

The Ecstasy of Survival and The Fall

By R.W. Mosses

A tornado is a raging, gyrating funnel of air. A force of destruction, it obliterates everything in its path. Tearing up streets and houses, crushing towns and crops. The whirling wind, a product of a butterfly's wing. At the eye of the storm lies tranquillity its very essence charged and electric, a primordial source of creation, its very energy inspiring. To be able to stay here and feed off the energy to move as the whirling walls ripped a passageway ahead, now that would be something. Would there be enough strength to keep up, to move where the wind blew? Conor had wondered this some six months ago, then he ran with the wind, unconcerned, nestling inside its chaos, protected by its destruction. However, he had started to lose strength. The raging debris caught in the tornado snatched at his heels. He knew that soon his time would be up, he had eaten his share and he would be eaten

in turn. Devoured by the very thing that had driven him, fired him, protected him.

Knowing this he was somewhat resigned to his fate.

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Conor sat outside Cafe Que? playing with an empty bottle of Miller spinning it back and forth. The sun shone down hotter than he could ever remember it being. The waitress caught his eye and he ordered another Miller. She wanted to take the empty bottle but he wanted to play with it. Lethe was late, but that was nothing unusual. By her very nature she was forgetful. When the niggling had started, that was when he felt the whirlwind nipping at his heels. Now he felt himself trapped; he was waiting expectantly for the end and this made him behave in a way that would most definitely bring about an end.

He remembered when he first met Lethe. The bar was hot and despite drinking more than enough he wasn't drunk, just thirsty. Pushing past obstinately immobile drinkers he finally reached the bar. He ordered an Addlestones. There she was perched on a barstool drinking a whisky, talking to the barman. Long dark hair, with an occasional silver strand, flowed down her back. But her voice was what got him, it slid honey-like into his mind and settled there, the lilt bubbling around. He thought of his favourite imaginary spot when he heard that voice.

Being a little mad he introduced himself. And she did the same to him. He couldn't help but notice her name, and before long they were comparing their favourite myths and stories from folklore. He had known he was a dead man when he first heard her speak to him, but now he was utterly beholden. Coincidence was

playing him a winning hand, and he felt the first sparks tingle down his back.

Lightning was about to strike, the storm was rising as the winds began to blow. That night he spent in ecstatic reverie, passing over the electricity of the moments he had spent earlier and awaiting the future.

Conor didn't fully understand it at first. His reactions to people around him slowly made him realise how he never really knew who or what he was without them. He could have this vague sense of his character, but if he didn't see himself reflected in the mirror of the people he met he felt he had no real identity. Of course this meant he never really knew people as they were, as they really were. He just saw the masks they wore when he met them; the masks he got used to and learned who he was from. And of course they did the same, they knew who they were from his reactions to them. They never knew him as he really was and he could never show them as he was only something when they were near; and what he was, was what they wanted to see of themselves.

This was perhaps why he had groups of friends who could never mix and why he was never going to get on with Lethe's friends. He never saw any reflection of himself in them, it was like they just absorbed everything he showed them of himself. Their indifference galled him, even intimidated him. Conor tried to tell himself he didn't care, but he wanted to get something from them, he wanted to please Lethe, to get on with her friends. She failed to see he tried, that it was her friends who stopped him. It was like trying to enter an exclusive club but the bouncers wouldn't let him in as he was wearing the wrong coloured tie.

He found himself wondering what character he had when he had been single. He thought of those times as formless and chaotic but fun. When he had a relationship he was a person. During a relationship it was as though he wore one basic mask upon which all else were variations and this mask was defined by the one he wore with his partner. And when he was single he wore such a variety of masks, his reactions being based only on that meeting with a person, or perhaps a little on history if he had met them before.

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For their second date, the first being a strangely tense, expectant affair where neither of them really knew what they were doing with the other. Lethe talked away and Conor, despite her attractive charge, wishing he hadn't gotten into the situation in the first place, suggested they go to Bonnybridge and watch for UFOs. For years the skies had been lit up with many strange, unexplained lights; tales of missing time if not full scale abductions abounded. They got into his maroon Cavalier. Conor reached across to the glove compartment and extracted the tape player. He fitted it into the hole in the dashboard. They headed out of Glasgow towards Lothian, Carmina Burana resounding through the air.

Eventually they found their way to the hilly mining communities. Passing through Bonnybridge itself they sought a suitable vantage point to view the area. The vista of light spread out below them reminded Conor of scenes of small town America from Spielberg movies.

Sitting and watching they got to know each other better, comparing their past lives and future plans, their tastes in food, culture and partners. As usual Conor was amazed at the number of similarities, backed up by enough differences to remind him they weren't the same person.

As they sat with waning expectation, the sight of a flickering glow suddenly appeared. The sky was slightly cloudy. The spherical moving lights seemed to come and go. The yellow globes moved towards a group of rotating globes, circled and moved off. Conor at first found himself thinking it was a roundabout reflected in the cloud above. However some of the clouds broke apart leaving gaps through to the dark sky beyond, and here the globes were more defined and could be seen pirouetting like miniature suns. It was an awe inspiring experience. After half an hour they moved off. Conor felt very tiny and insignificant. Stunned into silence and mentally exhausted they drove home.

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Conor checked his watch, Lethe was an hour late. Now he was really pissed off, too many times she had said she was going to do something and then didn't. He'd had enough. He was inclined to be really childish and ignore her when she called; she'd have to call, he was going home, but he was too tired to be petulant. Finishing his Miller, he got his coat, not that he needed it, and headed via the Tube to the West End.

He loved his flat, Lethe loved his flat. Fortunately now not enough to move in. It was large. The lounge was a haven all its own, the mock fire, the rocking chair,

the long settee that moulded and supported perfectly. The plastering round the light socket, the ivy growing round the mock classical statue of Theseus slaying the minotaur-alabaster smooth and cold. Rummaging through his many keys he walked up the steps opened the outer door and got into the communal staircase, the banister winding its way ever upward. The top floor had some advantages he thought puffing his way up to the top. It meant few people looking in your windows, which Conor found handy at times like this, and excellent TV reception.

Dropping his coat on the floor he dashed into the hall cupboard, grabbing the box on the top shelf. If he was lucky he'd make it in time for the conjunction. Damn her, he was late and would have to do it on his own now. He moved the settee and rocking chair against the wall and rolled up the carpet. The chalk on the floor would need replenishing. Taking a stick out of the box he carefully went over the circle. He put a small folding bridge table in the centre of the circle placing a cup, a knife, a wand made from a willow branch, an athame and a brass pentacle. Placing two candles in holders on the table, one red and one green, he lit them. Conor stripped off his clothes and threw them in the corner. He purified his room with incantation and a sprinkling of salt. There was just enough left. He called on the spirits and elementals, and opened the four watchtowers at each point of the compass. Reciting the poem he had written specially, he breathed in, and was filled with an...awareness. He had invoked one of the gods and felt it struggle in his body, his mind. There simply wasn't enough space, so he-it expanded outward. He felt himself grow in stature, his knowledge seemed infinite and he would never have enough

time to examine it all, no matter how many times he did this. He knew that he was the universe and contained everything within himself. But also that it contained him. That which is above, is like that which is below. The oldest and truest alchemy. Here, being the universe, he was at peace. He noted a few small parts of himself come into alignment. A channel of power opened up like an old telephone exchange linking calls. He used some of the power for himself aware of other parts of himself tapping into the flow as other beings in the universe used some of the energy. Before he lost memory of himself he purged himself from the God and the God from him. He awoke on the floor to hear the phone ringing. Dammit normally he left it off the hook, if only he hadn't been so hurried. He was coming down from the rush and shivered violently despite the warmth of the room.

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Conor always wondered why people had such a low opinion of magick; Magick, the Art and Science of change according to Will. Think of the power of invocation; taking the abilities and strengths of a mythic God, Zeus or Hermes say, into oneself, exaggerating them to your advantage. Or evocation; perhaps more dangerous, but taking your inmost self, projecting it outside of your physical shell and examining it. Sure a lot of people couldn't handle seeing themselves in this way-that is where most Angels and Demons come from. But it could be very therapeutic. It was nothing Jung hadn't examined or written about, if Jung could be accepted why not magick? Maybe it was just a matter of time.

"Hello?" Conor snatched up the telephone.

"It's me," said the voice. Inevitably it was Lethe.

"Where were you?" he barked. "You know I needed your help here.'

"I was with my friends, you knew that," her voice honey even in anger.

"You also agreed to help me this afternoon. What time is it anyway?" The venom in Conor's voice was kept to the back; he could almost feel his wisdom teeth biting on it. It was certainly bitter on his tongue.

"I don't remember that," she said indignantly; she really didn't, damn her. "It's about half seven."

"I'm amazed you can't remember, I waited hours for you where we agreed to meet, good old Cafe Que? I nearly missed the conjunction."

"Well I'm sorry, but I really don't recall ever agreeing to see you this afternoon." It was in Lethe's nature to forget.

Conor was raging and shivering naked in the hall, he suddenly could hear the noise down the phone. He could feel the tempest hold his ankles, trying to trip him.

"In the pub as usual."

"Yeah we're just off to my place, fancy coming over?"

"I dunno, I'm a little out of myself at the moment." God not an evening with her friends, but he craved her company, addicted to her sex. How much was he prepared to pay? "Look, I'll see but don't wait up."

"Okay, maybe I'll see you later." She sounded disappointed. He couldn't understand how she couldn't see or realise that the two groups just didn't meet on common ground.

"Okay, bye."

"Bye." The phone was put down and Conor heard the open line. In frustration he threw the phone onto the receiver.

Conor went into the bedroom and found his dressing gown. He had been feeling so good but now was feeling rather bad. And very hungry. Wandering into the kitchen he tore open the cupboards and found a half eaten packet of chocolate digestives. He ate ferociously but his stomach still craved food; a hard knot twisted and ground inside him. His anger at Lethe abated as it always did, but somewhere in the back of his head his step faltered and the wind was closer to taking him. He began to prepare himself a proper meal by putting a pan of water on for some pasta. While getting some vegetables out of the fridge he thought he saw a cat moving out of the corner of his eye. just a white blur nothing more. Must be the ghost again, he thought nonchalantly; he didn't own a cat.

Conor's experience of the supernatural always left him wondering how other people failed to see the things he did. Was it all a matter of belief; if you believed in these things you would see them, if you were a sceptic there would be no disappointment. Conor wasn't sure anymore if it was belief or experience which had come first for him. It had all been happening for so long, ever since childhood. The odd occurrences that had taken place and his interests as a result were really

ordinary, usual parts of his mundane life. To other people he guessed he would be possessed, haunted and at best a weirdo. It was odd how Lethe took his experiences in her stride. She even asked him about the things he saw and felt, that she failed to see, like the colour of her aura in the, to him, literal, afterglow of intercourse. Conor wondered how he could feel so jaded and dejected when there were colours available to him others couldn't see; experiences they could never encounter; maybe he needed so much more to stimulate himself. Maybe that was why he turned to magick and lusted after Lethe; the heady heights, the danger, the loss if he fell off the precipice, if the whirlwind wrapped him in its embrace; the ecstasy of survival and the fall, a perfectly sublime paradox.

The ghost continued to hover just at the corner of his vision. He finished his meal and after washing the dishes picked up the phone to call John, his remaining friend. He'd drag him along, after a quick trip to the pub. Lethe reckoned friendship was an impermanent thing, that very few lasted, but Lethe didn't believe in love, had no God and to Conor no honour. Then she turned to him and wondered where she had lost her way. Conor suspected that secretly she depended on him more than she cared to admit. Maybe it was wishful thinking.

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A band was playing skiddley-idle-doo music in the corner and the cigarette smog made Conor's nose twitch, he thought he was going to sneeze but it passed. John couldn't make it so he had a pint or two on his own. After an hour he suddenly

realised he was supposed to go to Lethe's. Conor was sure he was being lifted by the force of the whirlwind, but it could be just the Dutch courage he'd had a few pints of.

"Hello?"

"It's me, Conor," he said into the intercom. "Let us up will you?"

"Okay."

The door buzzed and Conor pushed it open. He climbed up to the second floor. Lethe stood expectantly, silhouetted in the doorway, her hair falling around her shoulders, her jaw firm.

"Hello dear," Conor said.

"Hello to you too, the others are inside."

"So how ye?" he asked.

"A bit worried actually, you're behaviour is right out of order these days. You always seem to be pressuring me for something." Lethe could sometimes surprise Conor by remembering too much and by being direct and to the point; Conor was too drunk now to hear the wind roaring in his ears.

"Jeez Lethe, that's a bit heavy for this time of night isn't it?" "Look I've got guests, and you bring John over, and you're pissed."

"You invited me round don't say you forgot that? And you're none too sober yourself."

"Conor," Lethe sighed, "I've been thinking perhaps we should take some time out from each other." The air was moving faster about him whirling faster, Conor's

strength finally ran out, voluntarily he stepped into its embrace and he began the fall.

"Lethe, I think we should just go our own ways full stop." He was spinning round, free and imprisoned.

"Yes, why not?" she agreed, not in the least perturbed.

"I'll come and get my stuff sometime more convenient," he said and turned to go downstairs, "Bye," he parted over his shoulder. Not hearing another word he walked out the front door, destroyed by the thing he had feared. But he could now rebuild himself. He was falling, but was even more ecstatic, not knowing where he would land, he knew the future was clear and he had Lethe's whirlwind to thank for that. He headed off home, the last bus had left ages ago. Typically it began to rain small frogs.