

The Well of Being

Draft 02

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Very long ago but not so far away,
Ollie awoke into a wiggly new day.

Try as he might, scouring Earth and Sky,
neither he nor anyone could find the Well.

Ollie had been very young when his quest began.
That first glimpse of the Codex had sealed his fate.

Back then no one could read it.
though all the world's scholars and scientists
had tried to decipher it for a thousand years.

The Codex had lay buried for ages unknown
in a tomb of rainbow gemstone
in the clutches of a giant crystal skeleton,
harder than diamond, glowing with its own energy.

Mining for plutonium, a mile-long drill had struck
the impenetrable cluster of gem. Hard as it was,
it shattered and shook the earth above apart
opening chasms into which the miners fell.

Weeks later a rescue team was finally able
to reach the bottom where the miners had fallen.
Though they had not survived,
the rescuers stood agape in wonder at the vein of gem.

The giant crystal skeleton lay in peace on its back
like a twenty-foot-tall pharaoh
with nothing but the Codex in its hands over its heart.

The Codex too was harder than diamond and glowed
as though it were made of the full moon.

Upon it was etched an array of symbols
like nothing anyone had ever seen.
No one could make sense of the Codex,
except for one piece that was incontestably obvious:
the eye gazing into the Well.

For generations the best and brightest tried their hand,
and gradually the Codex was forgotten
and lost in the annals of time, shrouded in mystery.

A thousand years after its discovery,
the more devoted Codex enthusiasts, like Ollie,
carried a Codex card with them,
a sign of their belonging,
and a reminder of its awesome inscrutability.

Until one day a mystic singing crone cracked the code.
This lucky crooner called herself Osa Niña.
She lived in a cozy hut deep in the forest.

It was a windy autumn day when Ollie found her hut.

Ollie had set out following a clue
from his favorite Codician, Shubh Anumaan,
who claimed to have found the Well
six hundred years ago in the Hindu Kush mountains.

Explorers had since scoured every crag and pebble
of the Hindu Kush, leaving it barren and ruined,
a paved-in trash heap in the heart of Kashmir.

Anumaan's handbook had been translated from Kalash
into 120 languages, and in every form
it read as an unconscionable web of riddles,
like the one that led him to the crone:

*Moon painting birds
as shadow woods shed sun
sing way to foam Well.*

And so Ollie found himself
in early autumn on a full moon
trekking into the darkest woods
no one had mapped or trod
listening for birds who sing at the moon.

Just as he realized he had lost himself in the forest
the hut glimmered in the moonlight
from under its woodsy camouflage.

Timid but brave, he strode to the door
and before he could knock,
the wild crone flung it open.

He gasped at her wild smile and fiery eyes.
Osa wore the forest on her skin and in her hair.

The clawed toes of her bare foot
scratched an invitation into the dirt floor.
Ollie understood Osa's intent without thought or doubt.

Osa and Ollie stood and shared their hearts in a gaze.
Ollie's hand found the Codex card in his breast pocket.

He held it up for Osa like a mirror.
She jolted Ollie with her thunderous laughter.

Then Osa stretched out her arms and began to sing.
The sunbeams buzzed and the trees quivered to her voice.

Rainbows cascaded through the air in the hut.
Ollie could taste fruits in the colors
and smell flowers in the music.

Ollie felt his face melt into his chest
and his anus pucker up into his belly.

Then as suddenly as the song had started everything stopped.
Silence, dark and numb, drowned the world.

Ollie became aware that even in this void,
even without the world, he was here,
He became aware that he is always here and now.
Just as you are and I am.

From that unbounded void, Ollie witnessed strands emerge
of every size, and color, and shape,
at every speed, and heft, and length,
intertwining and weaving with every other strand
in every way they can
in more dimensions than a human can comprehend.

Ollie found he could comprehend all of this.
He found that he understood it all at once,
and that he, in fact, was all of this.
Eons passed and returned in the blink of an eye.

The strands interwove to take every form
Ollie had ever encountered
and then every form he hadn't
but could imagine.

He dreamed a million dreams at once
and then a million million
and then more still.
Future and past epochs zipped by.

Ollie found that he was no longer a boy,
but was the void of all of these possibilities
aware of itself, loving itself, and playing.

And just like that he was a boy again.
He felt his inner eye snap shut like a guillotine
and his outer eyes pop open like rose buds.

Everything and nothing was gone,
and before him stood the magical crooning crone,
Osa, covered in a woven bear fur coat
softly showering him with the firelight
flickering in her ember eyes.

But the world was not quite as it had been.
Now Ollie could see that everything was made of foam:
bubbles within bubbles all the way up and down.

And those bubbles were woven of the strands
he had seen and been forever in that void.

In a glance, the flames in her eyes jumped into his,
and Ollie knew that Osa knew that he knew what they know:
the Well is within.

From the bottom of that bottomless Well,
Ollie bowed with Osa for a timeless moment
then swept himself out the door and back to camp.

As he hiked along in the silver mist
the night birds tittered and hooted in the canopy.
The moon peeked at Ollie between the leaves

to tease him with its pastel painted face.

Ollie floated just above the trail as he neared his camp.
The firelight danced on the shadow woods
as though the trees were molting sunshine.

His fellow explorers on this Codician expedition
lay strewn about on the pillowy pine needles
around the fire commiserating about the fruitlessness
and hardship of today's treks in all the directions
Ollie had not chosen to go.

Only Ollie had left his GPS and compass behind that evening.
Only Ollie had wholeheartedly heeded Anumaan's entreaty:

*Seek foam Well, you never find.
Surrender lost, you fall in.*

Only Ollie had found the Well.
But how could he share his discovery?
He thought better than to interrupt
their symphony of grief
with the discordant tone of the ineffable.

Successful though he had been,
the Well was not what they thought.
He wondered how he could convey the truth.
He wondered whether they would believe him.

A tumultuous sea of Anumaan's riddlesome verses
flooded Ollie's mind as he drifted off in his tent
into the most peaceful slumber he had ever known.

*Sea without surface
mountain without base
seat leaks always peace
gaze casts ever joy*

Awake again, today again,
location: here, time: now,
Ollie knows with the steady surety of a deep dream
that no one will believe him
unless they too see the Well.

In their swollen shoes, he knows
he would not take anyone's word for it.
It couldn't be so simple.
If the Well was within us,
we would have found it by now.
Everyone would know.

After breakfast, he would take them to the crone.
He would bow and she would bow,
and he would kneel and beg for her to sing for them.

Codicians Gracie and Hugo and Trix and Quentin
had roused with the sun with the taste for worms.
Ollie sidled up to their circle with a sly smile.
Stoking last night's coals they grumbled at the cold.

"Any of yall see that hut out there?"

H: "What hut? Ain't nothing but trees and toadstools out here."

G: "You heard the yokels back in the village.
Nobody lives a hundred miles from here."

Q: "Hang on, hang on, you found a hut? ... where? ... anyone there?"

*"Yup, yes I did. It's due west a click or so. Lemme show you. Let me introduce you to **Osa**."*

T: "Osa? You mean to tell us someone lives out here?"

"Yes. Someone very special. Finish your beans and follow me."

They sucked down their frijoles and assembled their kits.
After considerable debate, Ollie convinced them
to abandon their infectiously redundant orienteering technology:
GPS watches, tricorders, smart maps,
AI sherpas with quantum compasses.
Hugo even had magnetoboots that directed his steps.
He borrowed Ollie's spare moccasins.
Trix quietly regretted her implants.

Ollie could hardly contain his joy.
The foam swelled and collapsed at his will.
Gracie and Q clipped at his heels
as Hugo and Trix dragged themselves to follow.
No one noticed that Ollie didn't touch the ground.

As they neared the hut, Ollie hushed them close.

"Steel yourselves, mates. This is it! Let me do the talking."

Then Ollie realized he and Osa hadn't spoken a word to each other.

He didn't remember how he knew her name.

The hut sat as unassuming and disguised as it had.
Smoke trickled from the chimney,
the cauldron babbled in the still forest air,
and that sweet familiar must fogged up their noses.

Once again the door flung back just as Ollie went to knock,
and once again Osa enticed them in with her toe talons.

This time the quaint hut was crowded.
Ollie met Osa's gaze as before.
Gracie giggled nervously as she noticed Osa's flaming eyes.
Hugo grabbed Q by the shoulders, playfully but too rough.
Trix shrank behind the rest of them.

And there they stood, uncertain and expectant.
Ollie didn't know what to say.
Osa didn't offer a word.
Ollie understood that no word would do.
Hugo guffawed, "Mighty fine hut you got here, lady."
The crone paid Hugo no mind.

And there they stood, uneasy and insistent.
Gracie averted her eyes from Osa's fiery gaze.
Q couldn't help himself.
"Mademoiselle, s'il vous plait, savez-vous où est la source?"
No matter. Osa didn't mind, and spoke no reply.

Ollie sat serenely in the Well while they waited,
the silence ringing and tolling in their ears.
while the cauldron babbled lazily on
and the birds tittered about the weather.

It wasn't the first rodeo for these brave Codicians.
Gracie had combed the backcountry of seven continents.
Quentin had read every book ever written about the Codex.

Hugo, whose had ancestor cracked the vein that unearthed the Codex,
had, in his own lifetime, built a hundred billion dollar empire
drilling and fracking the Earth's crust
mowing down the jungles and rainforests
and nearly boiling the oceans with his survey expeditions
in search of the Well fabled by the Codex.

And Trix was more machine than human at this point.
She could give you incredibly precise data
describing the present moment in thousands of dimensions
a nanosecond at a time with impeccable recall.

So there were each uniquely still in shock
from Ollie's casual mention of this hut,
and there they stood,

quivering in indignant disbelief,
brimming with self-assured confidence,
congratulating themselves already
at having solved the biggest mystery humanity had ever known.

And so they stood.
Until she toe-scratched out their seats
and offered them each a bowl of soup.
It tasted of the floor of the forest and its branches and crannies.
They sipped politely, even reverently
until the last slivers of sun slipped between the shadow woods.

All the while Trix had a thousand eyes on the situation
was analyzing the hut, and Osa, and each of them,
the air temperature, humidity, and the wind currents,
the soil composition, the architecture of the hut,
this precise location in relation to every sacred site on the planet,
and even the chemical makeup of the soup
(which was just what it tasted like).

Osa spoke not a word.
Ollie acquiesced to her wisdom.
And the night got so thick they could hardly breathe.
And that was it.
Ollie had found a nice old woman in a hut deep in the Siberian wilderness.
They ate her soup
and returned to camp
and back to their relentless searches
the desperate strives they lived as lives
and never spoke of it again.

And so Olikós Élenchos,
having personally scanned every light-second of the cosmos,
found the Well of Being within himself,
and understanding that to foam well is to breath easy
returned to his wife and their young children.
And never worked another day in his life.
He cared for them in every moment with his whole being.

In fact, he cared for everyone and everything that way.
And he wrote the most beautiful poems about the Well.
But he never could quite tell you how to get there.