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Blood Moon

The Dying Priestess Has A Vision of Her People's Future

by Karen Shearer Voorhees

Every realization of depth comes with a terrible burden. Those who are permitted to see are simultaneously saddled with the obligation to communicate that vision in no uncertain terms—that was the bargain.

Ken Wilber, "One Taste"

I know I will die in two days. I know where, and how, and who will drive the knife blade into my heart as the next full moon rises. This is not why I tremble. I tremble for you, my people. What will become of you? Before my last breath leaves my body, I pray that you will catch this story my spirit is struggling to tell, and hear my warning.

When you begged me to go to the gods for you as a human sacrifice, I did not tell you this: my body was already dying. I had known it for many months. My spirit was already turning toward the next life, eager to meet the gods I have striven to serve. That is why I agreed so readily to die for you.

Sixteen long years ago you made me your High Priestess. As we have gone forward together in our great change from foraging to farming, I have served our new gods by loving and serving you, and you in turn have loved and supported me.

Until now. In this latest crisis you have turned on me.

I cannot blame you for your bewilderment. At times our great change has been hard. At times some of you have doubted, yearning to return to the days when we roamed in small bands on the bosom of the-earth-our-mother. Some among you have feared all along that our ancient spirits would curse us for leaving our old life-ways. Still, up until the last full moon we had always endured in the face of every challenge, even through the troubles of these latest years — drought, and roaming bands of displaced tribes, and unrest here in town.

But when the shadow of the earth fell upon our last full moon and darkened her face to blood, you, my people, despaired.

“A monster is eating the moon!” one of you cried.

Within a heartbeat many of you flared in fright and took up the cry. The demons of terror and chaos spread like wildfire among you. A few cried out that the spirits of the land had risen against us and cursed us at last. This fear too spread to everyone.

Very soon I gave up trying to calm you with my words and instead led you in songs and dances. You thought these were to strengthen the moon in its struggle against the demon that was devouring it as a snake swallows an egg. In truth, the songs and dances were an outlet for your frenzy, so you would not go out of your minds with terror. I helped you pace yourselves to keep dancing and singing for half the night, until the moon came back again in her fullness. Then I helped you tell yourselves that your valor had vanquished the demon. As indeed it had, but the demons that night were in your hearts and minds, not in the sky.

I thought we had survived this crisis too, as we have survived so many others. But in the days that followed, our war-leader Batumivir cunningly stirred your fears again.

It was he who incited you to demand that I go to the gods as a human sacrifice. “Let our High Priestess go herself before the gods at the next full moon, and beg them to take us back into their good favor,” he urged. “Only our best will do!”

I knew that his real purpose, unspoken and self-serving, was to get rid of me. I have long stood between him and his will to dominate the town council. But I also saw your terror. And when you came to me and pleaded, I thought I saw a way out of my own secret misery.

When I said yes to you I, too, had an unspoken purpose. Rather than suffer any longer from the cancer that has been slowly devouring my body I chose a swift, clean death from a knife-thrust to the heart. I chose to leave you and abandon my struggle with Batumivir and his followers.

Now I see that this was self-serving on my part. Perhaps I too, like you, lost my courage. Perhaps this is why my vision failed me. I surely did not foresee what happened next.

Within days you allowed the voice of my enemy Batumivir to seduce you further. Instead of pulling together, as I have taught you, you gave in to your fears once again and let him turn you against each other. In your distress you even listened to those who declared that we must turn time backward, and leave our farms to return to our small tribes and our old foraging ways.

You listened to those who would tell a six-year-old to go back to suckling at his mother's breast.

Then you listened when Batumivir blamed me for leading you on a false path. How quickly some of you believed him, and made me the scapegoat for all that has gone amiss in recent years. When the brutal men of Batumivir's war band seized me and abused my body for three days in the public square, none of you tried to stop them. Some you joined them. Others of you, horrified though you were, enjoyed watching what they did to me.

My terror for you runs as deep as my anguish for myself. You cannot see the unclean spirits that you have drawn to yourselves, but they are with you even now. By the deeds of these last days you have cursed and degraded yourselves for a long, long time to come.

My people, what will become of you?

None of the men who were beating me meant to kill me. They'd meant me to live two more days, until the next full moon. Batumivir knew better than to dash your avid expectation of a human sacrifice. And you—in your innocence most of you still thought my ceremonial death would win you back the gods' favor. When Gorin struck the blow that broke my rib he was more horrified than anyone else.

When my rib snapped and its jagged edge pierced my lung, and all the muscles of my torso clenched in spasm, and my breath stopped, and my spirit leaped out of agony into the light... it's hard to go on, even in thought. My spirit weeps as I remember how eagerly I entered the tunnel that opened before me. How grateful I was to die.

My people, I wish I could tell you this: we are so much more alive outside our earthly bodies than in them. I wish I could tell you. But then, if we knew, none of us would want

to stay in them at all. Maybe that is why, under the wisdom of the gods who guide us, we forget our true glory while we dwell on this earth in these vessels of clay.

I gather my courage and continue, struggling to catch in words the wonder that awaited me on the far side of that tunnel: the garden of the gods, the ringing radiance. Even grass and flowers there are made of light, and of music and fragrance too. How can I describe trees that are as vast as hills yet delicate as gossamer, or living cascades that resound with the voice of many waters? How can I name colors beyond those our earthly eyes can see?

On a terrace ringed by fountains of nectar that sang with bliss I was received by beings of light clothed in garments of light. Mighty as they are, and puny and flawed as I am, they greeted me with tenderness and with absolute, unconditional love.

Their cleansing light washed through me. I knelt in spirit and surrendered to its scouring. In the face of such acceptance there is no place to hide anything, least of all the rage and horror that were still reverberating throughout my body of light. It took an uttermost effort of will to release them. The jagged shards of my rage sliced through me like knives as I let go of them, but then the last vestige of my distress was gone, and I was entirely at peace in the presence of these celestial beings.

So it was in truth more their doing than mine that after your betrayal, and three days of torment at your hands, I did not ask the gods for vengeance, or even for justice. In that garden of light I begged those beings of light to forgive what you had done to your High Priestess. Then I recited to them your prayers for mercy, exactly as you had begged of me before Batumivir turned you turned against me.

Suddenly everything became even lovelier. A golden mist filled the terrace with a sweetness I could taste and feel as well as see. It was joy, joy bursting forth from these godly beings. They were that pleased with my feeble effort to forgive.

They used no words at all but a pure, shaped essence of meaning that is impossible to mistake. It flowed into my understanding in swirls of shimmering music. In human words it might run thus:

“You have opened the way for us to show you our hopes for your people. When you have seen what you will see, and understood the choice that lies before them, you will be given a choice of your own. You may stay here with us. Or you may go back to your earthly body, and complete the ceremony you and your people have planned at the next full moon, and then return to us.”

A veil seemed to lift. Off to my right I saw a lane of majestic trees like nothing on earth. Between the trees floated a row of exquisite, shimmering globes, each one larger than my own light-body.

At the loving invitation of the gods I approached each globe in turn. Each one showed me living images. Even now as I lie here, once again in my earthly body, my every breath an effort, the images in those globes seem more real to me than my own flesh.

Vividly in my mind's eye I see again the images in that first globe: humans roaming the earth in small bands, clad in furs and coarsely woven garments of grasses.

I understood this to be the first age of humanity, when we lived like animals but with fire and stone tools. How uncountably many years we did this! But even as primitive as we are in this age, we have something beyond any other creatures. We can imagine and make new tools that befit new environments. Sometimes we trade our goods with foreign tribes. We are more adaptable than any other beings, even our near-human cousins.

I watched for what seemed a long time as we spread far over the face of the earth in our scattered bands, fascinated at the fierce, primal joys and pains of our days, and at the terrors of the nights we spent close-huddled around our fires.

Each one of these globes was to show me a different age of humanity. This lay clear in my understanding as I moved on to the next. For a while the moving images here in this second globe seemed no different from those in the first. Humans are still foraging on the face of the earth. But things begin changing, slowly at first, then more quickly. We are making more elaborate tools and weapons and garments. These grow ever more complex and varied as the years pass.

In this era we are becoming self-aware. At first we do not realize this. Our keen sense of subtle energies, and of the living spirits in everything, is fused with our own inner imaginative life. Along with the spirit-life we sense in every rock and bush and bend in the river, we also see our own sentience reflected back to us. Our dreams and imagination interact fluidly and interchangeably with our sensory grasp of our surroundings, and with our psychic senses. We are only beginning to learn to distinguish between them. Our wisest leaders, our shamans, help us live and move in this sometime beautiful, sometimes terrifying world of spirit-matter.

And we are using language in more complex ways. In this second age of humanity we begin to recognize patterns, and we seek meaning in them by way of stories. We see patterns in the stars and make stories about them, and tell these stories to each other. We make stories about the living spirits we sense in everything. We begin to see the world and each other as beautiful, and so we create art and music. We make stories about our origins. We bury our dead with rituals and prayers.

My people, this is the life-way many of us knew in our own childhoods and youth, before we settled into our new farming towns. But there were at least five more globes to come! What would the gods show me in these? I seethed with eagerness to find out.

When I moved to the third globe I saw vast numbers farming on a scale so immense I was staggered. How far the spread of farming can take us if we follow our new gods into this new era! You will find this hard to believe, but I see great wild beasts tamed and harnessed to till our fields and carry our burdens. Humanity multiplies and spreads like never before. Larger towns appear, then splendid stone cities. It is as if the-earth-our-mother herself is rising up and taking new shapes to shelter these new human societies. So many new styles of craft and culture arise! So many new songs and stories!

In this era we become aware of our capacities. But at first we do not recognize that they are innate in us. For a while we see them reflected back to us in our stories of gods and goddesses. By invoking our gods in prayer we are learning to call up our own powers through a deliberate act of will. My heart smiles to see how the rituals that our priests and priestesses create in the gods' honor will help us gain further conscious control of our impulses and abilities, enabling us to live close together in these ever-larger communities.

My people, you cannot imagine how the dim sense of gods and goddesses we have today will grow into elaborate pantheons, and what this will make possible. I watch as differing tribes come together into larger groups. City-states arise and then, as millennia pass, great empires.

Goods and ideas will be traded far and wide. Even as terrible new diseases strike in the crowded cities, and spread along trade routes, fewer adults die of violence or hunger or exposure. More live to grow old. They share their voices in the ruling councils, balancing the young hot-heads with their seasoned wisdom.

But while I see much in this third globe that makes me rejoice, it is not all a happy picture. The primitive savageries will lessen in this era, but many brutalities are only increasing. I see great warlords protect their peoples from much random violence but their rule is often oppressive. Some are worse than Batumivir. Warfare is less frequent but much larger in scale. Most horrible of all, slavery spreads and becomes ever more common.

Still, in spite of all the brutalities, many people are living longer, and some better, than before. The new songs and stories give meaning to the lives of the men and women of these times, and sometimes joy.

The fourth globe, when I place my eager attention there, shows great stone cities so huge they stun my mind. Around them stretch cultivated fields beyond reckoning. Written language is mastered, then metal work in bronze and iron, then coinage. Wind- and water-

power are added to human and animal power. How vastly these enhance the works of the human mind and spirit!

The advances are inner as well as outer. Sainly individuals reach new heights of spiritual realization on the high ranges of Truth. Some share their inner treasures with the masses, and great religions take shape. More and more people are beginning to be aware of an innate sense of moral law. They project this onto their new divinities.

Side by side with the moral codes fostered by the great religions, the great empires bring forth codes of civil law. At their best these codes bring a new order that advances civilization to another level. New forms of family, polity, and society arise. Ever greater cities and ever greater civilizations spread across the planet.

But the price paid for this advance is also very high. The foraging peoples are dying out wherever the higher civilizations touch them. The intimate nature magic we knew in the childhood of humanity is fading from our awareness. Terrible wars rage on a scale Batumivir could never imagine. Driven by the shadow side of their new religions, people persecute each other in the name of their single gods. Women are subjugated instead of respected. Slavery and oppression spread even more widely than before.

The visions in the fifth globe are stranger yet but I can still make sense of them. Here are cities like crystal clusters as huge as the hills. Inconceivable numbers of people live in them. Deep thinkers are discovering some of the spiritual laws that govern the natural world. We are becoming conscious of natural law, and we use this to amazing effect. Bitumen is harnessed to put vast power in the hands of ordinary folk. Unliving devices carry people and goods everywhere almost effortlessly — even through the air!

In this era the worst of the brutalities are decreasing. Slavery largely vanishes from the earth. Unbelievable numbers of people are living longer, healthier, more comfortable lives than ever before. Living into advanced old age becomes normal. We reach out to each other through subtle devices that let us speak instantly over great distances. Whole societies are beginning to take responsibility for the well-being of each and every member. Amazing!

But far too many of the earth's peoples are trapped in poverty and misery. We wield weapons of godly power while our wisdom is still all too human. War is less frequent, but when it happens it is devastating on a scale impossible in earlier ages.

And the great wild places of the earth are beginning to sicken.

The sixth globe shows networks of fairy lights all over the planet, brighter than the stars at night. I gape at the sheer beauty of it. Vast knowledge is available to vast numbers of

people. Many of them are using this to improve the material quality of life for more and more of the populace at an ever-faster pace.

Even better: one by one, more of the brutalities are being overcome. While much remains to be done, the ideals of tolerance, fairness, justice, and well-being for everyone begin to spread ever more widely throughout the entire world. New forms of spirituality overflow the vessels of tradition, and flourish in spite of wide-spread cynicism.

And here is the greatest wonder of all. Among the countless marvels I am witnessing, this is the one that makes my heart sing with joy. In this age I see the multitudes finally begin to understand what only a few rare souls have seen before now: we all, everyone everywhere, really are one tribe, one people, one family, sharing one life on this beautiful oasis in space.

This advance in consciousness, like the ones in earlier eras, spreads slowly at first, then begins shaping entire cultures.

But as before, the cost for these advances is high. With great effort we have pulled back our aggressions into smaller, less devastating wars, but war there still is. Dire poverty is lessening rapidly but it is still wide-spread, with its terrible toll of suffering. And even while poverty is lessening, and increasing numbers of people have an ever-higher quality of life, human population is mushrooming as never before. There are so many of us, and we have harnessed so much of the natural world to our uses, that we are affecting the entire web of life — even to the very climate.

The need to address these problems globally is dire. Yet some self-serving leaders are still able, like Batumivir, to exploit the fears of the people in dark, destructive regimes that preach hate and suspicion instead of tolerance and unity. Such regimes pull us apart and take us backwards at a time when, more urgently than ever before, we need to move forward together.

Are we learning fast enough? Will we suffocate the web of life on the-earth-our-mother, and with it ourselves?

The seventh globe was yet harder for me to see. But here I saw marvels even stranger than before.

The cities have become as beautiful as forests. No, now the cities *are* beautiful forests. The buildings are alive: immense, interwoven trees, grown under the conscious control of those skilled in such crafts. These living, garden-filled wonderlands reach far into the sky, as tall and vast as mountains. As they grow, they draw dangerous vapors out of the air and cleanse the atmosphere. They harvest sunlight and wind for their energy. The thousands of millions of people who live in them even grow much of their food there.

Human population growth slows and stabilizes and begins to decrease, as all women everywhere gain full control of their own lives and bodies and fertility.

In this age of humanity dire poverty is finally abolished from the earth. So much is done by unliving devices that people can devote the work of their days less to life's necessities and more to health and sports and culture and learning and caring for each other.

The pace of new learning and new technology continues to increase. We grow far wiser and more skillful in our use of resources. The natural world begins to recover, slowly at first, then more quickly. Even as population growth slows, stabilizes, and gently reverses, populations continue to withdraw from the country-sides and concentrate in the immense sky-cities. More and more of the surface of the earth returns to meticulously monitored wilderness.

After several disasters we finally harness our will and slow the heating of the planet to a pace that averts all-out catastrophe. We plant billions of trees to reforest the planet and draw ever more of the dangerous vapors out of the air. Bitumen-based energy is replaced by cleaner means that I cannot understand however hard I try.

Grave challenges still arise, but as they do I see them being managed by means of skills and crafts that I don't even try to understand. A decent quality of life for each and every human becomes sustainable, within a healthy life-web upon the-earth-our-mother.

In this era we begin to grasp how deeply we are all interconnected with everyone and everything at every level. Ever larger numbers of men and women are reaching advanced states of consciousness. We grow in wisdom, insight and compassion. As before, this filters through to shape entire cultures. Life becomes deeply beautiful and meaningful for more and more of the people.

As the natural world renews itself, and more of us reach high states of consciousness, an awareness of the subtle energies in nature reawakens in many. At the same time we come to know that some of the age-old wisdom from humanity's dawn has been preserved in the wilder corners of the world. The old nature magic comes back again in its highest forms, without the narrow tribalism and occasional savageries of our foraging days. This ancient wisdom joins and strengthens the later-arising forms of spirituality. Together they blossom into many beautiful life-ways.

Side by side with our individually expanding consciousness, our new, subtle communication devices are connecting us on an ever-growing scale. We reach out and form interlinked clusters in a network that spans the planet.

Entranced, I watch as we human beings collectively become a brain and nervous system for the earth-our-mother!

Now I feel a jump to an even higher level of intensity. I'm seeing differently, as if some new dimension is opening out. The globe beside which I am standing, the seventh, is still straight out along the line from the first globe I looked into, but it also stacks on top of that first globe to begin a new, higher tier. Somehow I am looking down upon the first globe at the same time I look out and back at it.

A perfectly straight line that loops back on itself? How can this be? My mind cannot grasp how space shapes itself in this higher dimension. The best I can do is put this in the form of human meaning—into a story. This seventh globe is showing me a story about the seventh stage of humanity upon the-earth-our-mother.

But this is more than just a next stage. With this globe we begin an entirely new cycle of ages.

Now this begins to make sense to me. The sixth globe ended the cycle that began with the first, in which humans awaken and grow in awareness. This seventh globe begins a whole new cycle on a new, second tier. In this round of eras, the-earth-our-mother herself will awaken and grow as a conscious being.

This new planetary consciousness is emerging through us. Not only are we becoming the physical brain of the earth-our-mother; collectively we carry part of her consciousness too. But we also continue our evolution as human individuals. Even as more and more of us participate in a planet-wide consciousness, we continue to become ever more fully our unique, individual selves.

But now I'm deeply concerned.

At each stage, in each of these globes, I have seen how, even as the light has brightened, a shadow has darkened along with it. Maybe it must ever be so. As long as humans live on earth in these bodies of clay there must be a shadow for every light. Just as our bodies cast shadows in the light of day, it seems that our brightening minds will also cast shadows in every era. Even the-earth-our-mother casts a shadow, as she did at the blood moon that cost me everything.

What worries me now is this: what shadows might darken, what newly emerging challenges might arise, in this new, second tier? I looked searchingly to see. But I'd reached the limit of my perception.

I wanted to keep going! There were five more globes in this second tier! And I sensed even more tiers stacked above these first two! But when I strained to see further it all dissolved into blinding light.

Then the vision changed abruptly. Now there was only one globe, directly in front of me. In this globe I saw only one image: a toddler. It was standing but wobbling back and forth, struggling to take its next step. It was either going to take that step forward very soon or fall down hard, backwards.

I knew at once that this toddler stands for you, my people.

Time seemed to expand as I pondered this image, and insights unfolded further in my mind. The visions I had just seen in those ethereal globes are a plan for us in the high councils of the gods. Just as you, my people, had sketched out plans for enlarging our cultivated fields, and laid out markers in the meadows before beginning to hoe them, the gods have marked out their plans for the coming ages. I grasped that humanity will eventually make it into our own next level. Even if this community of ours fails to take this step, sooner or later some other one will. Evolution, it seems, is one of the great spiritual laws that drives the physical universe. Occasional backslidings are mere ephemeral eddies in the great river of Time that flows in one direction, and one direction only: onward into greater complexity.

In this larger scheme of the gods it is not so very important whether this particular wobbling toddler — you, my people — succeeds in taking its next step now. Somewhere, somehow, some community will eventually make it all the way into the next new era on earth, and from there it will spread.

As soon as I grasped this, everything changed again. The globes and the garden and the gods all vanished. In that instant I stood by the very same stream in the high mountains where my shaman teacher had taken me during my childhood to watch trout struggle upstream to spawn. I seemed to be standing again in my eight-year-old body on the very same glistening boulder by the same cascading mountain stream, holding onto the same overhanging fir tree, its bark rough and sticky with sap under my hands.

I watched a trout gather itself for its great leap up to the next pool, just as I had watched it breathlessly so many years ago. But this time in the lower pool where the trout circled I also saw, as if in one of those globes of vision, the foraging tribe of my early childhood.

Then I looked at the upper pool, so large and inviting. There under its surface I saw our town. But I saw it as it might be in years to come. Ripe, heavy grain stood ready for harvest in the new, larger fields that you, my people, had only just begun to measure out before the blood moon changed everything.

Insights unfolded in my mind as I watched the fish circle in the lower pool, gathering its strength. If it fails its next leap for the upper pool and falls back, this trout will be bruised and exhausted. It may not be able to try for the upper pool again for a long time.

The meaning behind this vision given me by the gods shone clear in my mind. My people, if in your fear your shadow side prevails now, then you will fall back, hard. Your debasement under Batumivir will take you far into darkness and suffering for a long time to come.

The trout leaped! It landed slap across the lip of the upper pool, struggling with all its might against the down-rushing current.

My spirit reached out in urgent desire to nudge this trout up over the lip of the pool.

In that instant I slammed back into my earthly body; my chest muscles released out of spasm enough to let me draw breath. The gods had granted me the choice I'd made in will though not in words.

By your time I'd been out of my body only briefly.

It seems that during those three days of outrage against me, you who remained my friends and allies had been gathering strength too, much like that trout in the lower pool. I am told that when I collapsed unbreathing at Gorin's blow, some of you arose and faced down Batumivir's gang. Then, when my body began breathing again, everyone backed off. I thank the gods that it did not come to a fight among you.

And I thank the gods for the care with which you, my friends, claimed my body and carried me here to safety, and are tending me with such loving kindness. For now I rest peacefully, taking joy in your company in spite of my pain at each labored breath.

But the clash of wills in this town is not resolved. An uneasy truce holds between the factions. About a third of you wish Batumivir to rise up and overthrow the town council and seize control. You who are of this mind believe you will prosper under the rule of one strong man. You are deluded.

At least it seems likely that I will live long enough to die again two days from now. No one, of any faction, is going to make a move until all can see what omens the gods send at my ceremonial death. If you only knew how gladly I will go to it. The healers have done what they can for me but everything hurts. Breathing hurts most of all. Returning to this physical body was a far greater sacrifice than leaving it again will be.

I came back to you when I could have stayed in that bliss-filled garden because I want you to understand this, my people: the bright future the gods wish for you is not yet lost

to you. You can still claim it if you hold to your courage and go forward together. How much of wonder lies ahead for you if you do!

Or, if you give way to your fears again, and break apart into your old tribes, you will fall backwards. You will go down the darker path that befits the darkness of your recent deeds. How much suffering awaits you if you go this way!

But the body to which I have returned is so broken I cannot tell you any of this. I cannot draw breath to whisper more than a few words at a time. I cannot tell you how much the gods love you; how much they wish blessings for you. How much they hope you will choose the brighter path. They will love you beyond your understanding no matter what course you take, but they will not choose for you. Or perhaps they cannot.

And I cannot warn you of the choice before you. Of all the agonies I have suffered this is the worst.

I do the only thing left. Though every breath I take is an act of will in the face of brutal pain I set myself to endure. I will keep breathing for two more days. When the next full moon rises you will see me go willingly to my sacred death. If I can do nothing more for you, I will at least do this. Maybe by this you will know yourselves to be forgiven; to be blessed by the gods. Maybe this will help you claim your courage, and move forward instead of backward.

And even if I must remain silent outwardly, I can still speak in my mind the vision given me by the gods. I pray that some of you, or at least one of you, can catch in your dreams this story I am telling over and over again in spirit. May you take courage in these dark times and move forward into your bright future.

My people. How much the gods love you. How much I love you. I pray that you may be blessed, now and forever.