

Introduction to the Gift that Explodes

Unbeknownst to you, perhaps, this gifting, as providing a space, place, opening in a cluttered field, crowded home, busied life.

Daughter, in your hunger for place, blank notebooks, world to fill, in your own spectacularly voracious, almost frenetic creation and plunder of bright pages, you thought of me, fashioned an extra, opened another world in our home.

This one. Of recycled paper, compiled and designed by hand and stapled together, clean as fresh snow and designated as if by the magical mind of a sprite or god - "Notebook" - with a strong directive to open and burst, as if I had it in me to gather myself and aim, I might Big Bang into a possible and potential universe.

Thank you dear strong heart - for giving me a sacred room - a safe and boundaried medium where I might enter at will, wander about and perhaps discover a thing or two, locate traces that might even remind me of me - playing with sounds and shapes, calls and codes - those orphic gibberishes they used to chant to coax the mysteries. What were those - spells? Charms? No. Why does my mind work like this - have such clear and specific sensing of exactly what it seeks - send out all the troops to "perfink" (perceive. feel. think.) it, only to bubble around it as if by anti-magnetism?

My vocabulary as finicky as my ever-altering surround.

*Yet if you get my meaning, the *mot juste* would only be a delicious delicacy, a cherry plopped on the sensuous cream of a sundae. We enjoy those little extras, though - delights - as ubiquitously available as these wonders are - why are pleasures so hard to come by?*

And then, unsuspectedly, you slip this white wick into my hands, leaving it to me to light the fuse.

Fuse lit. Now to follow where it burns..

In Which is Entered the Rich Thicket of Woods

In the beginning was the wood. It took us much time to discover its uses. We ate its tough skin for roughage, we mashed its soft heart into pulp. We chopped it to bits, we rearranged them. We played games with it. Sometimes it was all that kept us afloat. Sometimes we structured them carefully and turned to them for shelter. As we learned what woods could do, we began to comprehend their value. At times we relied on them for everything necessary to survive – the fruit of a tree gave us sweet liquid and meaty flesh. The fragility of the dead still warmed us as it disintegrated in the flames. They grew to be almost sacred – the world as we knew it came to rely on them. We crafted them into signs and created many sounds from them – enabling us to communicate over vast spaces. We were capable of traveling quite far, able to reach one another over distances before considered impassable. Woods made this possible my dear! Some days I might spend hours simply admiring them – looking them over – taking them in. Each with its own fine shape, and own specific range of uses. Some were embellishments, some anchored the whole forest together, some provided seamless access or served as bridges to crawl carefully across great dangers. We constructed some for fences and walls – they helped us keep the unwanted out. Others we piled up like babble in the sheer joy of conflagration and release – it seemed they could life our heavy spirits like colorful smoke. Oh the woods, my darling, the woods! It is they that really enabled us to become what we are today. To reveal our capacities, our feelings and thoughts, intentions and dreams. In woods we could concoct our plans and rest in their leafy comfort. There are times when all one needs is woods. Things can seem overwhelming, catastrophic or of unmentionable sorrow or fright, and yet finding the right type of wood, or clinging to a wood that is kind and safe and strong can sometimes leverage us through great storms. My precious dear, learn as many woods as you can – make peace with them – seek out their countless paths that you might always have a place to go, a world to be.

In Which the Wood is Entered, Entering

As we grew we noticed things. The more we interacted in the woods, the more we found in common. Or perhaps the woods created them – our commons. In any case, as we examined the woods we came to see ourselves, or began to think we did. It appeared to us that very little passed us by without record. Hewing through a heavy trunk we remembered an ancient drastic storm, here marked as darkened whorls, ripples in an inner ring, where many limbs were lost. Currents of nourishment functioned over years and years, flowing from the core in hairline strands, outlasting generations of leaving. At times there were traces of trauma strong enough to redirect the growth entire. Yet nothing was not useful, productive of something in its life.

Environmental fluctuation sometimes twisted us, never to grow “straight.” Sometimes the changes came from inside – the patterns of our roots, or pockets of disease, a particular yearning for warmth or rain. We accumulated, and let go. There were portions of the wood which had been razed or burned, only to spawn shade for mushrooms and ferns in some other direction. Often the old laid down to serve as hosts – life drawing life as it waned. We almost recognized a cycle. We seemed to grow in all directions at once, to haphazard effect. We found dead spaces and hollows, troubles to be grown around. In fact some things were incorporated entire, as if a self-devouring, like a snake would swallow its tail if it could, all the while producing another layer.

We came to view the wood with mystery, ourselves. Through injury, joy and terror we believed our bodies re-stored it. Swallowing pockets, harboring knots, tunneling roots across ages. We seeped or scabbed where we were cut, at times remaining open and leaking a kind of syrup or salve, at times hardening over in projects of defense. We began to be known as “the woodsmen,” and, later, *The People of the Wood*.

We were tuned to the life of the tree, which we revered as *The Tree of Life*.

In Which Is Inserted a Loose Leaf

Becoming aware of the change. My little one, as we let (or made) our woods carry us far, we discovered beings everywhere – and all using woods. Having named our woods and defining ourselves by their usage – we had thought ourselves the only ones – the People of the Woods – and were surprised and astonished at the purposes others would put them to, at the sounds they were able to emit, at their shapes. Even the structures they built could seem odd, and their burning came from strange fires.

Everywhere we ventured we found the woods relating to life. Its giving and taking. Beings used them for weapons and tools, they used them for shelter and warmth. As our knowledge of woods grew enormous – the kinds and environments, uses and names – the Mysteries of the Trees began to grow.

In places they were pulped to a gum and let dry, then marked with a rock or hot iron. Other places they were chopped into boards and large planes and smeared with designs from animal blood. It came to seem the whole world was made of beings and woods, each defining themselves by particular use. Battles were waged over woods, clans and families splitting apart, even lovers argued over true uses of woods – what they purposed, how they worked, why they mattered, which ones, what was proper to do with your woods. Little one, woods came into conflict, everywhere. People fought over which woods were best, or which had more power or weight, which cores were pure and which garbage, what woods should serve for what.

We wanted our woods to do everything. To solve and evolve, to stand and retain. But our woods continued to change as we lived them. Some grew smooth and slipped from our hands. Some hardened like rock and got too heavy to carry. Some simply crumbled to dust. As their variety grew, so our experiences – we encountered moments when we could not find the woods that we needed. It distressed us and we cast about in clumsy silences and jerky motions. We grew hungry for new woods that were different. We began to play with the roots and the seeds, combining and grafting or trying new soils.

In times like these, there was speech of The Leavings, of infinite limits of life. The old among us would point out the woods where we no longer dwelt or visited, had let rot or decay, and would question our strange new graftings. The woods were always changing, dear child, there are always new things to learn.

It is time, then, to speak of these Leavings...draw near...it is our custom to address them in whispers and cold...

In Which the Leavings Whisper

Indeed there are times of leaning toward cold and the dark. We huddle close, our woods seem silent, even emptied, so we hush and sound our whispers, to blend them into wind, its Winter.

I speak of the dangers – presumption and preference – too-devoted attachments to our particular woods. You hear us sing their praises, we dance like them in breezing sunlight, pattern our coats according their colors, entrust them to shelter and shade us, providing our true light and fire. We claim them the hardest and strongest, the Durable Ones. We come to cling to our woods as life. Dear child, it is not long before we view them as the “only.” The Most and Highest, the Broadest, Richest, Rooted Deep. We worship their hold, celebrating their fruit. Develop our rituals of cultivation by tending them daily, each of us making our rounds, repeating the woods until they are all that we know, all that we love, the scope of which we are able to see.

Hush and beware, my splendid dear, for here is where the quiet comes. The times we call The Leavings. These very woods to which we cling, within and upon which we build our homes, nourish our bodies and fuel our fires, compose our messages and texts, which provide us with movement over long waters and vast mountains of snow – keeping us warm all the while – just when we revel most confidently in their glorious splendor, their rainbows of color and light-glowing hue...they begin in their wander away. Day by day, as the cold is approaching with its elongating nights, they drain of their colors and begin letting-go. These, my child, are The Leavings.

As we cuddle near their time-trusted fullness and warmth, they appear to us bare, barren, and grey. We look up, we cry out “the woods! the woods!” and our sound shrieks right through, we are staring at stark and the Gone. Seeing past in icy clarity, our woods exposed and stripped, if we do not close our eyes in terror, but look far, far beyond our own tangled thicket of woods...far, far beyond, my lovely, farther even than the eye can see...are more woods, and more, everywhere woods making scents for their peoples, sheltering and shading them, burning and abandoning them as well. If we hush and refuse ourselves despair as we see our woods give out, in turn setting ourselves silently to listening and keenly looking out – we can know the lessons of the Leavings. That there are further woods than ours, many woods and other, only farther out.

We grow easily impatient of our woods in our discomforts and our panics and our fears. Yes there are countless many Leavings – you can count on them, and *by* them, but my tender one, if you will persist and endure, if you are open to their lessons and their silence, the woods will come back to you, freshly and new. There will be young woods you never knew before, and the old ones will return too.

Our woods are never so much lost as that they undergo strange changes. They break and wither, shrivel and drop – they must shed themselves of their embellishments and gathering continually – so they might produce themselves again, altered and renewed. Their many uses over untold years are logged within their roots and cores, marked and divided, scarred and sapped – it is for us to remember and adapt, let go with them and wait, wait, enduring the Leavings with all that we have, slogging onward toward new growth.

Oh yes it is frightening to feel all is lost, sweet child of wonder, but our woods never fail us finally, they leave us to be born.

And this is why I gather samples wherever I chance to go – fruits and nuts, leaves and needles, parts of any woods I chance to see or hear – in order to remember and remind in times of Leaving that somewhere, and any time, we will live again in woods that will be full and bright, returning the woods that we've known toward our unknown need.

Now rest, child, rest...the night is quiet and cold, let the woods hush and whisper through your dreams...

Whose Woods are These I Think I Know

At any given moment, these are the only woods we have. We do what we can with them, my dear, always many and diverse. Yet just a tiny little forest in the vastness. Some of our woods are soft and mulchy while some are brittle and sharp. There'll be splinters and cracks, switches and boughs. But used together, in ways appropriate to their kind, they'll be useful. Like don't use kindling-wood so support the house. I know you often think, being small, that you don't always have the woods you need. That others more skilled at building, the polishers and craftspersons, or the armory whittlers have advantages and types of wood beyond your resources. I've heard you cry that your stand of woods is lacking meat or certain fruits, you haven't the wealth of many rings and nuanced etchings. That when you rope the trunks, the roots are shallow and fail the weight you beg them carry.

Rearrange, my dear, and be patient. Keep trying the woods that you have. I've seen a woodsman create with 100 what many cannot in a jungle. We must seek and study our world, evince all its ins and its outs. Which of our woods will comfort, which we can hone for attacks. What parts need handled carefully and preserved, that they might grow fuller and larger with age, 'til they form a bridge toward where you need to go.

It is greatly advisable to journey and trade. Take with you fresh seeds and young branches. Try never to sever your roots, but graft and train, splice and mend, understand what will fertilize.

Your woods are an active place and a venture, requiring tenacious tending. Climb, my child, but test your footing, not every sapling will hold. You can succeed and will, should you choose to partake with the People of Woods. It only takes time and practice - adapting and adaptation - the bud and the tendril, the log and the trunk. Recite and remind and then jumble.

Above all, my daughter, please play. Pick-up sticks, wooden boats and chutes and ladders. Kites and slingshots, barrels and monkeys, apples to apples. Now is the time to throw peaches and chew the walnuts' rind, bowl crabapples, smoke the reed and sniff the pine. Some whips will leave seams you'll never forget, some falls may even break a limb, but you will grow and know, know and grow, until you, like the tree, flourish and bloom, strip and stand bare, proud and enduring, withstanding both wind and the wave, strikes and blows, the cold and the dark, all from your stock of woods and what's possible.

Whoever dreamt a log could roll on rivers, or bend into a wheel? Who knew they'd form enormous arks - large enough to save our world? The handing of a tiny reed embossed with cursive love, sharpened to a blade, signs set to warn of danger,

posts to fort a home. My love, impossible does not apply with your woods – all that we know is unknown where the woods come into play.

Experiment, invent, babble the brook or construct a staying dam. Use our woods, love and care for them, ignite your passion, rub them together toward sparks, thatch, nest, spear. The woods are waiting – and these are yours.

Taking Root, Using Your Woods

For this is how we come to woods – they come to us. Ancient are the lineages and deep the roots of almost every wood we encounter. *Your* woods, my child, thought feely belonging to anyone, are also and quite absolutely, your own. You see, we come to learn our woods through time and play, experiment and work. Those woods you train yourself with, that you fondle and prune and water and grow – those woods will change right along with you. With time and your own adjustments, growth and adaptations to all within and around you – these woods will shape those changes in you and you will select, alter and use each of your woods in your very own specific and particularized manner...in every moment, experience, and time.

It may not be long before one of us departs with The Leavings, and with such a season you may seek out woodless spaces for a while. There is nothing wrong with leaving woods behind for a time. You will invariably find yourself among thickets of woods you do not recognize, are unfamiliar, or being used in ways you had not imagined. Remember, my dear one – this world is large and uncontained – we cannot master it – it is crowded and flush with persons and woods. Incessantly they are changing, every moment – the woods and their peoples, and the peoples' selection and uses of woods. Many will offer you groves unwanted, wealds of woods you do not know, clumsy lumber for your yearning purpose.

Remember to breathe and look far, my dear, take your time and search their roots. Nearly any wood can be partially known from its seed taking root and its clamorous growth. Woods are formed of winds and waters, weathers and disparate soils – they are bound to have unique characteristics and histories, varieties and sources – learning these will help you find your way among them. While hardly a simple task – its effort carries its own worth.

Then you may come to feel comfort in whatever woods construct the bosk where you are – they can speak to you, and you with them – becoming another precious person of the wood.

You have so much to offer us, as the forests of woods do you – all the many woodlands spread throughout our homelands, neighborhoods, countrysides and world – many, yes, loved child, many woodlands yet to be invented, discovered or known – and you, sweet forested one, growing now among them, taking roots, assembling branches and leaf piles and canopies, or ships with broad docks and high towers, realms and copses, barrels and fires and beds – as you learn to love and use your woods, multiply and form them – oh what wonders await us all!

Take your roots, then, gather seeds, use your woods – let them grow and shape you – plant, sprout and remake them! All woods you engage are yours while you are in

them! So live, darling wonder, live and learn and create! Staying open to woods – testing and investing and proclaiming them! Even logging them for records or constructions, be certain to renew, and create!