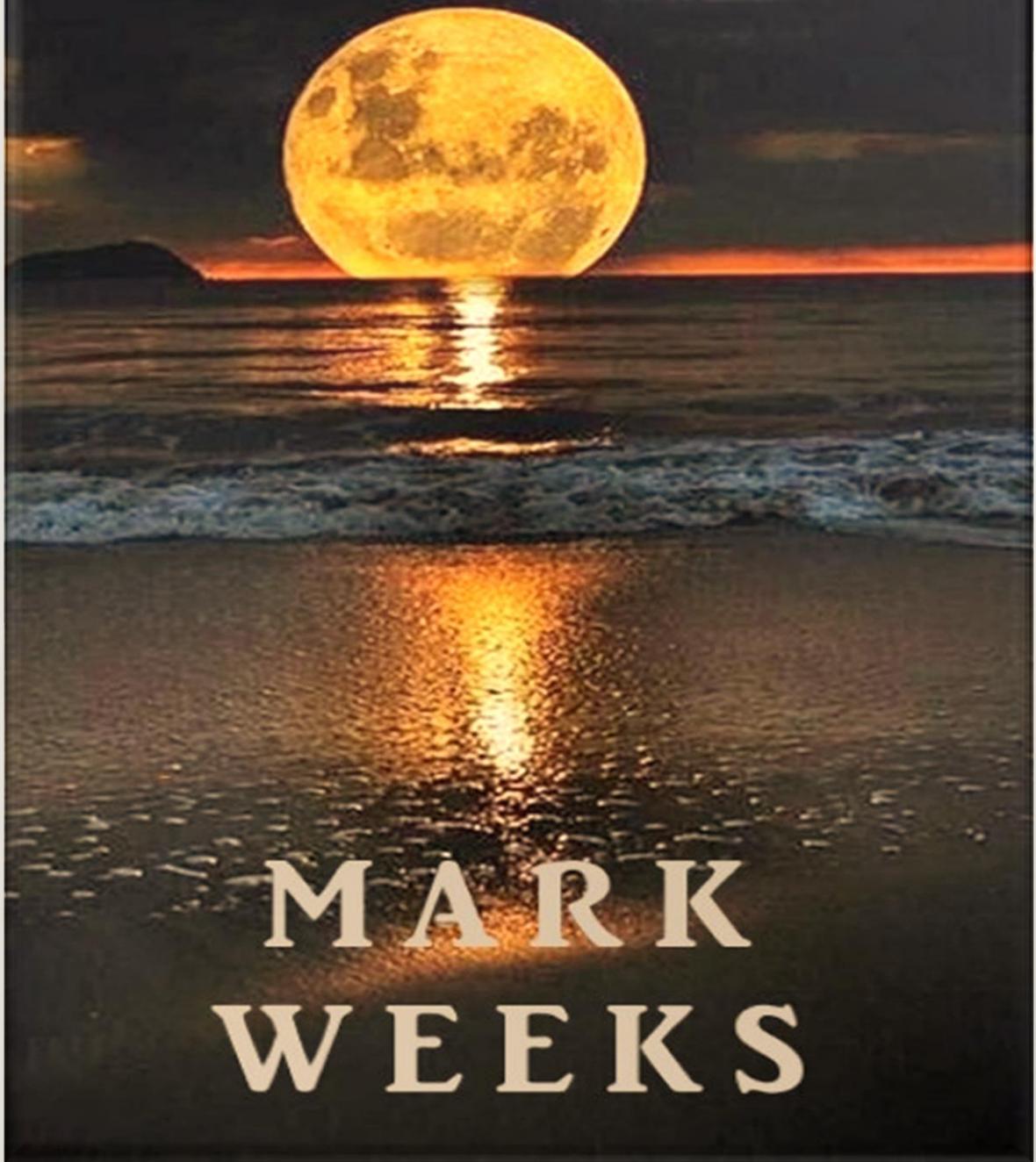


**SOUL OF A
DREAM CATCHER**



**MARK
WEEKS**

Soul of a Dream Catcher

Mark Weeks

The bit where Emiliana meets Aurelia the witch

The Halloween edits 2022

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Soul of a Dream Catcher was an immediate Amazon Bestseller in 2020. But naturally lost momentum as the world succumbed to the pandemic and all the shenanigans that followed. Yet for those of us who believed tomorrow would be a brighter day if we followed our hearts and listened to our inner voices, always knew there was a way to navigate the turmoil. As we knew history may not repeat itself, but it sure leaves clues. And the story of Emiliana holds as true today as it had for her in 1948 too.

I hope you enjoy this short Halloween edit.

For the best 'virtual' experience please listen to Einaudi on YouTube with a glass of red wine and a smattering of candles. This was the way it was written:)

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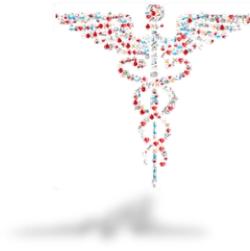
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Author's Note



The symbol above used at the start of each chapter resembles the Caduceus - the staff of Hermes.

The God Hermes in Greek mythology is considered a messenger of the gods. He is called the patron of travellers' and the conductor of the souls of the dead.

Hermes' father is Zeus, and his mother is a beautiful nymph of the Maya Mountains.

For YOU ...

You don't have to be what others want you to be.

You are free.

That is, free to be whatever the language of your soul speaks.

And to understand this language and the mysterious forces that surround you,

all you have to do is be a keen observer,

an avid listener and a believer in your own imagination ...

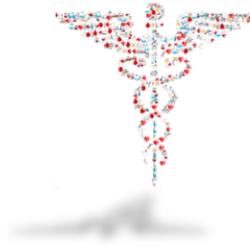
only then will you discover the truth, hidden just inside you.

Only then will you realise the power within yourself to reach your destiny;

as every one of us is bestowed with a destiny waiting to be unveiled.

Love and believe

Catch your dreams and be what your heart wants to be.



'... whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it.

*Boldness has genius, power and
magic in it. Begin it now.'*

~ Goethe.

Italy - October 1948

(Mid-way through Chapter 3)

Emiliana had spent another typical lifeless day. A day full of chores, preparing the restaurant for the evening. And, with All Saints and All Souls Day no more than a week away, the preparations had grown frantic for the forthcoming feasts. The sense of mortality had given rise to a heavy atmosphere, especially so with her mother, who had become even more solemn in memory of both Paulo and of Peter. Windows were already kept ajar, and places left at the table, awaiting returning spirits. Emiliana had never embraced the world of spirits and the rituals that took place during Hallowe'en. And now, since the loss of both her brother and Peter she had grown more sceptical than ever. Had there been any truth to the superstitions, surely Peter would have made his presence felt if he were close by.

Whilst helping her grandmother to prepare the *Ossi di Morto*, *Bones of the dead* cookies, she somehow found the strength to talk of her recurring dream.

'If you dream the same dream every night, would you think it an omen?' Emiliana asked sheepishly.

'I've never experienced such a thing *bella*,' grandmother replied while her plump fingers kneaded the heavy dough.

'Have you felt the presence of spirits on All Souls Day?'

'What is with so many questions? I must admit, I do feel warmth in this old body remembering loved ones I've lost ... this I feel, is all one should ask. It's not up to us to take things further. The Holy Father will show us when we need to know.'

Her grandmother filled another baking tray and Emiliana opened the stove door. Not content with her grandmother's answer she pressed further, looking for a greater explanation.

'My dreaming of Peter feels so real. Why doesn't it go away?'

'Grief ... grief my child, has a mind of its own and affects us all differently. Your dreams, I feel, are simply telling you what you wanted to happen not what is. It is tragic ... but life is tragic, in so, so many ways.'

This was not what Emiliana wanted to hear. She knew her dreams had meaning and wished she had not mentioned them. Her grandfather poked his head through the open doorway. Without saying a word, he turned, sat on the steps and, taking his pipe from his waistcoat pocket, sucked it hard. Emiliana would never speak of such things to him and felt uneasy continuing the conversation with grandfather sitting so close. 'There must be another reason ... it must mean more?' she said quietly. Grandmother glanced over her shoulder to see if her husband was listening, before she too, lowered her voice.

'Angel, in all my days there has only been one person who could explain dreams. She has a way of understanding.' Her voice quietened further. 'If you *must* find out what your dream means, visit my old friend Aurelia. You'll remember her, she was the quiet one we had lunch with on the day of the big storm.'

A tingle ran down Emiliana's spine as she vividly recalling the old woman who had given her a fright that fateful day.

'Don't tell the child to visit Aurelia Cantena,' bellowed her grandfather, his voice edged with anger. 'She's a mad old witch filled with poison. Stay away Emiliana.' He spoke although he had not moved from his perch on the step, nor had he turned his head towards them.

'She's not mad ... just because she lives in the forest alone.'

'That's not the reason, as you well know. Anyone who takes the lives of their own children cannot be sane.'

'You're the crazy one,' grandmother said with equal venom. 'You've been smoking the same pipe for months without lighting it!' She laughed heartily, giving her granddaughter a wink and quick hug, sprinkling her arm with flour. The old man muttered something, picked himself up from the step and sauntered into the back yard still mumbling in an enraged tone.

'Is it true, did she murder her own children?' Emiliana asked in dismay.

'Nothing has ever been proven. But her two sons and husband disappeared at the same time ... vanished. Aurelia took to the hills, a virtual recluse and never speaks of them or of what happened, and no one asks ... but, tongues in this village will always gossip. They have little else to do.'

That evening after supper, her grandmother gave her a little hand drawn map showing the route to Aurelia's home. Giving her a soft kiss on the cheek, she whispered Emiliana would be safe, and that one visit would put her at her ease.

It was the morning of All Souls Day before Emiliana summoned the courage to visit the old lady. Anxiously, she set off across the fields, following her usual pathway up the hillside then cutting through the orchards where she played as a child. The village sank behind the hills and ahead of her, the verdant valley and the forest towered above, forming an apparently endless blanket of thick green pine trees. She had visited the forest once many years before, with Peter and Giorgio, her youngest brother. They had played a game of chicken, seeing who

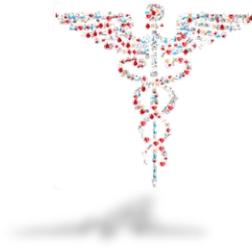
would be the first to become scared. She laughed to herself as they all ran together when they heard a wolf howl and they raced each other home, screaming.

She entered the brush of pine trees at the edge of the forest and was not as afraid as she had been as a child. Strangely, her anxiety of the early morning gave way for a sense of hope. The further she walked into the dense wood the darker it appeared and soft streams of light filtered through the trees, fracturing the bright morning sunshine. Several birds flew from the thicket more alarmed by her presence than she was by theirs, seemingly giving out shrieks of warning. Her blood froze as the pressure of a hand squeezed on her shoulder. She turned quickly and was face to face with Aurelia. 'You really have to stop doing that,' Emiliana said whilst trying to catch her breath.

The old lady removed her hand from Emiliana's shoulder and smiled warmly. 'I've been expecting you for some time, come with me,' she said and held out her hand.

Emiliana grasped the woman's bony hand, surprised by its warmth. The sunlight shining through the trees highlighted the flecks of red in the old lady's hair, whilst also etching out her high cheekbones and her feline green eyes. Emiliana imagined how beautiful the old lady had once been and felt in awe of her presence. Here was a woman who lived life the way she wanted Emiliana thought, as they made their way off the beaten track into parts of the forest that had never been trampled.

Finally, a small and simple log cabin came into view, resembling one from a fairy tale. Emiliana never imagined such a place existed within a few miles of the village and felt quite privileged to be entering a witch's home for the first time. The fleeting thought crossed her mind that she would never come back out the same.



*Tis the witching hour of night,
Or bed is the moon and bright,
And the stars they glisten, glisten,
Seeming with bright eyes to listen*

For what listen they?

~ John Keats (1795 - 1821)

The log cabin was not home to a magical lustre as Emiliana had first imagined. There was no cauldron, no potions and not even a black cat in sight. Though, seeing a broomstick leaning against the wall and tarot cards strewn across the table made her wild imaginings a little more believable. Apparently, reading the girl's disappointment of the hovel-like sparseness, Aurelia apologised for not living up to her imagination. Emiliana, unable to tell if this was said with good humour or sarcasm, remained silent. 'Let's have a nice cup of lemon tea before we talk, my child,' Aurelia said soothingly. 'And then you can ask me anything you wish. Of course, you may not like some of my replies. Because, if you already think you're right or wrong, you're probably right,' she added wryly. Emiliana could not believe the witch used some of the last words Peter had spoken to her. And though she would take many of his so-called 'wise words' with a pinch of salt, she instantly understood the true meaning of the message. Yes, she believed her dreams were an omen even when told by her grandmother it only meant grief.

Then, forbidden by her grandfather to even visit the witch, Emiliana still believed strongly she was right to have ignored them both. Emiliana grew more eager to talk of such things and was willing the small pot that simmered over the rusty wood-burner to boil quicker, as she needed answers on how to reach her destiny. She sat on the solitary chair at the round wooden table, whilst the witch pulled a stubby chest closer to sit on. The old lady gave her a gentle smile and they sat in awkward silence. Unable to restrain herself further Emiliana blurted out, 'Are you really a witch like my grandfather says?'

'Yes I am.'

'Do you believe in omens?'

'Yes, I do.'

'Should I search for my own destiny?'

'Yes, you should try.' Agitated by the curt answers, Emiliana seethed with frustration. The old lady poured their tea and made herself comfortable once more.

'Is that it? After months of soul searching, I finally meet someone who is presumed so wise and all I get is "yes, yes, yes"? I think I should get going.'

The old lady took a sip of tea and started chuckling, which grew into loud raucous laughter. The girl could not see what was so funny and stood as if to leave.

'Sit down, please Emiliana,' the old lady said, composing herself. 'It's just that you remind me so much of your mother when she was your age. Full of impatience, bags of energy and in a rush to find herself.'

No one had ever spoken of her mother in such a way. To Emiliana, it was the description of a stranger. She sat back down, acutely aware that she might learn something new after all.

'So, you've spoken to my mother?'

'Of course. We were neighbours for many years. She would always ask so, so many questions. I must tell you now, I am no fortune teller ... all I did was try to make her life clearer ... easier for her to understand.'

'So, what happened? Why is she so lonely and miserable now if things were made clearer?' Emiliana asked, puzzled.

'Listening and thinking are of little use without doing,' Aurelia quickly replied. 'Many years ago,' she continued, 'your mother wanted to leave the village and move to Istanbul with a young Turkish silk merchant whom she had fallen in love with ... his name escapes me. All I remember is your grandfather virtually imprisoned your mother for months. Refusing to let her out of his sight. Eventually, the merchant gave up waiting and sailed home. Who knows what may have become of her life if she had followed her ...?' The witch's voice trailed off as she stared at the remaining flames in the wood burner. A sense of shame washed over Emiliana as she recalled telling her mother she never wanted to end up like her—going through the motions of life and just existing. Feeling contempt for herself, Emiliana sat in silence.

The old lady let out a deep sigh and her eyes saddened. 'I was so sorry to hear of the loss of your dear friend. I know you were very close.'

Emiliana nodded but remained silent. Feeling she had Emiliana's full attention, Aurelia reached out and held the girl's hand. 'My darling child, you have already answered so many questions and only your heart will guide you. Me ... I am just an old woman who is in tune with the flow of nature. But, if you wish me to, I can help make life a little clearer. As I tried for your mother.'

Emiliana shifted to the edge of her seat, still clutching the old lady's hand.

'Firstly,' Aurelia stated firmly, 'when using the words "soul searching", they should be spoken with respect. Each and every one of us has a soul. A second voice you may call it. But many will choose to ignore it ... take it to their graves, where they finally realised their existence in this physical world was only one small part of their sorry lives.'

Emiliana tingled with excitement as she tried to understand the witch's words.

'So, speak of your own destiny as much as you wish, because, this other voice of *you* is your guiding light ... your soul.'

'Can my soul come to me in my sleep? Peter is with me every night in my dreams, and

I believe my destiny lies in America. I feel it so much ... yet when I am awake, I get no closer,' Emiliana knew she was rambling but could not stop until she'd blurted out every last jumbled word. 'How can I go on alone ... How do I get there? What if I make mistakes? Or, should I wait for my destiny to find me?'

Again, the old lady started laughing and Emiliana suddenly felt foolish. Maybe her grandfather was right. Maybe the old lady was crazy. Aurelia stood and rushed into the other room, she quickly reappeared with a beautiful full-length dress mirror, hinged to a mahogany framed base.

'The reason I laugh is this.' She beckoned for Emiliana to come closer. 'Stand in front of the mirror and don't move.' Intrigued, Emiliana did as asked. She gasped in utter astonishment. Within the reflection she saw a dark shadow cast from her feet, strewn across the floor. She looked around to see if the light had played tricks on her. She moved to the side of the mirror and looked down. The shadow disappeared.

'You see, you are not alone, this is Peter's shadow,' Aurelia said reassuringly.

'Shadow? What do you mean?' Emiliana asked as she stepped back in front of the mirror.

'Yes, his shadow of death. And I am sensing Peter was an unhappy young man. The tragic accident could have been brought on by his own thoughts.'

'This is so confusing. Did he drown himself on purpose?'

'I do not think it was planned,' the witch said calmly. 'But I do understand when a person focuses on positive or negative thoughts, they maximise positive or negative experiences into their life.'

Emiliana looked blankly at the witch, too dumbfounded to talk.

'Like always attracts like,' Aurelia continued. 'There is a possibility the other fisherman wished to end their lives too. For thoughts are pure energy and negative vibrations can wreak havoc on lives.'

Emiliana found it hard to grasp the idea that Peter's thoughts had helped him to perish

at sea, but there was no denying the shadow was real.

'Does ... does Peter want to say something to me?' Emiliana asked, stumbling over her words.

'No. I sense anger and frustration. I can only talk to the souls who communicate with me first. To me, he says nothing.'

Emiliana was stunned by Peter's silence and wished she could receive a sign from him that would help guide her.

'The souls of the dead know only what they knew at the moment of death,' Aurelia continued, sensing Emiliana's frustration. 'Nothing beyond that. Now Peter realises the truth, he is refusing to enter the spirit world whilst his destiny on earth remains unfulfilled.'

Standing motionless in front of the mirror, Emiliana was lost for words. Her mind, though, raced in trying to make sense of all the witch spoke.

'I hope I am making things clearer?' Aurelia asked sympathetically. 'Too many people stay ignorant of their lives on other planes. But I feel you are different ... Your mind stays open, ready for nature to show you the way.'

Emiliana turned to the witch. 'So, there is life after death?' she asked.

'The question for most should be, is there life *before* death?' The witch chuckled.

For the moment the irony escaped Emiliana as she tried in vain to gather her thoughts.

'But what of my dreams,' she finally asked. 'Are they omens?'

'As the souls of the dead move into the spirit-world, they can penetrate our thoughts with those of their own. Like a stone cast into water, it's ripples will reach far. And so, it is with thoughts ... Your soul is picking up Peter's thoughts whilst you sleep ... When minds remain still, they will eventually listen. So, in answer to your question ... Yes, your dreams are omens, from Peter.'

Emiliana smiled. Peter was trying to tell her something. She knew it! Her dreams meant more than grief, more than memories. Now she knew they were signs pointing her towards

her true destiny.

'Thank you, thank you. Suddenly everything makes sense. But unlike my mother, I will not let others hold me back,' she said confidently. 'I have to get going as soon as possible. Yes ... as soon as the time is right, I will leave and follow the path to my true destiny.'

Aurelia smiled at Emiliana's newfound enthusiasm.

'Can you teach me more today so that I can be ready for more omens? You are so wise and independent ... I hope someday I can be like you.' Once more, Emiliana started to ramble and failed to notice the solemn expression upon the witch's face and the tears that welled deep within her eyes.

'There are many more things I can share with you, but please do not become like me...,' her voice grew tense. 'Let me share a secret I have never told and feel so shameful for.'

The old lady motioned Emiliana to step away from the mirror and stood there herself, staring coldly into her own eyes. To Emiliana's bewilderment, she could see a very short shadow cast from the witch's feet.

'This is little Alberto ... my beautiful darling son.'

The girl gasped in horror as she recalled her grandfather's story of Aurelia taking the life of her own children.

The old lady moved away from the mirror and settled on the chair, clasping her head in her hands. Without prompting, Aurelia vented the anguish that had been building inside of her for so many years. Suddenly, the awe Emiliana had experienced was replaced with pity. Aurelia's life no longer appeared one of self-reliance and independence, but that of self-imprisonment and pure loneliness.

Keeping her head firmly in her hands, Aurelia told Emiliana of her shame. Her coven had believed through their teachings that the hills and the seas would run with blood and mankind would take vengeance on itself. For the sake of those with young sons the coven believed that they should help release their souls to the spirit world to stop their suffering in the physical world.

'And so I, along with several others, took the lives of our sons ...' Aurelia's voice quietened to a whisper as if worried others would hear. 'The coven were right. Within thirteen years the great war came and took the lives of millions of young men and blood did flow through the hills and seas.'

The witch finally raised her head from her hands and looked at Emiliana firmly. 'Was I right or wrong?' she asked coldly, in contrast to the pity she had shown earlier.

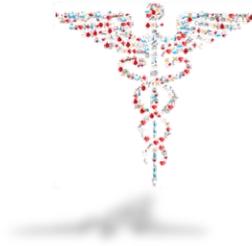
Emiliana could not answer, nor did she want to. She remained numb from the confession.

'What right did I have to control someone's life?' Aurelia asked, yet simultaneously answered for herself. 'I believed I was right, and so I was at the time ... every single person who has harmed another ... every single person who has tried to control another's life and thoughts for better or for worse can justify themselves in their own mind.' The old witch took a sip of cold tea and looked out towards the window where a cooling breeze whistled through the pine trees unnerving Emiliana further. 'No one has to be what others want them to be. We are free to be whatever we wish.' Aurelia took a deep breath and let out a short sigh. 'These are the words I told your mother too. I only wish someone told me when I was young and naïve.'

The old lady stood slowly, as if suddenly aged by fifty years, her feline eyes still welled with tears. Fleeting, a question crossed Emiliana's mind. What had actually happened to her other son and husband? Emiliana handed Aurelia a handkerchief from her trouser pocket, resisting the overwhelming urge to both ask and comfort the witch.

'Thank you, you are every bit as beautiful as your grandmother says. Now let's have some lunch and talk of better times to come. You have found your voice, let's see what it truly has to say.'

V



'To the Ancestors, whose words of wisdom

"Just remember to follow nature,"

I sensed even in the dream, were not as simple as they seem.'

~ Meredith Sabini.

They ate a simple lunch of bread and goat's cheese in silence. In desperation, the girl tried to grasp and understand all that she had seen and heard. Within a space of several hours, her life had changed forever. How could she return to the limitations of village life, living within the constraints her parents imposed? How could she ignore her dreams when her dreams beckoned her reality? Now, she was aware of Witchcraft, with all its vagaries and mysteries. Now, she was aware the souls of the dead could penetrate the souls of the living. And an unexplainable force enveloped our very existence, conjuring an intoxicating desire to be free of pain, struggle and torment. Suddenly, she felt herself standing at the edge of forever, her journey beginning without her having taken a single step, her mind, though, remained paralysed with trepidation. But why had the witch entrusted her? At what price were her secrets? Everything has its price, Emiliana reasoned, her thoughts sounding more like her father bartering with a livestock supplier. Finally, Emiliana spoke. 'Please tell me more about witchcraft and how I will find the path to my true destiny?' Pushing her plate to the other side of the table, Aurelia smiled warmly and, without further prompting, let forth the secrets that

had been bestowed on her many years before. 'Witchcraft is the Old Religion, celebrating the Wicca Goddess and the underlying strength of femininity,' she stated with an air of authority. 'It is not based on a set of beliefs, dogma, or scriptures. Nor is it based upon sacred books, revealed by so called great men, for that matter.' Emiliana listened intently, intrigued by what might follow. 'Witchcraft takes its teachings from nature, reading inspiration in the movements of the moon, sun, and stars, the flight of birds, the slow growth of trees, and the cycles of the seasons.'

The old lady continued with a new sense of vigour which had all but disappeared after recalling Alberto's death, 'The Wicca Goddess did not rule over a kingdom but was expressed in everything we see, hear, feel and smell. For she is seen in the roundness of a stone, the colour of the Autumn leaves, the glow of the moon, and the warmth of the sun,' she stated with ever knowingness before adding, 'The intensity of female power reawakened by the Goddess had, through the centuries, threatened so many religious leaders and men who simply refused to listen to their own souls. Which I believe, is the way when ignorance conspires with jealousy.'

Emiliana gave the witch an easy smile and nodded gently.

'Witchcraft had been persecuted and seen as a threat by such men; driving its teachings underground, giving it a far greater sense of darkness than it actually deserved. For the abundance of the Universe and the majestic laws of nature were the most natural gifts anyone could behold.'

Emiliana sat mesmerised by the witch's enthusiasm and zest for her teachings. Aurelia seemed to be in her element, as she had finally found the pupil she had longed for, the pupil who was to continue the teachings of the old religion.

Fleetingly, Emiliana glanced at her own feet, trying to glimpse Peter's shadow, but there was nothing. Though she was content in knowing he, too, listened and gleaned the secrets that would lead them towards finding their true destinies. She felt enlightened yet still confused. The language the witch spoke sounded poetic and beautiful, but it did not explain enough to show where Emiliana's true destiny lay and how she would reach it. The old lady patiently guided her through her first spiral dance ritual; reading by candlelight from an

antiquated sheet of parchment she revealed how Emiliana would eventually open her mind and heart to the soul of the world in an endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

'You are now ready for the first true principle,' declared Aurelia excitedly as her enthusiasm overflowed.

Anticipating the words coming as her first true step towards her future, Emiliana sat dismayed as the witch spoke with certainty that she alone must know herself first. 'You ...,' she said, pointing her bony finger towards Emiliana's heart, 'you yourself are the instrument of your own life.'

Emiliana remained silent as the old lady continued passionately. 'If you are not convinced of your intentions, how can Mother Nature show you the way? ... For she might well be the greatest teacher of all, but she is not a mind reader.' Aurelia smirked at her own humour and hoped it made the right impression to her new student. She continued without giving Emiliana the opportunity to reply. 'Everything on earth is continuously changing because the earth is alive ... it has a soul. Nothing remains the same. But this does not mean Mother Nature will not change her direction once a choice has been made ... for a stream will still flow downhill if a boulder appears in its path ... it will have to now flow around it to reach the sea ... it will not give up, it will never give up ... it simply finds another route. So, do not be afraid to change direction yourself once you set your course, because the most important thing is to go forward whilst listening to your heart.'

'Peter would say similar things,' Emiliana reflected sadly. 'Maybe all I want is to escape. Is that wrong?'

'You will never escape from yourself or your wrongdoings,' the old lady solemnly stated as her head bowed towards her own shadow of death.

'More than ever before, I know I must start my journey towards my destiny,' Emiliana said. 'It feels like the right thing to do. But how can I hear and see what the soul of the earth is teaching me when everything looks and sounds the same?'

'My child today is beyond exception, as your introduction to the Old Religion was unexpected. But tomorrow and forevermore you will expect the unexpected. Slowly, you will

fall into harmony with nature as though you were cast over the entire landscape, inside things and living in every tree. Even from the splashing of the waves to the clouds and every animal that comes and goes, you will feel as one.' The old lady smiled knowingly as she added, 'You have no choice but to embrace the way of life of the Wicca Goddess, as your newfound awareness will never shrink from sight.'

Emiliana looked bemused. 'So, even if I ignore all your wise words, I have no choice but to follow the way of Mother Nature?'

'Yes ... that's right, Emiliana. The soul of the earth will be speaking its wisdom every day you live, and long after you leave this worldly plane, too. Your choice is to ignore it at your own peril.'

A little pang of disappointment seeped through Emiliana's body. So, that was the price, she reasoned. Now I know I have a secret soul I will never escape from it, even if I wanted. '*Act with faith and faith will be given.*' The words come from nowhere, taking her by surprise. Emiliana stared at the old lady puzzled, but the words had not been spoken by her nor did they come from Peter. The witch gazed at her in a seemingly newfound light. 'I said you have found your voice, now comes the hard part ... deciding to act.'

With the daylight hours fading fast, Emiliana knew she would have to leave this bizarre world behind and return to her parents, but still she remained confused as to how she should act and listen to the soul of the world. The old lady busied herself lighting two oil lamps, placing them in the centre of the table before sitting back down. This amused Emiliana, but nothing the witch did could shock her further. They sat quietly, both reflecting all that had been said. Unlike the awkward silence of the early morning, this silence radiated warmth and tranquillity. As the lights flickered, sending distorted silhouettes around the walls, the old lady continued her teachings. 'We are only in this physical plane for the blink of an eye. Soon we will leave this life ... soon many will be aware of their greater being, the one they've always had access to, yet have blindly ignored.'

Emiliana nodded in agreement. Even at such a youthful age, she too knew life passed away quickly. 'Some people may snatch a secret from the depths of their hearts and souls that will drive them to find their true selves. But most will continue to wonder ... wish ... and dream.'

And then, one day, they will awaken with a shock to find themselves standing in the same spot where they had dreamed as young men and women. Only now they have lost sight of their dreams and they will wonder why life has come to be,' the witch stated wisely as the warming glow of the lamps made her green eyes sparkle even brighter.

'Are you telling me to leave everything behind and simply follow my own instincts? Even before I know where to go?' Emiliana asked.

'Remember, no one has the right to tell or control another. You are free to be you,' the old lady said firmly. 'But I am saying, whenever we give up, forget our dreams and leave them behind, there is always danger that these neglected emotions and desires will return with an added force that can wreck you. Of that I will tell you.' Emiliana thought long and hard before she spoke as her enthusiasm for a new life ebbed and flowed within her. She reasoned to herself that she could return if things did not work out. But where would that leave her? She would feel a fool and be the laughingstock of the village. Her father, she felt, would be understanding of her return, but would her mother feel disappointment that her daughter could not escape from reality? Or deep inside her, would her mother be glad because her own opportunity for a new life had disappeared many years before. Why should her child's life be any different?

'If my journey fails, I will be a failure.'

'If your journey fails and your heart beckons you return to your previous life, then so it is,' the witch replied. 'It is still your choice. But I think it would be wiser to think of your journey than to focus on "what if" and the things you leave behind. Remember, the Universe always conspires to give you what you concentrate on ... be it for the best or for the worse.' The witch looked Emiliana in the eye with sadness and added solemnly. 'I am living proof of that.'

Flatly, Emiliana responded, 'I had better go home.'

'Yes, yes of course, I'll come with you. But first there is one last lesson.'

The witch stood and held her right hand over the first oil lamp, letting it hover within an inch or two. 'As the flame needs air to live,' the witch said as her hand covered the top of

the lamp immediately extinguishing it, 'so your mind needs imagination for it to live.' The old lady turned her attention to the second lamp and placed her hand on top of it. This time, the lamp remained lit, and the girl believed she had witnessed magic. Little did she know that the old lady had left a gap at the edge of her palm for the flame to burn. *'As long as the point is made, what harm was a little burn and trickery to bolster one's own myth?'* the witch thought. *'After all perception remains everything.'*

'I have mentioned several times,' Aurelia continued aloud, 'that there is life on other planes, and these are the truest reflection of anyone's physical world. These planes are made up of the emotional, mental and spiritual worlds.' She took a moment to allow Emiliana's thoughts to catch up and then continued, speaking more slowly to emphasise the importance of her next statement. 'Without an understanding of these worlds, your search for your destiny will be in vain, no matter how far you wish to travel. But to understand them you must let your imagination soar.'

Emiliana's eyes lit as if she had found her missing clue. 'So,' she said, 'all I have to do is search for these worlds and my destiny will be revealed?'

'Yes.' The witch nodded slowly. 'Sometimes it will be clear that others have access to such worlds. At other times, the waters are muddied, and you will have to guide yourself blindly through the murkiness or wallow in self-pity.'

'Why didn't you tell me these secrets eight hours ago?' Emiliana asked, cheekily.

'Now what fun would that have been?' the witch replied.

They looked at one another with equal amusement and burst out laughing. The laughter echoed through the stillness of the darkened forest—a sound it had never heard before.

The End (for now:)

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