

# Pretending dawn has never come

## Somatic storytelling tale of connecting sexuality and heart

By Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar

My friend Leo is doing a study on Kabala and Jewish mysticism in 16<sup>th</sup> century Prague. He told me this story when he came back from his latest visit, totally shaken and unnerved.

Leo was introduced, by some uncertain third party, to an old man who was said to hold some invaluable information regarding his research. Leo got used to the mystery and occult with which people, who held real stories and not just scholar discussions, approached their information. But this man was extra careful. Through this third-party person, the old man insisted that Leo met him in a very specific church, at an exact time and date. He was to sit in the church and wait.

A lover of the melodramatic pause, Leo accepted and took an immediate flight to Prague. On the allocated day and time, he told me, I made my way into the church. It was a large wooden church, looking neither interesting nor very active. It smelt of burning incense and dried resin, and so my head became somewhat lighter, hazed. But something in the building was enchanting, for as soon as I sat down, the rhythms of the slow woods penetrated every bone of the body.

Breath slows down, matching a space of ancient times; slowing down.

Every thought starts wondering back and forth, making it difficult to concentrate yet easier to take in what is really important.

Perhaps I drifted away, perhaps sleep has taken over me, for when the old man tapped on my shoulder, I realised I haven't heard him coming. He had an old touch, dry hands, was he fragile? We sat in silence, two people in a church; two people in an empty church. And as touch connects two, you could tell – magic is invited.

So you need to ask yourself, do I accept?

I have. The old man insisted we stayed in the church; it is where the story ends, he said. He insisted I would remain seated in front of him. He refused any form of recording his story. And yet I wouldn't rather be doing anything else but being there, with him.

Take what you can with your ears, and eyes and soul, and trust that what needs to be remembered will be remembered and what needs to be forgotten, will be forgotten.

And so you find yourself knowing, you breathe. Rhythms cycle back and forth, mind swings adrift; some information you try to hold on to, some you can let go of. And yet, it is not for you to decide what avenue will memories pursue, what space will the forgotten breaths find to weave their cocoons. When would it ripen? You may be in wonder, so you can find yourself knowing.

On the outskirts of Prague there was a forest, deserted woodland. The black forest, inhabited by outlaws and peripheral people. By those who thrive on the shadow and hide the sunrise. He with a wise heart would not enter the forest. Legends were born there as frequently as blueberries give their luscious fruits, spread quicker than overshadowing fields of fungi, died suddenly like the melting snowflake landing upon a streaming river.

But one legend persisted, only gathering more details, power and magic, more inconsistencies in time. It is about this Hunter that I wanted to tell you. What was the colour of his eyes? Was it golden, hazel, almond, ocean blue or black? What was his stature – was he wide and sturdy or lean and agile? Nobody could agree on the hunter's character.

A weary thought crossed my mind, was it mine? Implausible as it may be, told me Leo, but my heart told me – I had a sense of truth, that this old man had personally known this hunter.

The hunter of the black forest was frequently depicted with bow and arrows. Walking solemnly and swiftly, talking very little. Some said he was of noble blood fleeing a destiny of restricted nobility and wealth. Others swore he was a murderer and rapist, hunting for people. The women gossiped about his haunting grey eyes and wavy mane. They giggled describing his viciousness and relentlessness, and you could see that behind their fear, they wished to be ruthlessly abducted by him into the forest. The people of Prague seldom saw him; one could never tell how many of the witness-stories were fabricated, and how many were genuinely true.

One day, at midmorning market day, the entire town of Prague held its breath, when the hunter came walking – broad daylight – into the market, not a mark for his bow or arrows. The hunter walked solemnly but confidently, as if he had known the town by heart, and turned into a game stall. To the awe and bewilderment of the people, the hunter bought some meat. He tied the game's legs and hung it over his shoulder, walking back into the forest. A hunter buying meat. The Hunter buying meat. Everybody was horrified, curious, unnerved. Everybody was expecting something horrible to happen.

But this, said the old man, this comes far later in the story.

A few months before that day, a rumour was spreading in the black forest. There was a strong woman, a huntress, frequenting the forest. Soon, she was the main talk of the people of the black forest. Small groups of men were telling of an Amazon, a beautiful yet dangerous misanthropic woman. Her arrows, it was said, never missed and her bow was quick to be drawn. Like the hunter, she was a loner; like him – she never spoke to anyone. The men would tell of nights where this huntress silently joined a bonfire, and always left with a man. The morning after the man would come back – always silent, never willing to talk about her again; these men always had a possessed look, sadness and fear. A huntress.

Some said her hair was fiery red and her eyes were orange. In the nights, the forest's music changed, for the trees too sang slow odes for this huntress. In this day and time, women counted few in the black forest, and none of them was a loner. Women mostly belonged to their husbands, if not to their masters. But she, the huntress, she was different.

Let your jaw loosen and drop, your shoulders give in to the pull of gravity. Rivers of tears broke unto a damn; who erected this damn? Avalanches of roars rolled down the mountains; what called upon them? Pulses of breath, great leaps of laughter. Moments of awe, of shame, of fear. You are here. And in the morning, would you wake up on

your own? Can you not? And in the night, who would be there looking at you when your consciousness gives way. A hunter's arrow never misses. It asks: would you rather be doing anything else right now? Would you?

Rumours do fly, particularly between the dense canopies of a black forest, and so the hunter came to hear of this new mystery of a woman. Drip the gossiping conversations made way to his reluctant ears; drop the praising odes found rest in his restless mind. Morning and night he would hear her everywhere, in the broken branches, the weaved nests, in the death-bound cries of his game he would hear her, calling him: dare you meet me.

The hunter of the black forest became possessed. Slowly, he started joining groups of nomads in the forest, carefully choosing a place among them. Silently he sat there; keen to hear about her, thirsty for their stories. But the foresters would not share a secret without reciprocation, so the hunter told his manifold stories. With his stories he gained more knowledge of the whereabouts of the huntress.

The hunter's first story was of a man who could not find rest but in the solitude of the woods. A man who could not trust but the fearsome cries of his prey. The hunter told a story of a man who was magically given a glimpse of hope in an unexpected way, and of his journey to find this hope.

The hunter's second story told of a young girl in a mysterious land, who was summoned to portray a depressed emperor, and struggled with the fear of being an agent of change, who journeyed to find her faith.

The hunter's third story was of a man whose mother abandoned him, having given birth to him in a forest, and vowed, in this early age, never to be hurt again. His anguish was so painful that the trees awoke, sending their enticing lullabies to the city. The people have all fallen asleep, and in the nightmare of a collective dream, the trees told the story of the boy. The fury of the people almost resulted in the death of the mother, who escaped. The child was not found in the place that he was left. Was someone else lured to come for him?

After a few nights and days, the hunter knew where he should be waiting for the huntress, and so he left the foresters. He walked for the entire day, and the entire night. His courage seemed to have transformed, for a wild boar appeared to scare him. Perhaps it was his keenness, or his sleeplessness, though. When he reached the cave, he sat and waited.

How long do you wait before you leave? How long should he be waiting? He waited. And at this moment, told me Leo, he could have been waiting forever; it just didn't matter. But he didn't have to. She came after a few days, and knew he was waiting for her. Two hunters, gauging each other with their gaze. He gave in first, and in the night she took him to her cave and they made love all night. The trees were humming. Has something changed in her? Something has changed in him. The dreams, what do dreams mean? How much do we own our dreams? How much do we belong to them?

When he left the cave in the morning, for the first time in many years he left his bow and arrows behind. The huntress was roasting a hare. And when he looked at her eyes, the brightness of the love that was there yesterday was clouded by the sharpness of her opaqueness. She wasn't there for him anymore. He smiled, haze and blurry, where am I? But she was not there. A man who is not prepared for such a gaze cannot be a hunter; a man who cannot prevail his lover's gaze is not a lover. The man left the cave and walked, bare from arrows, naked from his bow, into the town. It was a market day and his legs followed his sharp nose, he knew where he was going.

The man brought back his meat and roasted it, on the leftovers of an uneaten breakfast. The huntress was gone. The day was disappearing, the breath lengthening. A certain pain, a certain yearning. What shall be of the body who knows what it wants? What shall be of the body who knows what is there. Finally, the night came – and with it, the hunter's wails. Sharp, tearing into the air, into the forest. Lonesome, free of the inhibitions of one who cares what others may think – totally immersed in the pain, in the yearning, in the fear.

The hunter's anguish was so painful that, in the night the trees have, yet again, came for him. Enticing the forest to sleep with their lullabies, they weaved their songs to lure her back. In this night, all the people of the forest had the same dream:

The night was starless and the moon lacking. A bonfire was erected and the forest's life seemed to hush in its presence.

By the fire sat a hunter and told his last story.

Once there was a young man who was looking for an answer.

Would you rather be doing anything else right now?

He was lucky enough to know what his question was.

In the mornings, he was searching and in the night hunting.

He was a hunter.

And then one day he realised, that it was the question that he missed.

And he knew where to find that question.

When he met her, he could no longer be what he was:

He was a lover.

In the night he has changed, his agile body softened, his ruthless eyes smiled.

He wished the morning would never come, that dawn would never rise.

Who am I now, now that I am no longer a hunter? The young man asked.

And he didn't know the answer.

There he sat, or lay down. He waited for her to tell him.

He sat there, on a church bench, or at home. Or through his journey.

The body aching to know, the heart fearing it.

Can I hunt and yet be more than a hunter? Can I love and yet be more than a lover?

How have I lived my entire life pretending dawn has never come.

And now, the hunter said, now the fire is nearly gone.

Now the time has come, the time has come for dawn to rise.

The first beams of light were tingling their way through the canopies and the hunter left the fire. In the cracking of the dead coal, one could smell ancient incense and dried resin, just waiting.

In this night, all the people of the forest had the same dream; all but one.  
For the first time in his life, dawn has come. And she came with it. Something has changed in her too.

Some say, the old man told Leo, that they hunted in the night and made love in the morning. Some say that they have never existed, that they were only waiting to be told. But this church is made from the trees of the black forest, and it knows the truth. It is the dream weaver of many hopes; it is the enticing call to come home. It is where a breath and a tear lose their shape in each other and reflect in the string of the bow.

The old man left, and I was left with a heavy chest, and without knowing why or what for – I sobbed for long minutes. Would I rather be doing anything else right now? When I walked in the streets of modern Prague I wasn't at all surprised that my legs took me to my travel-agent representative, and that I asked for the quickest flight home. I have never experienced such a sense of urgency.

It was only when I got home that I realised that the old man's story had nothing to do with Kabala, or Jewish mysticism, said Leo. But somehow, I didn't care.

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Integrative Massage Therapy (IMT) is a body-hypnotherapy approach. It combines conscious cognitive work with unconscious work and bodywork. IMT aims at supplying a safe space to expand and shift, and within the therapeutic framework we do our best to invite magic. IMT draws knowledge and experience from various sources, including massage and bodywork approaches, Reichian bodywork, hypnotherapy, NLP, shamanic work, various psychotherapeutic schools, stress management, Buddhism and healing. This particular process of somatic storytelling is one magical way to encourage inner resources for spontaneous change.

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