

A story about the vows we make...to ourselves:

Atalanta

A Story, a Myth, a Dream

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In the Familiar

by Shaun Perkins

He is the minor character.

He is a catalyst.

He carries an axe and is not bloodthirsty,

But he may serve those who are,

Or he may serve those who simply

Refuse to acknowledge blood ties.

The woodsman.

Remember the story you heard as a child,

How the Queen spirited the woodsman

From the castle with the babe wrapped in the robes

Of smothering envy, and she spoke:

“Take it into the woods and cut out its heart.

Bring it to me as a token.”

A girl abandoned.

And he could not. He left her

In the wild wood and killed a boar instead

And took that heart to the Queen, who ate it,

As a way of knowing that no one,

Including the woodsman, could understand.

And a stone rolled away from her heart.



Or the story of the children abandoned
In the woods, found, and caged.
Each day, Hansel would put his finger
Outside the cage so it could be tested for plumpness.
Each day, his sister pulled the trick,
Which allowed her to rescue them both,
To return to their father . . . a woodcutter.

A girl and a boy abandoned.
A woodsman as minor character.

At twilight the man climbed into the witch's garden
To harvest the rampant lettuce for his wife,
Until caught. "Eat as much as you would like,
If you will give me your baby when born."
Imprisoned in a tower, loved by a swift climber,
Sent to the desert for loving,
And he blinded by thorns for the same.

Remember how the woodsman cut
The girl and her grandmother from the wolf.
A deus ex machina, but a savior nonetheless.

The woods.
The woodsman.
The garden.
The witch.
The children.
Abandonment.



Clymene wanted a child.

Iasus wanted a boy.

They had a girl, whose name
means "equal in weight."

Rapunzel, whose name means
"rampion," gave birth to twins,
In the darkness swept by wind,
Bleeding in a barren place,
Until he found her, and her tears
healed his eyes so he could see
They had a boy and a girl.

These children nestle in the curve
Of our spine, rummaging through
Our veins, clotting the flow.
We breathe their stories in our dreams.
They hide in our memories, caged
By our fear of knowing.
She wanted to eat the child's heart.
He wanted wolves to devour it.

Child. Boy. Girl.
The witch who knows them.
The woodsman who abandons and saves them.
The desert we all wander in.
The stones that roll away from our hearts.



You are the Magic

by Laurie Dietrich

THIS IS A STORY OF MAGIC...

Myth. Story. Dream. One thing all these words have in common – we have decided that they mean “not true.” And yet stories are the oldest manifestation of our uniquely human consciousness. Before we had books, we had storytellers. Stories taught us the things we needed to know: when to plant and harvest, which herbs can cure and which can kill. And the things we *needed* to know: why we love, why we lose, why we die.

Human beings are pattern-recognition machines. We helplessly, relentlessly make meaning. We use stories to do it. And the stories that do it best, that are big enough to hold us all and make sense of those relentless patterns, live on. They become myths – the collective dreams of our clan, our culture, our consciousness.

***“A myth is a story
that never
happened, and is
always happening.”
-- Howard Sasportas***

There is a secret to dreamwork, you know. You must accept that *everything* in the dream is *you*. In dreams – in myth – we learn perhaps the most essential healing truth: separation is an illusion. There is no *then* and *now*, there are no *villains* and *heroes*, there is no *us* and *them*.

You have been Iasus and Clymene, who thought they knew what they needed, and thought they needed what they knew. You have been Ciron, who believed his prayers went unanswered, and so never prayed again. You have been Artemis – the one who did not answer. You have been Atalanta, unwanted and abandoned. And you have been Althea, the witch, who knows all – or needs to believe that she does.



You have been the wild, mountainous land of magic and the cozy village of gossip and the solemn temple by the sea. You have been the dark winter's night that shattered another's dreams, and you have been their woodland cave of sanctuary.

If this is a *story of magic, of the circle a spell can cast, and of those of us who live within the circumference drawn in time by a silver-tipped blade*, then you are the magic. You are the spell. You are the circle and the blade that draws it.

If this is a story of magic, then you are the magic. You are the spell. You are the circle and the blade that draws it...

WE TELL OURSELVES THE THINGS WE NEED TO HEAR. WE BELIEVE WHAT WE MUST BELIEVE...

My need to believe something doesn't necessarily make it untrue. *All of our stories begin before we enter life*. Do you believe that? This story does. Here's another thing story... myth... dream... allows us to do: try things on for size. Not clothes but history and heartache, alternate endings, unborn beginnings, fantasy and belief. How about this belief: *These things are set before we are born; they are the agreement we make with the soul of our times*.

Do you believe that? I can see why you might want to. *I want to*. When the patterns in my life break down into chaos, when I can't find meaning anywhere, it is comforting to believe that some part of me knows the *why* of it. Some part of me made a plan, and made it with love, and sees the shore on the other side of this storm-tossed sea.

And, just because I want to... *need to*... believe in that part of me, it doesn't mean she isn't real. What if I lived like she was? What if I tried that on? You don't have to believe but... *imagine*. What would it be like if you believed? What would change?



If you truly believed that even the hardest things in your life are there in some way by your own choice, because they serve who you are becoming or because you are the best person, at this moment, to serve in the midst of hardship... what would change?

Which is more important? The "truth" of what we believe, or the way what we believe shapes our lives? Is this maybe a truth religion has known all along? *Someone must plan the coincidences.* Is that why we made up the gods and goddesses in the first place? Or is it simply how we recognized them?

WITH TWIGS AND LEAVES, PRAYERS AND TEARS...

How do we live as *if*? We marry action (twigs and leaves) to intention (prayers), and passion is the fuel that feeds the fire. Tears. Want. *Desire.*

Which is more important? The "truth" of what we believe, or the way what we believe shapes our lives?

Human beings are characterized by desire. Did you know that the Buddhists believe there are three realms of existence that are "lower" than the human realm, and three that are "higher"? In that system of belief, you could be born as a god or goddess, and it would not be as precious as a human birth. In the lower realms, they say, we suffer, and so cannot find the truth. In the higher realms we are so comfortable and happy, we do not seek the truth. The human realm is the most precious because, as humans, we *want*. We desire. We are uncomfortable enough to seek. To learn. To grow.

Desire is what we are. Desire (or the thwarting of it) makes us everything that we are. Do you believe that? It might not be true. Generalities rarely are. And yet... I think there's more than a grain of truth there. If desire were not such a powerful force in our lives, would it be so charged a word? *We are* desire, and we are ashamed of desire, and we secretly ache for and with desire, despising its presence, mourning its absence.



What if someone told you it was fine to want? To desire? Better than fine. *Fundamental*. What if someone told you that the pain we secretly fear lies waiting on the other side of desire – the pain that makes us hide from...deny...despise...our wanting – that pain doesn't come from passion. It comes from passionate attachment to form.

Clymene wants love, but she wants love to look and feel a certain way. Someone who loves her stands on the other side of a veil made of enchantment and awkwardness. If she were not so attached to the form of her fantasy love, would she have been able to see that veil, reach through it, bring him through?

***Pain doesn't come
from passion. It
comes from
passionate
attachment to form...***

Iasus wants a child, a second chance. Salvation. But he thinks that salvation comes only in the form of a son, like he was, whom he can love, like he was not. His attachment to the form of his salvation led him to damnation instead.

Ciron wants to serve the one he loves. What a pure, a noble, a selfless desire! But... *not like this! Not like this!* If he were not so attached to the form of his service, would he have been able to see the true part he played in this story? Would he have realized his prayers *were* answered? Instead of losing his faithfulness along with his faith?

Not like this! When has that been you? When have you thrown away a gift because you didn't like the wrapping? Perhaps... no, *probably*... it's happened more than once, and you didn't even know. *Beware the vows you make, but know this... even more binding are the ones you don't make.* What did you vow *out* of your life? What did you vow *not* to do, *not* to know, *not* to experience... because your attachment to the form of the outcome blinded you to the real opportunity?



Here's another secret this story knows: only the invisible gets you. It's what you don't see, that invisible twine, that rules your life. *You cannot unknot a knot not seen.*

Clymene in despair, Iasus in disappointed rage, Ciron in desolation – they cry out to you to see. See those stitches in your heart. *Invisible twine sparkles in the sunlight and hides itself in the shadows.* Take your heart out of hiding. Hold it up to the sun. See what is holding you small and tight. Only then can you begin to unbind the invisible twine that holds your desire in the prison of form.

NO ACTION IS WITHOUT CONSEQUENCE...

Do you believe that? What would change if you did? If we all agreed to play a part, then we all agreed to come together. We all agreed to enter into this story and, through it, into each other's lives. You're here because you are needed. Events will unfold as they should only when every part is filled. Only when every role is played.

What would change? You might have to give up the arrogance of believing that your actions and words don't matter. How often, in stories, do the actions of the seemingly smallest characters change everything?

This is a story of magic, and in this story... this myth... this dream... every character is you. Knowing that you cannot help but play your part, what spell will you cast? What nest will you build – with twigs and leaves, prayers and tears – to hold who you are here to be? Even if that form is still unknown? Invisible?

***Here's another
secret: only the
invisible gets you.
You cannot unknot a
knot not seen...***



Invisible Twine

by Cynthea Jones

She made a vow to herself, she made a vow to Artemis... *I will be true to myself.*
Discarded at birth, raised in the wild, blessed by the wind... when all you have is
yourself, it is essential not to betray that one sacred relationship. Her vow: *I will never
be less than I am... no matter the cost.*

As a Priestess of Artemis, she vowed never to marry.
Not a vow of chastity but a vow of self-possession.
Raised by the wild creatures of the wood, she would
not enter the cage of convention nor be anyone's
possession. Who knew the consequences of such a
vow? I did.

***When all you have is
yourself, it is
essential not to
betray that one
sacred
relationship...***

I held my own baby in my arms and took him to my breast. It was years before
Atalanta's birth and yet, she entered my life on that full-moon night when her mother
took her father's hand and said yes to her fantasies about the man she would marry.

I knew then that my son would die. I knew *how* he would die, and what kind of man he
would grow up to be. Atalanta is not the only person in this story who made costly vows
to the Gods and to fate. My name is Althea, and I made a vow before my son was
conceived. Promises unbreakable... so I could have his spirit in my life for a brief and
borrowed time. If he had lived a long, long life, he still would have left me wanting more.
Knowing that eternity would not be enough time to spend with him did not make it easier
to do what I did. My name is Althea. I am a witch and this is a story of magic, of the
circle a spell can cast, and of those of us who live within the circumference drawn in
time by a silver-tipped blade.



You have heard it all and none of it is as you think it is. Vows made, chains break, you are bound by fate to what you state. And still.... you must make a vow or live without shape, a shadow to yourself. Not that, not that.... we all have debts to pay and he was mine.

***Beware the vows you
make, but know
this... even more
binding are the ones
you don't...***

I am Althea and I am a witch. When I pass you on the street, you will see me as a woman in my prime. Strong and tall, my beauty was a gift and a nice one indeed, for I have spent a long, long time in this one body. My face impels you to pay attention. My eyes tell you that you have been seen, seen and understood, understood and forgiven... that alone would have made me beautiful. When I let my long hair fall, it smells of lemon and ginger. When I let it fall and the wind carries the scent, the truth gets told.

Truth. Said or unsaid, I hear it. I hear the truth within the heart. I read the sacred script written on the soul. My years have made me strong enough to hear those truths, but that was not so for the first century or two. I will tell you the story of Atalanta, for I knew her before her birth and I knew the role that she would play in my life. And still – and still – in spite of what will be or because of it, open wide your arms and give your heart to the day. Beware the vows you make, but know this... even more binding are the ones you don't make, won't make.

Invisible twine, thin and fine,
you can not unknot a knot not seen.
Invisible twine, thin and fine.
Sew small the heart and tight the hand,
who can unbind invisible twine?



lasus. I don't know who sewed his heart small and tight. He didn't look like a man without compassion or empathy. Tall and strong, his broad chest had room for care within it; even I couldn't see his emptiness... but I was young then. Now, I would see it.

He was always in the woods as a child, he loved to wander the creeks and follow the trails of the deer. Some said he knew the name of every tree and mourned when the big ones fell. I knew him as a boy, a lonely child without a mother. Could it be that just a stitch each year – sharp needle into soft and throbbing flesh, thread pulled tight – made him into what he came to stand for? Invisible twine sparkles in the sunlight and then hides itself in the shadows.

He grew up with a handsome face and gracious manners, a quick laugh that charmed the other children and adults as well. Was he hiding in that friendly demeanor, that calculated casualness? Was it all to win the affection of a distant father? King Alexius

***Invisible twine
sparkles in the
sunlight, and hides
in the shadows...***

was too busy to be intrigued by a son. Others were intrigued, certainly. There were stories about him then, as there would be when he was older, but then there are always stories about the king's son. They said he was heartless and shameless with the pretty village girls, giving promises of love, winning hearts and tossing them away. He thought of himself as Zeus' protégé and ran naked when the rains fell and storms rose... even I was captivated by the lightning in his eyes.

There was great storm on the night his father died. It rushed in from the northwest – winds and water – the rain fell so fast and hard, you couldn't see a horse's length before you. Alexius was hunting with his men. They headed home. Rain and dark obscured the path. His horse stumbled on the slippery ground. Alexius fell and rolled down a rocky cliff. The men found him, made a sling, and carried him home.



Painful breath, broken bones, an intimate exchange – too young to die, too strong to be broken: Iasus was only twenty-two, his father in his prime – deathbed promises, hopefully a word to heal a loveless child, I don't know. Even I don't know what they said to each other.

Was that the final, final stitch made in his heart? Come morning, a meticulously carefree boy woke up a man. Before the funeral was planned, he called in all of his father's advisors. While the women washed the body, he was going over ledgers and taking inventory of his holdings. Villages in his care, farm workers and grape tenders, taxes and tithes, sheep and cattle. Some thought this was the way he managed his grief... or his fear.

***He vowed to prove
that he would do well
with all that had been
denied to him...***

Fearsome indeed, to suddenly be responsible for the treasure that had been his father's secret. He was well past the age when he should have been invited in, well past the age when he should have observed his father in council. This boy knew each nail in the door that closed him out, denied him his sense of worth. Now,

all the mystery was his. I do not know what Iasus and his father said together, as Alexius lay dying, but even the deaf could hear his vow to prove that he would do well with all that had been denied to him. His mother died at his birth, but he would prove to the world that he had the right to be alive. He would prove to the father gone what he couldn't show the father alive, who had no eyes for him.

Five years later, he met Clymene. She was the daughter of the neighboring king whose lands were greater than Iasus'. She was promised to another man – a political marriage that would raise her family's status in the eyes of the old, established clans. Who weds who is negotiated by the fathers and dictated by the mothers. Ambition is more important than concern for a young girl's feelings and fantasies.



Clymene had always had her father's ear. She was an only child, and a long-awaited one as well. Oh my, she was a pretty thing. A fairy child with silver hair and delicate bones, she flew rather than walked. She ran like the wind and swam with the fish. Sky and water fought over her but she belonged to the ocean. A new-moon babe, silver and crescent, rumor had it that Poseidon was her true father, and that she was conceived in temple rites at the water's edge.

A barren woman conceives after I am called to do my work. They thank me and then, they blame me. "What kind of spell, what were the words?" I delivered the babe and placed her in her mother's arms. "It doesn't matter," I say, "now does it?" She sparkled like moonlight, starlight. "Look," I say, "she has her father's eyes, so deep and blue." They all agree.

Clymene always got what she wanted and she wanted lasus. Her promised marriage was to a kind, round man twenty years her senior. It would have been a gentle life. She would have been... but what does it matter? What is, is. Someone so delicate was not made for our world. She could not survive a cold wind. There are things we know and the knowing of them does not enable us to change the course of what will come. That is the hardest truth for me.

***These things are set
before we are born;
they are the
agreement we make
with the soul of our
times...***

I scream against it but it will not be denied. Prayer and offerings to the Goddesses and Gods can change the course of a river but not the course of fate. These things are set before we are born; they are the agreement we make with the soul of our times. Not one of us comes just for ourselves; there is too much work to do for a life to be a meandering stream of days leading to some vague and coincidental end.



Imagine us there, bright souls, history without form. All time simmers in the cauldron. A steam of dreams rises and forms the clouds. It will rain. It will rain. What once was and what will be bubble before me. With the tip of my finger, I swirl time. I move the centuries back to create a story that you will discover in your past. I take a pinch of life. Another pinch. I toss it on a black obsidian mirror. If a story must be told, it must be lived.

We make a pact; we choose our forms, our roles to play. Meleager is my twin, he has been my brother, lover, mother, and child – and I have been his. In this life, he is my son and I will cause his death. I will end his story as Meleager. May hands that love me lay the log of my life on the fire as well. Burn brightly – sparks rising to dark night – make the constellation of my birth and tell the Gods that I am coming home.

***Someone must plan
the coincidences. I
was the first to come
and I have remained
all this time to tell this
tale to you...***

My consciousness free as smoke, I move on the wind and speak to those who breathe me in. The ashes of who I am remain to feed the earth, to be one with the body that I leave behind. If only... if only I could remember the plans we made and see the conspiracy in our eyes... but I cannot. I cannot. No one here remembers, but dreams remind us of places beyond form and the promises we made there.

At times, the cells of my body remember. I know what I must do, my hands know and my arms know. The world arranges a déjà vu, and laughs at my startled recall. I was the first to go, to step into form. A harbinger, I came a century before them. I had so much to do. Introductions had to be made, societies arranged, fortunes built from tidbits of random luck; someone must plan the coincidences. I was the first to come and I have remained all this time to tell this tale to you.



King Iasus married Clymene. Her father gave him the wild, mountain land that adjoined his kingdom. Not rich farmland – she was too great a beauty to need wealth to bind a marriage – but that wild land, like her, was touched by magic. Rushing streams and waterfalls, clear, deep pools, rich woods filled with deer. Iasus loved that land. He was lost in its wildness. Some say he loved it even more than he loved her. Certainly, he understood it better. He knew its mysteries; he spoke its language.

The gamesman, Ciron, came with the land. It was his home. He had always lived in the woods, a silent fellow, a loner; he was an orphan child who was found wandering when he was only five. He was brought to the King, fed by the women of the kitchen and left to his own devices. He would disappear into the woods for long hours, appearing at dinner, eating, sleeping in the stables and disappearing just after breakfast. When he got older, one of the men carved him a bow and a set of arrows. That bow was taller than he was but he carried it everywhere with him. Eventually he grew into it and began to earn his keep by bringing home game. Rabbits, pheasant, then deer felled by a single arrow, although he brought in the meat, he ate sparingly of it as if he had no taste for the lives that fed him.

Ciron was five years older than Clymene. He never spoke to her out loud, only in his imagination...

He lived on the edge of the wilderness closest to Iasus' land. It had been the farthest from the castle when the land belonged to Clymene's father. Ciron was the same age as Iasus, five years older than Clymene. He watched her grow up, he called her Sprite and that was fine, because he never spoke to her out loud, only in his imagination. He told her his secrets and the stories of his past. He spoke to her in pictures because he never really mastered words. Inadequate words, that don't come in the colors of early spring or the rust and grey of winter. Instead he talked to her in the same way he spoke to the dogs, and they always understood him.



As long as anyone could remember, Ciron was always accompanied by a tall and graceful hound. First a gangly pup, then a clumsy adolescent and finally a fine, tall dog with long velvet ears and a quick black nose. His life had given him three such fine companions, the current one was named Julius Red.

Like the rest of us, Ciron was enchanted by Clymene. He knew he had no place in her life, that he would never make a mark on the story of her heart. He had nothing to give her. He belonged to the deer and the wild fowl, the bear and the mountain cats. He tended the wilderness, shaped it with his devotion and attention. He chose the trees that would fall for the good of their kind to make a stronger forest, a healthier habitat. Although he never saw a temple, he knew Artemis better than many of her priestesses. The woods were his temple; his life, a prayer.

***iasus adored
Clymene, everyone
knew that, but such
adoration is not
love...***

When given a choice, Ciron stayed in his woods and in service to Iasus. He brought his catch to a different kitchen. He respected the young king's love of this land, but he was bewildered by the sadness in Clymene's walk. She seemed lonely. He knew loneliness well and couldn't imagine how it could have slipped around her, but he recognized the weight it added to her shoulders.

Iasus adored Clymene, everyone knew that, but she was beyond his grasp. He touched her with his eyes and she made his mouth go dry and yearn for wine. Was she a witch, he wondered, that she could turn him into a boy who had never known a village girl? Such adoration is not love. Fine silk it was that he had for her... not love. Love wears socks to bed and know the smell of rumped sheets. Love is worn cotton made soft by years of use. He gave her silk.



Iasus was enchanted, but Clymene wanted to be more than an enchantress. She had her women friends, and she loved to swim in the ocean. She was a dedicant to Poseidon and spent her moontime at his temple by the sea. She had her friends and her interests and still, she was lonely. Always cautious, even she began to believe that she might break. If truth be told, although she found Iasus' obsession with her delightful, she also found it a bit empty. "It is only a matter of time," she told herself, and they would settle into being familiar. Singing to herself, she waited. They had their nights together. He seemed to see her best when only one lamp burned to light the room. But still, she was lonely. She wanted a child.

Iasus wanted a child as well. He wanted a son. He wanted a son as if having that son was his only possible salvation. Crazy, yes, but if he had a son, he could rewrite the story of his own childhood. If he rewrote it in time, the spell would be broken, the thread that bound his heart would dissolve. He knew it would. And then, he could be himself with her. He would finally be able to feel her touch. If he could make right the past, he could reach through the glass that held him in and feel her warmth. It had to be a son. Clymene would not wait forever on the edge of who they could be. He had to have a son.

***Iasus wanted a son
as if having that son
was his only
possible salvation...***

Meleager was five when I went to the village just beyond Iasus' gate. Tall for his age, with dark hair and quick eyes. We set out on a long journey. I brought my basket of herbs, leaves for tea, salves to heal the skin and the heart beneath it. We walked though winter's cold landscape and stopped to stay with friends along the way. I gathered wisdom and gossip in my basket. I meddled in the lives of those I passed. Set right a lover's spat, healed the wound of betrayal and a baby's cough, scattered blessings of abundance in hungry places and didn't allow circumstances to take away their generosity. I have always been a traveler.



In early spring, just before the equinox, I set up my tent in the village market only a short walk from the castle wall. The queen of the land was a fairy girl, twenty-one years old. The villagers spoke of her as if she were Psyche. They said the music of her laughter cured bad humors, but she rarely laughed any more. Her husband loved her from afar. They wanted a child but no soul stepped up to play the part.

***Atalanta was born on
a cold January night
and she was not her
father's son...***

I did not see Clymene on my visit to her city. I couldn't. I had a role to play but only distance would allow me to play it. I set up my offerings, told a few fortunes, and sold herbs to the king's kitchen. I became friends with Melaina, Clymene's companion. A few words of advice, a healing salve, a vial filled with the scent of night-blooming flowers – Melaina believed in my abilities.

A special blend of tea for melancholy, an oil that brought the sound of rain into the room – no suggestions, just opportunity. “Use this any place you think it might help”, I said. By Beltane, the whole castle talked of the queen's pregnancy. The king was so... well, more than happy. It was as if a great burden had been lifted from him. Light with relief, it was the first and the last time that I ever saw joy within him.

Atalanta was born on a cold January night and she was not her father's son. King Iasus called his huntsman to the castle. When the queen fell asleep, exhausted from the labor of birth, he stole the babe from her breast and told the huntsman to take her into the woods and leave her. The huntsman did as he was told.

Dark night, new moon – as Ciron went into the cold, he prayed to Artemis. He knew her well. He lived in her beauty for his work was in her forest. Artemis is the protector of all things wild and of women at the time of birth. Ciron prayed that she would take the baby from him and save him from this unbearable act. She did not.



Why me, I wondered. As a lonely boy and, yes, when I was a young man, I would make up stories. My favorite stories were about Clymene. I would make up coincidences that let me touch her life. I knew it was my fate to draw a line across hers and serve in some way... but not like this. Not like this. I am not her savior but her betrayer.

When I was young, I would imagine that she would twist her ankle running in the woods and I would find her and carry her home. I would find an abandoned wolf pup and give it to her for protection and companionship. In some later hap of fate, the wolf would save her life and I would know that my tiny piece of destiny was done. Now I am asked to take her child into the wood and leave it there to die.

I could have taken the babe to my cottage and raised her myself. In my mind, I did that. I took her there to keep her safe but I could not feed her. I stole milk from the kitchen but she rejected it. Spitting it back at me, she cried and cried and got thinner and thinner. They searched my cottage in the morning and on the mornings that followed. Men do the bidding of the king, and I cannot consider myself other than them.

***I knew it was my fate
to serve her in some
way... but not like
this! Not like this...***

In my mind, I found a distant village. I found a woman with a newborn of her own and told her of my wife's death, showed her the motherless babe in my arms. She took the baby in and I slept in the barn and did chores for our keep. And then, the king's men found her – gossip always tells and a woman with one child who suddenly has two is reason for conversation. The look in her eyes as they dragged her away...

I walked and walked, praying to Artemis with every step. I went deeper and deeper into the woods. Past the edges of our land, past the edges of anyone's land, I walked all that night and on into the next day.



I was tired and numb with grief and horror, and the babe had been crying for what seemed like hours. I put my finger in her mouth so she could suckle but there was no comfort there for a hungry child.

Artemis, Artemis, Artemis

Protectress of the wild

You who run with the deer and know the power of the arrow

You are the one that comes to the wild things at the moment of birth and death.

We tell ourselves the things we need to hear. We believe what we must believe...

Perhaps I was in a daze of despair but I convinced myself that I was looking for a place to give the baby to the Goddess, who would take her in a painless death and put her soul in a new-born fawn. She would still be her mother's child. She would be in a form that Clymene could recognize but Iasus would not. We tell ourselves the things we need to hear. We believe what we must believe in order to keep our sanity.

I wandered on, knowing that I must find the place where Artemis would meet us. The sun fell low; exhausted from hunger, the babe slept. Just before dark I saw it, the mouth of a cave. A large cave, it must have been home to creatures and humans in the near and far past. I wrapped the babe tight in my coat and placed her deep in the cave, away from the wind. I laid a fire. Stone on stone, I called the spark and blew a song into the tinder. Finally smoke rose and flame followed. With twigs and leaves, prayers and tears, I made a nest, took back my coat, and wrapped her in a swath of fur. I lay beside her for quite a while, my hand covering her tiny body. Just before dawn, I rose and left her there.



The Story of Atalanta

Diana's Grove Mystery School 2009

It was the darkest night – no moon, bright stars. Distant eyes watching me. I never went back to the place that had been my home. I just kept going. The next night, I slept a fitful sleep and then went on. It was twenty-one years before I could again taste that necessary nightly oblivion. Just at the point of drifting off, I would hear a babe cry. Startled, my heart would race, blood pump, sleep gone while exhaustion remained. I did not wonder why I had been so cursed. I never prayed to Artemis or anyone else again.

As the years passed, that night-cry changed to laughter, the laughter to whispers, the whispers to a soft voice – girl then woman – growing up in that place where I should have found sleep. No action is without consequence. Living with what we have done is the price that we all pay.





Vows & Contracts

by Cynthea Jones

The Vows We Make

*“Sew small the heart and tight the hand,
who can unbind invisible twine?”*

Atalanta's vow, as the story will tell, was a costly one. Her vow: *I will never be less than I am... no matter the cost.* She couldn't lose a race, she couldn't settle for a lesser life, she couldn't hide from her destiny. Telling a story is easier than living one.

In the living of the story, little compromises of our integrity seem fine, sometimes even wise. “Just this once...” “Well, it will make peace.” “What I want really doesn't matter all that much.” How about: “I am strong enough to... give in... do without what I said was important to me... find myself again when this is over.”

Vows – those vows – they are more than agreements, more than promises. They are sacred and they are unbreakable... at least, you can't break them without losing a piece of your self. Call it *soul, heart or reason to live.* Call it *knowing who you are, being who you are.* Simply stated: when you break a vow to yourself, you lose a piece of yourself. Just a piece... but how many pieces can you do without before the integrity of the structure that is you begins to break down?

We can dissolve, you know, like salt in the rain. Losing form, seeming to disappear. But when the water rises – and it will – it will return to the sky; the salt remains. You can't really lose yourself but you can misplace who you are for a while, or even for a lifetime. That is the danger of the vows not made. Without them, we drift without form or shape. Vague even to myself, I am. And then I say: “This is what I will do. This is who I am.” Vows made to myself and to my times.



Don't confuse these vows with the promises made to others. Wedding vows, initiation vows, the sacred rites of our childhood religions – be they made in church or to a group of peers, do they fit in the cup made of the vows you made to yourself and for yourself? If not, you might have some untangling to do... and now is the time.

Are there “vows” that you made that you must undo to take yourself back? Are there vows you must unmake so that you can be free to make a vow to *yourself*, a vow that will keep you whole?

Make a note of those vows here.



“When I let my long hair fall, it smells of lemon and ginger. When I let it fall and the wind carries the scent, the truth gets told.”

It takes truth to find those vows, to see them in the mirror of your life. Look in that mirror. If who you see is who you know yourself to be, then you may not have too much work to do here.

When I look in the mirror, I might not know the reasons why the woman who stands before me isn't me. Too tense, too sad, too set in her ways, too rigid, too soft, too timid, too forceful – I know that I am other than that. I am calmer, happier, more proudly strong and less defeated than the woman who says she is my reflection. I am taller and softer and my eyes are more open. How do I find the promises and patterns that make me less than I am, other than I am?

Ginger sharp and lemon bright,
Cut into pieces with silver knife.

Water;

A drop for every hour past. No need to count, just pour...

Until you are a month away.

And then, a spoonful for a day.

Until you are a day away.

Twenty-four drops will summon now,
And brew away.

Breathe it in.

Let the truth be told.



In the scent of lemon and ginger, you have only yourself to hear the truths that you must tell. What are the vows that make you less?

Unwind, unbind and boil away.

While the brew brews, write them here: Your body knows the little twists you made in your soul to make promises to others. With word or glyph, mark them here.

Did you become the person that someone close to you told you that you were?
Are you the one at fault, the one to blame? The strong one who can take it all and asks for nothing? Are you the one who will never walk away? Are you the one who always leaves? The one who didn't do enough, know enough, have enough, give enough? The one who wanted too much? With word or glyph, mark here the time that you said yes to being someone that someone else said you were... and that you are not.



“With the tip of my finger, I swirl time. I move the centuries back to create a story that you will discover in your past.”

Go ahead, swirl time backward. Watch your life replay itself. Are there vows you made that need to be undone? You can swirl time backward and undo those moments here. With this brew, you can do that. What do you want to undo? Tell it to this page. Tell it to yourself. Only Althea looks over your shoulder and... she already knows what should be written here.

If you were to ask her, what might she add?

What vow will you make to your past self?



Go ahead, swirl time forward. Spin it all the way up to today. And then, go one year further. Who are you? The water waits. The truth is what you say it will be. Who are you? List ten words that describe who you are a year from now. One or two of those words might find themselves written more than once more than once upon this page.

What vow will you make to your future self?

Are there people or situations that you need to untangle? In your mind and in your heart, what do you need to say so that you can be free? Are there things you need to do? List them here.

To untangle myself, I will:



Contracts Made Before Birth

An idea, not a philosophy... play with it. Did you make an agreement to play a role in someone's life? Did you take a part in a story that needed to be lived? Did you make a contract to meet someone at an appointed time and be the changer or the changed? Were you... are you... the opportunity-bringer, the lesson-maker, the betrayer or the fool king? Did you make an agreement to bring an idea, a point of view, or a needed solution? To offer a service to a person or group? To take a part in the making of our times?



I look at my most significant relationships as “contracts”. I made a contract with a boy to meet in 1964 and conceive a child. The only problem was I thought the “contract” was to live happily ever after, to raise that child together and to pass the years as a couple. That was definitely not the contract. We both had other agreements to keep, separate lives to live. When I realized what the contract had been, what had been a failure became a success.

My second marriage was a contract to change each other's lives. In thirteen years, Steven and I changed the direction of our lives. We stepped out of our patterns and habits. We supported each other in finding the spiritual work that would prepare us, and in doing the personal healing that would enable us to move on. And then, we came to a place where each of us had a different road to travel, a different life to live. Neither one of us could find destiny if we gave up self to live the other's life. In both of these relationships, staying after the contract was fulfilled turned a positive relationship into a hurtful one.



My union with Patricia has enabled both of us to serve our individual purposes. Our contract is not yet complete. I will quickly admit, retrospect gives insight into the contracts I have made. By seeing the outcome, I understand the agreement. There are other contracts, less personal than a marriage, and perhaps just as key to fulfilling destiny or living with purpose.

When I was in my late twenties, a woman hired me for a public relations/customer service job regardless of my lack of required qualifications. I don't know what she gained from our "contract", but she created the direction of my life. She taught me to write and she introduced me to metaphysics. She gave me my most valuable skills and she introduced me to the world that I now live

This idea doesn't require a belief in reincarnation... It requires a belief in metaphor...

in. She gave me a compass and a map, and sent me on to be who I am. I have used the gifts that Linda Marshall gave me every day of my life for the last thirty years. My life's work began after a two-year contract with her. What did she get from me? Nothing equal to what she gave me. Perhaps my contract was to commit myself to the gifts she gave me and use them to send her passions on into world. Perhaps we have a lifetime-to-lifetime contract. Perhaps in another life, I will open the door for her.

Now, does this idea of *a contract made before birth* require a belief in reincarnation? No, it doesn't. It requires a belief in metaphor. You don't need to believe in the power of metaphor or the divinity of metaphor, just grant metaphor its existence and metaphor will do the rest. See if this idea can give you a different way to see your life, your relationships, and the steps in the dance of interaction. For the sake of story, try it on.



Look at a time when you made a significant change in someone's life. Write about that relationship *as if* it were a contract.

Relationships

Friends, Lovers, Business Partners

Using the wisdom of retrospect,

Is there a relationship in your life that fulfilled a "contract"? I look for the relationships that didn't work out in the way I expected – endless love, enduring commitment, life-long friendship... but, when I look through a different window, I can see that the relationship delivered me to a new reality. Has a relationship delivered you to a new reality or a new sense of yourself? Has a relationship guided you, inspired you or provoked you to make a life-altering choice or change? Did you make a change in someone's life? Did you enable them to become more of who they are?

Write about that relationship as it were a contract.



Teachers, Mentors, Students, and Apprentices

Did you make a contract to learn a skill or an art? Did someone enter your life and enable you to find the skill that has given you direction, purpose, or a way to contribute to your world?

Did you make a contract to teach someone an essential skill or introduce them to an art?

Did you make a contract to deliver a message, introduce a belief system or discipline, or bring a different reality to someone?

Write about that contract.



Groups, Organizations, Associations

What is your “contract” with a significant organization that you are *currently* involved in?

Who agreed to join you?

What role do or did you play?



Contracts Fulfilled

How do you know when you have fulfilled your contract? First, you need to know that you *have* a contract and what that contract is. Secondly, realizing a contract is complete doesn't mean the relationship or association will end... although it might. Fulfilling a contract might mean that it is time to shake hands, say thank you and go on. It might mean that it is time to create a new contract.

***Consciously creating
a new contract can
enable a conversation
about change and
purpose...***

When I look back on my life, I find that my relationships became toxic and unhealthy when I tried to keep them after they fulfilled their purpose, after the contract was complete. A contract can be complete and the relationship doesn't end, but the *form* of the relationship does. The structure of daily life changes. Some relationships can change form, others can't.

When a contract ends, the purpose that was at the center of the relationship no longer holds the union together. Sometimes, the relationship wobbles and falls; other relationships find a new place and balance. Associations based on mutual work become friendships. Shared history, mutual affection or respect hold people and groups together. As time passes, a friendship might become more distant or less daily without losing its importance.

When a contract is complete, you can end the form of a relationship and create a different form or way of being together. In fact, it happens all the time. Often, I am not aware of the slow shifts that happen as a relationship is changing. When I become aware that things are different, I don't know how to talk about the change. Addressing the contract and consciously creating a new contract can enable a conversation about change and purpose.



If you have a relationship where a contract has been fulfilled and a different contract is required, write about that relationship here.

Contracts might not be equal or balanced. I might give more than I get. I might get more than I give. I might love more than I am loved. I might be loved more than I love. But what I find liberating about this metaphor is, none of that matters. It might be the only thing that matters to my ego-self or my romantic-self – equal emotional investment, having the one I love, getting something in return, giving as much as I have taken so I can leave with my self respect intact and tell myself that I don't owe anyone anything – those things matter to *me*, but they aren't a part of the contract.

The contract was to conceive a child. My daughter's father has a very different contract with her, and it has nothing to do with me. It is between them. I, too, have a contract with my daughter that is independent of her contract with her father.

I had a contract with my second husband. We agreed to support each other through times of life-altering change. We agreed to deliver each other to very different destinies that rose out of the same background. Love aside, there was a time to be together and a time when being together prevented each of us from growing into our distinct and different purposes.



Now, I have a contract with Patricia, a contract with Diana's Grove, and a contract with you. You, too, have a contract with Diana's Grove. That contract might have been to register for Mystery School – just that, only that. By so doing, you made the work that we will do this year possible. You are a part of making it possible for everyone in Mystery School. Your registration gives us our future. You did that simply by registering. That act might be more significant than you realized. Registering might be the only thing you do regarding Mystery School this year, and by doing that, a contract is complete. Your contract grants us our existence. And, I hope you have contracted for more.

Many of you have a larger contract with Diana's Grove, one that you might never know you have. You might say something on line that changes the course of the story, or gives someone the inspiration they have been seeking. Your insight could be the key to change or liberation for someone you will never meet. You might share an idea or a line from the story with a casual acquaintance and change the course of their life. You might have a contract to meet someone at Mystery School.

***“See you at Diana's
Grove in the year
2009...”***

Do you remember... *“See you at Diana's Grove in the year 2009. I am the person who will deliver you to the next phase of your life. I will introduce you to the passion that will become your purpose. I will be the person who supports you through a significant change. I will see you with such clarity that you will be able to see yourself more fully.”* Did you say that, or did someone say that to you?

You never know what is in store for you. You never know what is in *story* for you. But, Althea knows. She remembers the coming year as if it were yesterday.



How do I keep a contract I didn't know I made? By agreeing to be involved... in your work, in your significant relationships, in Mystery School, in life, in the mystery of discovering yourself.

By living as *if* you made an agreement to be authentic – to live up to who you are when you live for your values and out of your beliefs.

The purpose of all the contracts we make before birth is to deliver us to who we truly are...

By living as *if* you made a contract to uphold your vision and act according to your intention, as *if* each person you meet matters to you and is a gift that will enrich the pattern of your life... no matter how fleeting the encounter.

What if you made a contract with life and said that you would reach out and touch the world with your awareness and your compassion, and shape reality by speaking your truth?

What if you made a contract to allow yourself to be touched, shaped and changed by your experiences, by the dance of interaction?

What if you agreed to allow life to shape you so that you can become more fully yourself?

The purpose of all of the contracts we make before birth is to deliver us to who we truly are. They might be stones in the river that shape our course and enable us to rise toward the sky and plunge to new depths. All contracts lead us to be more fully a part of the tapestry of life. Before birth, we agreed to live a part of our times and turn the past into the future.



"I would know that this tiny piece of destiny was done."

Ciron played a role in Clymene's life. He knew he would. An agreement only half remembered – he knew he had a role to play but the form – so unexpected. Someone had to take Atalanta into the woods and who but Ciron could find the cave, so far away and yet familiar? A child of no origin himself, one who only knew the wild. Had he too been carried in strong arms and left in such a place? How do we know when we have fulfilled a contract?

There are the small moments of unforgettable impact. Listen deeply to yourself. What is done? How can you and how have you served a tiny piece of destiny?



"I take a pinch of life. Another pinch. I toss it on a black obsidian mirror. If a story must be told, it must be lived."

There are vows to be made this year. But first, look into the mirror and at your life a year from now. What vow will you make to yourself, to the self you will be a year from now?

Write that vow here.