



BRIANA SAUSSY

MAKING

Weaving Together the Everyday and the Extraordinary

MAGIC



sounds true

Boulder, Colorado



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INTRODUCTION

Children recognize magic at first sight. One day when I was about eleven years old, while wandering in the woods near my house, I found Licorice's body. Licorice had been a sleek, short-haired tomcat, white and blacker than licorice, black like the night far away from cities. He was one of my favorite childhood cats among several who roamed far and wide, all shrewd and competent mousers. We all noticed he had been gone for weeks, and nobody knew where he was. We assumed that eventually he'd return in his own time, as is the way with cats.

I stayed with Licorice for a long time. His body was already in an advanced state of decay and partially covered by earth. Parts of his delicate white skeleton were exposed and already bleached by the South Texas sun. When I found him, I knew I needed to mark the event of his death in some manner. He needed a memorial.

The first thing I did was prepare a grave, dug far enough into a patch of earth that his body would not be easily found by wild animals. I then set to the task of taking care of his body, picking him up and washing him down. I gathered some fresh lavender from the bush where he liked to sleep, and I placed the lavender with his body before I shrouded it. After I buried him in the earth, I sang over him. I don't remember what I sang, but I do know that it was a healing song and my gift to Licorice.

The whole process was as natural as taking a deep breath. I was not trying to prove how outlandish I could be or how rebellious I was. I was just sharing something straight from the heart, from my little being to his and to the land.

The death and ritual burial of Licorice, while one little girl's experience, points the way to a possibility confirmed by many people in countless ways, according to their own intimate experiences. We all have a deep capacity to make magic and to do it as easily as we breathe or open our eyes. This is not a matter of belief. You can discover your capacity for magic through your own direct experience. Recognizing it, then, is simply a matter of sufficient attention, memory, and reflection on experience. What we finally choose to do with this human capacity for magic will look different for everyone, but the very capacity for it flows from a human experience that is at once profoundly personal and intimate, and universal and open to all.

The million-dollar question is, what are we looking for when we make magic?

As it happens, I am in a unique position to answer this question. That little girl who reframed and thereby transformed a painful event with a series of simple, loving gestures—such as singing, cleansing, and placing carefully chosen flowers—grew into womanhood and became a teacher, writer, diviner, ritualist, and practitioner of the sacred arts. What I see in my work with people of many walks of life, listening to the stories they tell me about their own lives, is this: we are all looking for a way to heal the deepest rifts and fractures of life. The most beautiful, the most magical, of all things we can do is to find the means to reframe and unify the deepest discords not only within ourselves but also in our relationships—with other people, with animals, and with our world—to heal our broken planet. I have also found that the greatest rift of all is the one that cuts apart the everyday from the extraordinary.

There are many ways to go about doing the work of healing, of reconciliation and unification, of seeking and making

something of our findings. Making magic, weaving together the everyday and the extraordinary, is one of those ways.

You will find that this book on magic presents a very different view from others. There are no occult or arcane systems, no rigid sets of symbolic correspondences to memorize, no elaborate ceremonial rituals to perform hailing from the Victorian era and largely created by men. Instead, you will discover a series of indications and directions you can explore yourself. For what we need most in our soulful seeking is to learn how to create rituals and ceremonies that are both meaningful to us and relevant to our immediate lives.

My approach to magic is grounded in and draws from multiple cultural traditions, as does my own lineage, and I have also been blessed to work with clients and students from around the world, many of whom have shared with me their own cultural traditions and the little acts of everyday life that are spilling over with magic. This unique vantage point, combined with my own cultural and educational background, has allowed me to sift through the tales I have heard and the traditions, spells, charms, rites, and ceremonies I have encountered to get down to the foundation of why people seek out magic. What I have discovered is that it always comes down to choice—a choice that needs to be made. This is the real gift of magic: it reveals possibilities and potentials that were previously thought to be unreal or impossible. In short, while we seek out magic for many reasons, chief among them is the fact that it restores our sense of sovereignty. I want you to be able to remember the roots of magic for yourself, from the basis of your own experience, so that you can create magic in just the way that makes sense for your life and beliefs.

The structure of this book is simple, with a view of magic that is practical both in terms of approach and results. Instead

of organizing chapters by desired end goals (such as love, sex, and relationships; health and healing; money and prosperity), I am taking a more unconventional approach and organizing the chapters by techniques and materials. In this way, we cover areas like gardening, cooking, bathing, lighting candles, and so on. This approach gives us a more natural entry point into our own experience of magic.

Though you may never have been interested in or encountered magic on your own, you will no doubt have trafficked with some of its relatives, perhaps without realizing it. The practice of magic, like each of us, does not live in a vacuum but rather is part of a vibrant community, a family that I call the sacred arts. These interrelated practices have been part of the human experience and human story since there have been people to practice them. The sacred arts include:

- right relationship
- magic and alchemy
- prayer, meditation, and blessing
- ceremony and ritual
- lineage and legacy
- divination, astrology, and dreams
- purification and cleansing

The sacred arts listed above do not compose a rational system; they are simply a description of practices that human beings

participate in all over the world. Typically, these practices are taken separately, in isolation from one another, and the whole is forgotten. Some of these practices, like magic, have been hidden, covered over, and burned out over the centuries, condemned and outlawed by big religions and even bigger modern authorities. Yet they, like wild creatures, have endured. As we remember our magic, seek it out, and discover anew the extraordinary within the everyday, we will touch upon all of the sacred arts. We cannot touch one without touching all. By seeing magic as part of a vibrant whole, you will gain creative access to the deepest sources of the whole-making power that is yours and yours alone.

This has been my experience of the sacred arts, and it is why I have chosen to dedicate my life and work to sharing them with my community of soulful seekers. Magic has always been my personal entryway into this world. Born with a cleft palate, amid a herd of doctors doubtful of my ability to survive, I was a creature of two worlds early on. There was the world of here and now, the everyday, and the world where the stories came from and the faeries lived—the extraordinary. I was fortunate to be nourished by a steady diet of medicine stories and by a clan of people who are in their own ways as wild as magic itself. Taught from an early age about prayer, divination, and ritual, I took to magic with ease and spent my afternoons instructing a rapt audience of stuffed animals about the finer points of spell craft. As I grew older, I discovered that not everyone shared my mystical bent, and at the same time, I saw that those who were drawn to magic often meant something quite different by the term than I did. The little tricks, medicines, and routines that I had been given in subtle, often quite casual ways had never been called magic. It was just the stuff my family did, the way we lived.

As I augmented my early education with more formal training in magic and a college education in classics from both the

Western and Eastern traditions, I began to understand that what I knew to be magic and the sacred arts have always been with us but rarely spied in their natural habitats and seldom witnessed within their pack. Throughout my college years, I would cast natal charts and divine for my friends, but it never occurred to me that the cap of professional sacred artist and magic maker was the one I was called to wear. In truth, the transition happened so naturally that I barely saw it. Friends came for counsel through divination and astrology. My counsel led to suggestions of rituals to try and magic to make, and my friends became clients, who in turn referred others to me. Slowly a community of bright and brilliant people, who I refer to as *soulful seekers*, began to grow around me. When I look back, I see that the roads were all leading to this point, and I feel deeply grateful and privileged every day that I am able to do this work, surrounded by such a beautiful community.

And as I have engaged in this work, I have learned so very much more about magic. Everyone I speak to and work with comes to the table already knowing deep down what they need or want, but they do not always have the right language with which to frame or articulate those knowings. Finding this language is a deeply personal and profound process that requires effort and speaks directly to our practical needs. The person who knows how to make magic intuitively grasps how to create a ritual to honor a damaged relationship with a family member, understands why she might choose this outfit over another when she goes in to close the big deal, and is able to create the “just right” ceremony to honor a beloved who has died and now needs to be remembered. And here’s the big secret: you know too.

Our journey through this book begins with an overview of magic and a consideration of what its native terrain might

look like. We will consider some of the ways that magic has been presented and thought about that are not quite accurate or complete, and we will begin to intentionally track the magic that is already present in our lives. From there, we are going to wander and wonder at how some of the most everyday experiences—going in and out of doors, collecting seemingly random objects, scheduling our time, making and maintaining friendships, experiencing the natural world, and tending to our homes—are all areas ripe and bursting with magic. We will uncover how simple acts like sleeping, dreaming, speaking, bathing, and lighting candles speak directly to a great sense of mystery and possibility. As we explore this terrain together, we will see how even things as fundamental as the clothes in our closets and the bowls in our kitchen cabinets hold magic in their very fibers and contours. While some might criticize this approach as a way of saying that all things are magical so therefore nothing is magical, what we will discover is that magic actually permeates our everyday lives, and the more places we know to look for it, the better able we are to start anywhere, to start with what feels just right to us.

And as it happens, there is a story about that.

GOLDEN LOCKS AND THE BEAR PEOPLE

Once upon a time, in the place where your home sits now, there was a young girl who lived in a small village that sat on the outskirts of the wild woods. When she was born, the girl's mother wove a beautiful headband for her. It was made of silk and lace and was the color of the golden sun pouring out over honey and of the bright yellow harvest moon and of the candles that flickered in the deep night when the snowy winds howled. This woven headband of silk and lace earned the girl

the nickname Golden Locks, and so she was known throughout the village.

It was not allowed for young children, especially young girls, to go into the woods by themselves, for the villagers all swore that the animals in this forest were keenly intelligent and tricky, and liked nothing better than to devour sweet and tender little children. But this young girl kept dreaming about the forest and those who lived within it, especially the Bear People. Finally, after the third night of dreaming, she woke up as the sun began to crest the treetops and knew that today she would go into the woods because, as her dreams had told her, the Bear People still knew about magic, and she wanted them to teach her.

The morning widened and deepened its reach into the day, and the young girl put on her best deerskin shoes and her finest dress, embroidered with roses and beads and birds. She took a clay pot full of honey down from the kitchen shelf so that she might take a worthy offering to the Bear People, for it was known that they deeply loved the magic that the Bee People made.

And so, she set off walking, one foot in front of the other, into the woods. She continued walking throughout the day, until night found Golden Locks cold, hungry, and tired. Finding herself in a little clearing, under the stars and the light of a crescent moon, yet still surrounded by the deep dark woods, she felt the first stirring of doubt within her breast. Was she crazy? Was this a fool's errand? Perhaps she would be devoured by the Bear People or lose her way back out of the forest and never see her family again. But she remembered her dreams and said to herself in a fierce whisper, "I will find magic."

She continued walking, now with the heavenly lights blazing in her heart, and she soon discovered a stony cave hidden by moss and lichen and great trees. Golden Locks knew at once

that this was the place where the Bear People could be found. There was a great river rushing through the land, separating where she stood from the cave. She knew that the cave that belonged to the Bear People could move with ease from one part of the forest to another, for it was as magical as they were. If that happened, she might never find it again. So, though she was colder, hungrier, and even more exhausted than she had been, she tied up her skirts and plunged into the icy waters. Instantly she woke up, came to her senses, and swam strong until she reached the other side of the river.

Approaching the entrance to the cave, she saw that it was swept clean, and she could feel the delicious warmth of the Bear People's breath on her night-chilled skin. She paused at the cave's entrance, bowed in the way of her people, and offered up the sweet honey. Within the cave, three pairs of eyes blinked at her curiously. One pair belonged to the largest of the bears, battle-scarred Father Bear, who had sharp and strong teeth. Another set of curious eyes belonged to a smaller bear, who had lighter fur and swollen teats oozing milk—watchful Mother Bear. The final pair of sleepy eyes gazed out at Golden Locks from the face of the smallest bear, who was just about the same size as she and had already stuck his paw into the honey jar, licking it happily with his long, pink tongue. Here, then, was Baby Bear.

Baby Bear met Golden Locks' eyes with his own and waited. She cleared her throat and spoke softly, just as we do in church or temple or any of our holy places even today.

“Bear People, I have come to you today to make you this offering of honey and to ask a question.”

The bears blinked and were silent, waiting. This was their first teaching to Golden Locks, and it was about taking as much time as one requires. The girl did not know if they had

heard her or understood her. She did not even know if any of this was truly real, but she continued.

“Bear People, I keep dreaming of you, and so I have come to seek you out. The question I have for you is this, Will you teach me magic?”

The Bear People said nothing and continued their first lesson in teaching her how to wait. And so for a long time, all four figures stood clumped together at the entrance to the cave. For magic takes time and effort and determination. The Bear People were curious. Did the human girl have these traits? Golden Locks waited respectfully. She would not leave and stood with her arms crossed.

Mother Bear was satisfied. So, she shuffled her big frame into the cave, and after a moment, Golden Locks followed. In the center of the cave was the hearth where the bears had their meals. There were three leaves of different sizes piled high with various berries and roots and treasures from the forest.

Here the bears paused, and Mother Bear spoke in a soft and grumbling voice like rocks shuddering in the deep earth. “Why did you come here?”

Golden Locks responded immediately. “My dreams told me to.”

Father Bear nodded. “If you want to learn magic, then you must learn to find the right way for you. Which one?” He gestured to the three leaves neatly encircling the hearth.

She went to the first leaf, the largest and the one that was most overflowing with all kinds of delectable Bear People foods. She sniffed it and tasted a berry, considering. She went to the next leaf, softer and full of flowers, roots, and berries. She sniffed it too, inhaling the scent of the flowers so deeply that it went into her bones. Finally, she went to the smallest of the leaves. She picked it up. The roots whispered to her of old knowing and older ways. She spied a raven wing.

Each leaf was lovely. Each unique. But none of them were right for her.

“I shall make my own.” And so she did, taking a berry from Father Bear’s leaf and a flower from Mother Bear’s leaf and an old root from Baby Bear’s leaf. She paused, considered, smelled and tasted, thought and felt. Finally, she nodded.

“Now this is just right.”

The Bear People said nothing but took her back farther into the cave, where there were three large boulders. Baby Bear hopped up on one of the boulders and sat as nicely as you please.

Mother Bear’s husky voice filled the cave once more.

“In magic you have to know when to act and how to wait. Which one?”

The girl sat on the largest boulder, which had an impression in it that reminded her exactly of Father Bear’s body. No matter how she shifted, she was barely comfortable. The boulder chair was hard in all places and made her think only of what was difficult and harsh.

She moved to the next boulder, which was decked out in moss and lichen and was a better fit for her size. But as soon as she sat down, she sank into the dry mosses and felt that everything was too soft, gentle, and easy. There was no tension here, and so there could be no balance. Standing up, she brushed the moss from her skirts.

She went to the third boulder. It was covered in deerskin and fox furs and was soft and cozy but still firm. Yet it was also small and carried the scent of Baby Bear, not her own.

So, she moved away a short distance, and using extra leaves and furs and arranging things just so, she made her own place to sit. This new seat had a touch of hardness, like the first boulder and like some of the parts of her life. But the seat also had just a touch of softness, like the second boulder and like other

parts of her life. It was warm and safe with its furs, just as she felt now in this cave. She circled around it several times, like a cat, until she was quite sure that it fit her shape precisely. Magic too, she thought, should be like this.

“This one is just right.”

Baby Bear was finishing off the honey as the bears took Golden Locks back even farther into their cave. Here the air began to grow warmer, and there was the unmistakable scent of Bear People musk. It was very dark, and Golden Locks began to feel a little fear crawl up her spine, as icy as the river water she had plunged into. Were the Bear People taking her back here to eat her? Had this been the plan all along? Would she be devoured, her quest for magic resulting in a few white bones stripped clean of skin and meat?

Baby Bear nudged her arm and gestured to three dens, which clearly were where each of the Bear People rested at night. His voice was like wind rustling through dry leaves.

“Magic also requires rest and dreaming. Which one?”

Golden Locks went to the first den, which was big and well-appointed and covered in the spicy scent of cedar and ever-green boughs. It smelled delicious here, but the boughs poked at her. This den was too hard, too complicated, and too difficult of a space to manage. So, she moved to the next.

This den was covered in flowers and soft mosses and more lichens like those on the second boulder. They were lovely and soft, but they made her sneeze and itch, and she could not feel the support of the floor. This den was too cloying, too clingy, too undefined.

The third den, like the third boulder, was covered in deer-skins and fox furs and was comfortable. She curled up into it but could not fall asleep, for it did not belong to her and did not fit her quite right.

So, she took up some pine boughs from Father Bear's bed, because parts of her story were sharp and clear, and some moss from Mother Bear's bed, because parts of her story were fuzzy and not yet defined, and a fur from Baby Bear's bed, because parts of her story were rich and had come after sacrifice. She circled round and round like a dog, pawing this way and that, until every branch and fold was exactly as she wanted it to be.

"There now. This one is just right."

She snuggled down in her newly created bed, and then she promptly fell asleep. When she awoke a few hours later, a crescent moon shone down its light from a crevice in the roof of the cave, and she was startled to find three pairs of eyes watching her intently. Baby Bear put a honey-sticky paw on her shoulder.

"Now you know magic. Now you know that it is not something you learn but something you remember."

And so, she did.

For a time, Golden Locks stayed with the Bear People, and they talked and sang and danced and told old stories, and she learned much more. Eventually she returned to her village, no longer as Golden Locks, the innocent, sugar-sweet girl-child, but as Headstrong and Heartstrong Woman, with flashing dark eyes.

She did know magic. She knew how to heal, how to help, and how to read signs on the wind and in the woods. And the people loved her, even though she knew that one day they may not, for they were a forgetful people.

But Golden Locks would never forget. She kept those memories safe in story, tied up close to her heart. And she learned the languages of the other peoples of the forest too—the Stone People, the Tree People, the Fox People, the Fish People. And she taught the ones who came after her how to remember their magic. Her teachings were handed down voice to voice, person to person,

life to life, with the promise that the ones who make magic would always remember how to talk to bears, and more importantly, they would know how to listen when the bears speak.

And now that is a promise I shall entrust to you. And in return, I shall tell you all about the ways of magic.