

A Storytelling Therapy Case Study: The Healing Story, "Budur and The Moon Rabbit"

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Client: C

TD facilitated three sessions with C in November 2017.

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Written by TD

1) C's Life Story

C grew up on a farm in a small town in the northeast USA. Her birth was a homebirth. She was born with her four older siblings in attendance. Her umbilical chord was unnaturally short, so her mother had to hold a squat while the midwife cut the cord.

C has two brothers with her mother and father -- and two sisters that are half-siblings with the same mother and a different father. C is the youngest of the five siblings.

When C's mother was in her early 20's, she had left an abusive marriage and put her two daughters up for adoption. When she married C's father, a 21-year farmer, he insisted that they find the two girls and reclaim them.

C had an idyllic childhood on the farm until around the age of seven. The marriage between her mother and father was deteriorating, and the relationship became abusive. C was taken from the family home to a women's shelter and shortly after this period of upheaval her parents divorced. Life on the farm came to an end. We discussed the relationship between Saturn and a surge of consciousness every seven years of one's life. C feels as though she was mature beyond her years, and by the age of seven years she was suddenly aware that things weren't right.

The years that followed were a period of stark loneliness for C. Her two older sisters had grown up and moved out, and her brothers were never around. Her mother was working as a waitress and would often be gone until 4am. Her mother would leave C with a movie to watch (such as "Black Beauty"), and would not be home for most of the day.

C experienced a traumatic event one of these evenings that she was home alone. Somehow her pet, a white bunny, had escaped. She desperately searched for the small white bunny and discovered its bloody, massacred remains near the neighbor's yard. It had been killed by a neighbor's dog. C cleaned up the mess and buried the bunny by herself.

Her mother grew increasingly mentally ill when C was around the age of nine. Her mother was often mentally "checked out" and would just sit on the couch with a blank stare. She would have dissociative episodes where she would call C a "wicked child," which was unlike her normal demeanor toward her children.

The family moved 10 times by the time C was 10 years old. This had a scattering effect on C. Without fully functioning parental caretakers, C became her own provider when she got her own job at around 12 years old. Because her mother was a beautiful woman who frequently attracted problematic men, C made the decision to leave and go live with her father and stepmother.

This was another sort of mess. C's shared a bedroom with her two brothers. There were only two beds, and arguments often occurred about who could sleep in these beds that night. C remembers sleeping on the floor with rats running by her in the middle of the night.

Throughout this discordant period, C felt as though she found solace in magical and mystical beliefs. One of her older half-sisters was instrumental in fostering a sense of wonder throughout C's childhood and adolescence. C felt a connection to ghosts, fairies, and elves during this period. She began to write stories about these magical beings. With the submission of these stories, she applied (in secret) to a very fine (and expensive) local "liberal arts college preparatory school" (a boarding school). In her application she described the confines of poverty and what it was like to be poor in a wealthy town. (During an earlier period, C's father had worked for this school as a gardener.)

The boarding school accepted C on a full scholarship, and at age 14 she moved into the boarding school. C feels as though this was a major turning point in her life and that her acceptance into the boarding school saved her.

A couple years into high school, she began summering in a college town three hours north of the boarding school. On her own initiative, she started renting a room in a shared home of scholars and artists. In this social circle she made many positive acquaintances. When she graduated high school in 2005, she moved to this town, which had the highest population in the state.

Here C was accepted into a university, but she dropped out early on. She moved out west with a boyfriend. They traveled for a few years, getting to know the American west.

C became pregnant around the age of 21. Realizing that she did not want to raise children with the man she was dating, she decided to leave him. C returned to the university she had attended earlier. C graduated with a BA in 2013 and has been living near the university ever since.

During her teenage years and her 20's, C felt as though her life story was somewhat overshadowed by unfortunate aspects of her family history.

However, in recent years C has felt a growing sense of the possibility of "owning" her own self, life, and story, and independently making the best decisions for herself – which she feels is "ironic" because she was forced to be independent at a very young age and has been making decisions for herself all along. We discussed how

interesting it is that people who are forced to be independent at a young age are often taking care of themselves against their own will, because one tends to desire to be cared for when one is a child. Being economically independent, and being independent regarding one's conception of oneself (emotionally and intellectually), are two very different matters.

C is now in her early 30s. She works in a homeless shelter and coaches members of families in various Life Skills, including in relation to securing stable housing. She has had a long-standing interest in the use of herbs for sustaining and improving health, and is actively working toward integrating herbalism into her professional life.

Written by TD

2) C's Guardians

R mentioned that despite the difficulties and confusion in her childhood, she always felt attuned to a higher self, or sense of divine guidance. I asked who her “guardian angel” figures were. She had been in touch with different voices at different times. They included:

The Elder: Sort of a genderless fairy godmother, “Not a crumpet eating type,” but more of a wrinkly earth spirit who would remind her, “Something is wrong here, child.” C had the sense that this figure came from the stars. C once had a vision or dream that this Elder and her associates her brought C to another realm to remind her that all the people in the stars are “always there for her.”

Fairies: The fairies had always provided a force field of light around C, to keep the darkness from penetrating too deeply. They would remind her that “It’s going to be okay,” and were always there to help lure her out of the darkness. They seemed to be made of light, whereas The Elder seemed to be made of the night sky and/or stars.

The Father: Another voice that C was in tune with was that of a middle aged man, just a normal father figure. He would instill confidence and gently nudge her along. He was an action-taker, saying things such as, “You got this, kid.”

Written by TD and C

3) Analysis and Research

The moon rabbit in folklore is a rabbit that lives on the Moon, based on pareidolia that identifies the markings of the Moon as a rabbit. (Pareidolia refers to seeing patterns in seemingly-random data.) This story exists in many cultures, especially in Asian and Aztec mythology.

In East Asia, the Moon rabbit is seen pounding with a mortar and pestle, but the contents of the mortar differ among Chinese, Japanese, and Korean folklore. In Chinese folklore, it is often portrayed as a companion of the Moon goddess Chang'e, constantly pounding the elixir of life for her; but in Japanese and Korean versions, it is pounding the ingredients for rice cake. In some Chinese versions the rabbit pounds medicine for the mortals.

A Native American (Cree) legend tells about a young rabbit who wished to ride the Moon. Only the crane was willing to take him. The trip stretched Crane's legs as the heavy rabbit held them tightly, leaving them elongated as cranes' legs are now. When they reached the Moon, Rabbit touched Crane's head with a bleeding paw, leaving the red mark cranes wear to this day. According to the legend, on clear nights, Rabbit can still be seen riding the Moon.

American folktales feature the trickster rabbit, Brer Rabbit translating to "Brother Rabbit." This character's roots are in both African and Cherokee Indian cultures. Brer rabbit (also spelt Br'er, Bre'r and Bruh rabbit) is a collection of stories about a rabbit living on his wits and surviving by tricking his foes and adversaries. These stories sometimes express the message that one does not have to rely on physical strength for survival and victory. (<http://www.rabbitmatters.com/brer-rabbit.html>)

A Vietnamese mythological story portrays the rabbit of innocence and youthfulness. The gods hunt and kill rabbits to demonstrate their power. In some lands, Hare is the messenger of the Great Goddess, moving by moonlight between the human world and the realm of the gods; in other lands he is a god himself, wily deceiver and sacred world creator rolled into one (*The Mockingbird and The Hare* by Kelly Louise Judd)

I'd like to look more into these goddesses and work with their energies in the stories:

Eostre, the Celtic version of Ostara, was a goddess also associated with the moon, and with mythic stories of death, redemption, and resurrection during the turning of winter to spring. Eostre was a shape-shifter, taking the shape of a hare at each full moon; all hares were sacred to her, and acted as her messengers. (I should mention that our understanding of the Ostara/Eostre myth is controversial, with mythologists divided between those who believe she was and was not a major figure in the British Isles.) (<http://www.terriwindling.com/blog/2014/12/the-folklore-of-rabbits-hares.html>)

She is related to the Norse goddess Freyja. In Norse mythology, Freyja (/ˈfreɪə/, Old Norse for "The Lady") is a goddess associated with love, sex, beauty, fertility, gold, seiðr, war, and death. Freyja is the owner of the necklace Brísingamen, rides a chariot pulled by two cats, keeps the boar Hildisvíni by her side, possesses a cloak of falcon feathers, and, by her husband Óðr, is the mother of two daughters, Hnoss and Gersemi. Along with her brother Freyr (Old Norse "(the) Lord"), her father Njörðr, and her mother (Njörðr's sister, unnamed in sources), she is a member of the Vanir. Stemming from Old Norse Freyja, modern forms of the name include Freya, Freyia, and Freja. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freyja>)

In Ireland, it was said that eating a hare was like eating one's own grandmother -- perhaps due to the sacred connection between hares and various goddesses, warrior queens, and female faeries, or else due to the belief that old "wise women" could shape-shift into hares by moonlight. The Celts used rabbits and hares for divination and other shamanic practices by studying the patterns of their tracks, the rituals of their mating dances, and mystic signs within their entrails. It was believed that rabbits burrowed underground in order to better commune with the spirit world, and that they could carry messages from the living to the dead and from humankind to the faeries.

(<http://terriwindling.com/blog/2014/12/the-folklore-of-rabbits-hares.html>)

Written by C

4) C's Healing Story: "Budur and The Moon Rabbit"

In a land not too far from here, there lived a young farmer and his beautiful wife. Though they lacked in riches, their hearts were full of love, for the couple had two sons and two daughters, and even throughout the hot days full of toil, sounds of laughter and joy could be heard by all who passed over and through the verdant hills nearby the farm.

It was a surprise then, you see, being very poor and already satisfied with such handsome and hungry children, that in time the mother's belly began to grow round again. With each moon that passed the new life grew larger and heavier within her, and as the days went on the mother could feel that this child would be unlike the others. The pregnancy brought with it strange dreams full of beauty, visions of lands unknown to her, and plants that spoke in words. Most powerful of all was the compulsion, the need, the spell that drew her out into the dark night sky to look up at the stars and to lay her belly down next to the earth. Only then would she feel satiated, and only then would she feel that the being within her would lull into a calm and slumbering rhythm.

Winter passed into Spring, and Spring gave way to the Summer. The mother knew that the time was growing near. One evening, the mother sat on the front porch and rocked under the big Buck Moon. Just as it seemed as though the gravity of its fullness might pull her into it, movement caught her eye and she looked out over the field to see a single white rabbit, its coat so pure in the light of the moon. Her tired eyes closed shut to blink and when she opened them again, the rabbit was gone and to her surprise, a quiet figure sat rocking in the chair next to her.

The woman who sat next to her had a face filled with deep lines of age and was framed by silver hair so long it touched the floor beneath her feet. Her dark eyes glimmered like pools of starlight, and she looked gently, deeply into the mother's eyes with a great tenderness.

She stood and beckoned the mother to follow her down the steps that led off of the porch where they could see the great moon more clearly. The old woman raised her arms high up to the sky and as she did, the moon seemed to grow ten times in size. And something changed still, and in the moon there was a beautiful rabbit looking down at the mother.

The rabbit in the moon spoke these words,

"In three days time you will give birth to a daughter who you will not see grow past her early years. This child will have the gift of sight. She will also have the gift of communion with all creatures of the world, even those that move by moonlight and between the realms. Finally, she will have the gift of healing. Know that we will always watch over her."

With that, the mother found herself back in her chair, rocking on the porch. The old woman was gone. But as the mother looked out again at the field, she saw the last glimpse of the rabbit hopping out of sight.

Three days passed and the moon grew full. Just as the Moon Rabbit had foretold, the woman gave birth to a little girl. As the infant exited from the mother's womb, the umbilical cord was stardust silver, and furthermore it was so short that the child could

barely stretch out of the mother's body. It seemed a testament to the desire for mother and child to stay close to each other, just a little longer. When the steady hands of the midwife cut that silvery cord, the exhausted mother looked upon her daughter and remembered what the Moon Rabbit had said to her.

The little girl was given the name Budur, after a story her mother had read about a beautiful princess who was loved by all. And it is true, the little girl was given the gift of love by her older siblings and by all who came to meet her.

Time passed peacefully for many years, and Budur learned to talk with the animals who lived in the woods and fields and who flew in the sky. She spoke with the plants and the trees that shared their secrets with her. She was filled with joy and wonder of the mysteries of the world. On the days that her mother could bear to let her go, she spent her days exploring with her sister, Bendis, who adored little Budur with all of her heart.

One day, on her 7th birthday, Budur came home from gathering flowers for her own celebration to find not a feast of merriment, nor the halls of her humble home filled with laughter, but the news of tragedy and her mother's death.

Grief stricken, her father could not bear the burden of caring for a family alone, and quickly remarried. Though a capable man, he could not find it in his nature to care for the ways of the children and consumed himself with his own affairs and those of his new wife. The Stepmother had no interest in farming, or animals, or even plants for that matter, and fearing that she might be driven away by such a lifestyle, Budur's father sold the farm and the family moved into an even smaller, and even more humble house.

Now, it may have been better if this stepmother was cruel or evil toward Budur and her siblings, but instead, she was indifferent, and this indifference led her to negligence. Soon she convinced Budur's father to spend nights away from the home. Nights turned into days, and days turned into weeks, and weeks turned into months, and months turned into the father and the Stepmother forging their own new life in the world without the burden of children.

He visited once after receiving news that Budur was sick with a fever. He placed a jug of cool water from the nearby well by her bed, brushed her fevered forehead with a calloused hand, and left as quietly as he had come.

Budur recovered from the sickness, but she did not forget the departure. Try as they might to care for her, Budur's siblings were far older than she, and though they loved her very much, in time, they had to find their own way out into the world, even Bendis. And soon, Budur found that she was very much alone.

As Budur grew into a young woman, she cared for herself and took pride in tending to her daily tasks and chores. She swept the dirt floor of the little home and she tidied and cleaned the few dishes she had to eat with. She washed her clothes in the brook that ran behind the house and she listened to the birds sing to her as she went about her days. She often wished for companionship and for love.

One early summer evening, after making a cup of tea and cooking up a few carrots and some dandelion greens to eat, Budur was just about to sit down to supper when a white rabbit hopped in through a small hole in the front door and sat down by her bare feet. Mice and rats had often visited Budur at suppertime, but never before had such a lovely little creature joined her humble feast.

The rabbit looked very hungry and as though it had come out of a very long winter. Although Budur did not have very much food, she offered her supper to the lovely little creature that ate it up swiftly. Budur spoke aloud, "Oh I wish you could talk to me, lovely little Rabbit, for I am very lonely." And Budur began to cry just a little bit.

That night she tossed and turned and after feeling very sorry for herself, decided that she would make a special feast the next night with the hopes that the Rabbit would return, and that she would have a new friend. She spent the morning cleaning, washing her clothes and linens, and bathing in the cool waters of the brook and by the time she began cooking it was already mid-afternoon. Deciding that this was to be a feast, and finding that she was out of the ingredients for her special cakes, Budur dipped into her drawer where she kept a few coins and set out to walk the miles to town that she very rarely journeyed to.

By the time she was nearing her home, it was very late and very dark. Budur's feet had grown tired from walking down the long and rocky dirt road that travelled alongside a big steady river.

As the full moon up above came out from behind the clouds, she looked down at her feet, now blistered and bleeding from the road, and where in a moment before she had felt hope for a new friendship, her heart sank back into its devastating loneliness, and again she shed a tear. She sat down with her basket full of flour, rosemary, and honey and cried on the bank of the river.

She almost didn't hear it at first over the sound of her own sobs, but looking up she caught a glimpse of something in the reflection on the surface of the water. Again she heard a voice, and this time she looked up high overhead and in the moon, she saw her friend, the beautiful rabbit.

The rabbit said to her, "You have been very kind and very good, and I have watched you since you were first brought onto the earth below me, but you have forgotten the gifts that you were given when you were in your mother's womb. Now, let me heal your bleeding feet."

Budur watched as the wounds on her feet healed before her eyes and the pain could no longer be felt. The Moon Rabbit asked if she could remember the gifts she had been given, but Budur could not remember and shook her head.

Moon Rabbit told her what her mother had been told. "You have the gift of sight and can see things that most do not. You have the gift of communion with all creatures of the world, even those that move by moonlight and between the realms. Finally, you have the gift of healing, and know the ways to heal those who are in need."

Moon Rabbit then asked, "Do you not remember the joys of your early life, do you not remember speaking to the animals and plants of the forest, the fairies who met you there? They have not abandoned you! They are waiting for you to remember."

The Moon Rabbit instructed Budur to arrive at the shore again the following night when the moon was high in the sky. Before departing, she was told to bind a lock of her long hair with the honey from her basket and three sprigs of rosemary, each kissed by her two lips. Budur carefully did what the Moon Rabbit asked of her and as she began to walk home, she could make out the shape of the rabbit in the moon above, grinding with what appeared to be a mortar and pestle.

The following night, Budur arrived again at the shore, which was no longer the river as it had been the night before, but was now a vast sea of endless and expansive glittering water. As Budur stood and looked out into the sea, she saw a ship approaching steadily toward her. It shone with the color of gold and the figurehead was carved into the shape of a rabbit that beamed forth through the parting waters.

Powered by an invisible source, blades of oars as bright as a flameless sun dipped coolly into the waters beneath them, and soon the boat fell to rowing toward the shore.

The rowers ceased rowing and an anchor was cast, the ship swung with the tide and lay sidelong to the shore and as it docked, a company of women greeted Budur on the deck. Each woman was clad in raiment glistening as with gold and gems, pearls from the ocean deep, foam and waves of the sea, blossoms of fair trees, flaxen fibers woven from nettle, and of saffron scales from fish still undiscovered by earthly eyes. Each cloak was different than the next and each woman's eyes were fixed upon Budur and beheld her with a great love.

On the deck among the group of women stood none other than Budur's sister Bendis, who rushed to cast her arms around her accompanied by kisses and tears of joy. Bendis led her sister to sit on a throne of moss and polished shell. As Budur sat, the women of the ship gathered around her. They remove her tattered rags, and as they did, they bathed her tired feet and scrubbed her body with warm water from the salty sea and slowly untangled her golden locks with combs carved of angel skin coral.

A woman whose cloak was glittering in diamonds and stardust, whose long hair was as silver as the moon, and whose face was lined with age, stepped forward from the gilded cabin and welcomed Budur onto the boat. In her arms she held the most beautiful garment Budur had ever seen. It was a cloak of deep indigo blue, dyed by the darkest night sky and was embroidered with a thousand glittering stars made of silver thread from the moon and of the very rare stars that shoot across the sky in their final breath. The inside of the robe was as bright as the exterior was dark, and on it every flower, plant, and herb was so delicately embroidered and the wide billowing hem of the cloak beamed with golden ribbon infused with the brilliance of the sun and thread spun out of Budur's own hair.

The old woman spoke, "My dear Budur, we are those that move by moonlight and between the realms. We have been waiting for you to find your way to us. And we have met before. You will come to know me by many names, but one that you already know is The Moon Rabbit."

The woman beckoned Budur to stand, freshly bathed, her skin as white as pearl and as pink as the interior of a glistening shell, her lips a perfect rosebud and her eyes, sparkling stars. As she wrapped Budur in her new cloak, again the woman spoke, "We welcome you. You have great gifts, but you have yet to learn how to use them. We have much to learn from each other. Come away with us, and you may return freely to this land at any time. And so we ask, Will you come away and over the waters with us?"

Budur's face shone like a star as her heart beat like a little bird pounding at her chest and in no more than a breath's time, she nodded her head.

As the anchor was hoist, Budur looked once more on the shores as they departed and all of the land was reflected in the light of the moon. The wind drifted into her blood and she turned to face the warm and fragrant sea. Budur closed her eyes and breathed with the wind and the ship sailed steadily toward all of the adventures, unknown to her yet.

Written by Eric

5) Note

I see this story as beautifully functioning to help C compensate for, and heal from, the loss of her mother (and possibly also her father), by having the character who represents C develop bonds with a tribe of women healers, in the midst of nature at its most mystical, including a white rabbit. The tribe of women healers, and the rabbit, can in poetic ways be seen as resurrections of C's mother.

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