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THE RETURN OF OLENTZERO

On the peak of Aunamendi is the cave at the world's end. Here in dark and vibrant silence the spirits commune with the divine and wait upon the summons from the material world which will call them to life.

The spirit of Olentzero rested within that cave till there arose within its field the seed of a desire to be. It followed this desire to its source and found itself caught in a material form. This net of wholeness caused the spirit of the bear's son to cling to the form which it had desired, and it saw itself and felt and accommodated to the new form that it perceived within itself. That which had arisen, a reason for being, set itself to fulfil the task which its spirit had created, and it knew itself as Olentzero and because it was, so was Neskatuzeru and those spirits set out to meet each other.

Olentzero in time had made his home in many bodies, each contained his spirit in the form of unfilled desire, his last body had been surrendered in favour of Kixmi, and this body and the desire to see what benefits this had brought to the Euskadi was embedded in the bones of his body which had its physical existence in Zarautz. His father worked in an office and his mother worked as a school secretary. His grandfather had died, so the children, he and his brother, were looked after by his mother's mother.

To the boy life seemed confusing: his parents spoke to him in Spanish, so also did his grandmother, but amongst themselves they spoke in a strange half language. They even walked and held their faces differently when they spoke Euskaldia, but they would not speak it to either him or his brother, or acknowledge them when they repeated words. This remained so until one day at school they were told that the country would have limited self government, and shortly afterwards small schools teaching Euskal started up. Up to this point they thought of themselves as Spanish, but now they began to think of themselves as Basques and of course they wanted to know what that meant. They asked their parents, who told them to ask the grandparents and the uncles and aunts and their relatives who lived in the countryside and in the hills away from the towns. But although they all spoke Spanish the boys found that some of the relatives seemed to speak in different words. It was very confusing to them, were they Spanish or Basque? Then they found that many of their friends had been taught it in the family and it had become to them a secret family language. They always thought that those who spoke Spanish were very polite but dictatorial, and really did not allow for differing opinions and experience. When they found themselves at home with Euskaraz, it seemed to fit them like a glove.

Olentzero by this time was known to everyone as Hartza, because of his hairy body and stocky stature. He liked to throw the hammer and lift the heavy stones. He also liked to walk in the mountains. His brother preferred to ride his bicycle and so, as is the way, they drifted apart. Meantime Hartza liked the more desolate areas, the woods and the mountain pastures. His uncle Antso had a house in the hills, and whenever he could he would spend his time there. He did well at school and passed his baccalaureate well. His parents were able to allow him to go on to university, and because of his interest in Basque history and origins he began to learn Latin and French and Semitic languages.

The more he learned the more he felt he belonged to a different time. The firm effect that this feeling had on him was to cause a religious alienation from Christianity. He did not disbelieve the Christian message, but he felt something in himself standing apart. In his dreams he began to repeat a pattern. He would find himself carrying a heavy cross which he would plant in a broad meadow, and having done so he would find himself climbing a tall hill with a cliff. Then

when he had reached the top he would find himself at the cliff edge looking into the depths below. Then it seemed as if in his dreams he would jump out into the abyss carrying a very bright light and would fall with that light into the light.

This dream kept repeating so he went to his doctor, who sent him to see a Mr. Saregile, who saw him for three sessions and then on the fourth session said, "We are going to see a friend of mine". They got into Mr. Saregile's car and they drove out into the country into the very depths of the hills through the woods into a deep wood. He stopped the car and said, "From here we must walk!" They got out and Mr. Saregile made his way through the woods following a path which he seemed to know, though Hartza could not see it. Then he began to smell woodsmoke and to see a drift of smoke. They came to a clearing. There in the middle of the wood was a small wooden house which rested on two runners like skates. Beside it were two donkeys and on a perch beside them there sat two ravens who chattered loudly when they saw them.

The door of the house opened and a very small, very bright-eyed old gentleman appeared. "Epa Saregile," he said, "what's to do?" "Ikazkina, may I introduce a young friend who is known to me as Olentzeru, but he is commonly called Hartza. He has been having a strange dream which keeps repeating." "Oh, you think it's an old dream, do you?" "Maybe it is, perhaps you will care to hear it?" "Why not," said Ikazkina, "it's a nice day and I have nothing better to do." "Go ahead" said Saregile, "tell him what you have told me."

Ikazkina said to Hartza, "Wait, first I would like to hear his family background. Where is the house of his grandfather? Is he working? Is he studying?" Before he knew it Olentzero was telling Ikazkina his whole history. "Well Olentzero, I would like you to do something for the next three weeks. Would you, before you go to sleep at night, remember your day in backward order, like five minutes ago and ten minutes, twenty minutes, until you can do it for a complete day and you can remember waking up from the previous night's sleep.

"Oh," said Olentzero. "I have been doing that occasionally, because I remember reading that it was a way to develop the faculty of conscious dreaming. I haven't done it often, and not as a regular habit."

"Right" said Ikazkina "do that for the next three weeks and then tell Sargile when you have finished", and he went on, "Paint for yourself a circular disc with the Lauburu on it and on each of the arms put on letters "J" "A" "U" and "N", and keep looking at it every day until it is really familiar to you. Now go away."

So Olentzero and Mr Saregile returned to their home town. Olentzero was of course full of questions. "He is an Alchemilari and he knows a great deal about human psychology." Mr Saregile refused to answer any more questions. He let Olentzero off at his home with the words "In three weeks time!"

This was a very busy time for Olentzero. His examinations were due in the next fortnight and they would take a week; also he had to find work. That was not difficult, because of his work with language he found work in a secretarial bureau where he would have to draft letters to France, Italy and Israel. His examinations were quite easy for him and after they were over he went to see Mr Saregile to report on his exams. When he had finished Mr Saregile said, "Have you made the Lauburu?" "Well, I've started on it. But you see, I did not have much time." "Then when you have finished it let me know!"

Olentzero agreed and in fact although it was a very full week at the end he had finished it. He called on Mr Saregile and told him it was finished. "OK, Hartza, do you have it with you?" He did. Saregile sat him down before a music stand and placed the lauburu on the stand. He told

him to settle down, let his breathing fall to a minimum and remember a favourite sight, which was in his case a field of daffodils. Then Saregile began to chant: “EE, AA, UU, EE, now repeat the sounds after me. Keep repeating aloud then gradually lose the sound and repeat that sound in the mind. Keep repeating it until you can only just hear it. Do this when you get up in the morning and before the start of the evening. Do it for about twenty five minutes morning and evening every day. Come and see me the day after tomorrow.” He did this and came back for every two days for eight days and was then told to come back at first weekly, and then after he only checked back at bi-monthly intervals. After three months it had become a fixed habit.

Six months passed. The repeating dream had ceased. His brother had become an enthusiast for cycling and introduced Hartza to a cycling partner of his, she was named Artagala. When they were introduced there was a sudden spark between them; in fact Olentzero would always remember that moment, it was to him electrifying. For her there was a moment of fear and she remembered a trembling which made her very shy. She worked in her grandmother’s restaurant as a cashier. They did not meet again for almost two months, which they did at the summer feast. They found that they were standing next to each other at a celebration of the war between the black and the red. From then on they became inseparable, which at first caused trouble between his brother and himself and for a while much jealousy on his brother’s part, but then his brother found another lady cyclist and the difficulty passed.

Hartza and Artagala explored the more hidden roads and paths and learned ways through the woods which only the locals knew. One day they took a rest near a waterfall. The path which they cycled along was well trodden, and apart from the noise of the water which slopped over the edge there was no other sound to be heard except the sounds of their own bodies, when suddenly Artagala’s grasp on Hartza hand became very tight, her voice ceased but her eyes pointed. There at the edge of vision was a group of four creatures: a naked lady with the horns of a deer, but it was not a lady; a man with the neck and legs of a bull; a dwarf carrying a hammer; and what was amazing, a small woman with the wings of a dragonfly. She was flying. Her feet did not touch the ground.

They had stopped breathing but then more astounding still the hovering elf began to speak: “Hartza and Artaga! Can you hear us?” “Yes” they said, expelling the air from their lungs. “Then take it to your spirit’s centre. It is time to begin!” “What?” they asked. “You will know! You both will know!” Then the four creatures disappeared into the under brush. The two looked at one another - “Lamiak! I did not believe they existed.” They compared descriptions. They were exactly the same, except to Hartza the elf woman spoke and to Artagala it was the bull man speaking: whoever it was, it was the same words spoken.

Up to this point in their relationship they had been exclusive to one another, after this their relationship changed, for wherever they went they became aware of the Lamiak at the limit of hearing and at the edge of their vision. They knew their friends would find this very odd, so they began to use their eyes and hands to communicate. Even so their friends noticed a strangeness in their behaviour but explained it as “being in love.”

Mr Saregila realised something had changed so he invited them for a drive out to Ikazkina’s hut. They followed him through the woods and then Hartza realised that two Lamiak were leading the way. They came to the perch of the two ravens and they made a lot of noise so that Ikazkina was outside his hut waiting for them.

“Epa, Saregila! What have you caught now?” “I have two for you; one you know, one is new to you.” They sat down on a log before him, one on each side of Saregila. “Neskatezeru!” he exclaimed. “No!” she said, “Artagala.” “You have returned at last. The circle is complete again.” He looked at them both. “I see that you have spoken to the bull lamiak, Artagala, and you to the elf maiden.” They pushed their heads forward so that they could see one another and him. “Yes,” they said.

“Then it is the time. You Hartzza must go to the computer department at Pamplona to meet Dunixi Salvatore, and you Artagala to Jaca. You will meet an old lady there who is called Eskarne Aintza. She will take you up to the mountains.” He gave them cider and honey to drink and sent them on their way.

It took them some time to fulfil his requests. Eskarne Aintza was away in Amerika and Dunixi Salvatore was on a visit to England, France and Germany. In fact three months passed before Hartzza could meet him. He had meanwhile made acquaintances in the school of artificial intelligence at Pamplona and he became familiar with the work being done there, particularly with its connection to bionic manipulation. To Artagala, Eskarne Aintza was a surprise. Her profession was social designer and her speciality was feng shui and she immediately took Artagala on an extended trip around the old homesteads bordering the French areas and also the stone circles and the ancient caves. Artagala found herself becoming more and more immersed in the ancient history of the area. It was odd but although she knew that most of this history was badly reconstructed on very little real evidence she began to feel it as a lauburu upon her heart and it made her feel safe and anchored in the country and in the starry skies above that country. Eskarne Aintza took her to visit old ladies who collected herbs and plants for the sendagilak.

By this time their parents knew one another and there was no objection to their marriage taking place. They decided that it would be in November and in course of time it took place. They had made up their mind that they would spend their honeymoon on the foothills of Aunamendi. One day the two of them took rucksacks and started to hike up into the hills. There were pockets of snow on the heights but the lower slopes were clothed in dew from the clouds. They climbed steadily until they could see the farms and houses like little dolls houses stretching out into the distance. As the sun rose higher in the sky and the clouds and mists cleared the world seemed to become a cleaner place. Then the path forked; one path led around the hill and the other became steep. They took the steeper path and Hartzza’s load began to weigh heavy on his back. He stopped to cut a stick to help him.

An old lady appeared, a very strange old lady. She seemed to be surrounded by clouds of insects and she carried a basket on her back and a basket on her front and she carried two staffs which looked as though they were snakes, and although she looked old and loaded up she tripped lightly along as if she was on her way to the seashore. Occasionally she would give one of her sticks a twirl and the clouds of insects would rise, buzz and reflect the twirling of the sticks. She looked at them and said to them “Stop loitering. You’re expected. Come on.”

Hartzza’s load no longer seemed so heavy. He picked up the pace and began to climb, followed closely by Artagala. As they climbed the clouds began to gather and overhead thunder began to rumble. The clouds of insects around the old lady were joined by streams of insects, until she was the centre of a great buzzing and a whining and fluttering cloud of darkness. They came to the peak of Aunamendi and sat down on the flat space, the old lady sitting herself in the west, her darkness now enlarged by a mass of bats and birds of all sizes. From the rocks below heads of animals began to appear: mice, rats, weasels, badgers, a wolf and a black bear all lined up behind the old lady, so that she was surrounded by a dark living cloud. She told Hartzza to sit in the northern and Artagala in the southern space. Suddenly the dark at the top of the mountain was split by an enormous flash of lightening and from the east surrounded by rainbows of light the sun rose in splendour. At its heart appeared a heroic figure wearing a white metal helmet with earpieces, two big spectacles and a small nose mask. He appeared to be a modern knight. He was attended by crowds of small machines all whirring, clicking and reflecting every motion of his being and over his head hovered clouds of mechanical dragonflies. “So old darkness! We meet at last!” “Yes, you silly artisan! You logical fool!”

Atsoa made Hartzza and Artagala spread out so that they formed a large square between them, the white knight on the east side, she on the west, Hartzza on the north and Artagala on the south. She took off and placed her baskets on the ground beside her and opened them out. They contained many little parcels and she laid them out so that she could reach them. The white knight beckoned with both hands and the machines sprang to life and began to shape the square between them in the likeness of the land. When his machines had finished, "Well," he said. "It will do," said the old lady.

Then each began to mark out baserriak and one after another the land was populated by the hiruhanka of the dark lady or by the knight's gurutzeak. Then the knight set his machines to work around the gurutzeak. They eradicated from their surroundings any sign of life and replaced them with pure materials. Where there was any problem the machines burnt the ground and mixed the earth with other materials. They placed themselves at the corners of the land and defended the space between with weapons of light. Meantime the dark lady had been extending her lands by worms and beetles and insects of all sorts and many were the border wars between her lands and his. At first it seemed that the forces of the gurutzeak were winning and the orderliness of them was beginning to rule the land, but then the winds would blow and the rains came and the clouds of insects from the dark ladies basket began to settle on the machines themselves and they began to clog on the dead creatures and even the dying creatures gave birth to other creatures which in their turn made for more problems.

At last the white knight rallied his armies and joined them by roads and they became one big city on the southern sides of the hills and gradually it became a walled enclosure within which everything was clean and controlled. The insects, the birds, the animals and the plants kept up their pressure on the white knight's borders and it eventually reached an equilibrium. Fecundity was on the side of the dark lady, intelligence on the white knight's side. At last the fecundity of life was almost balanced by the speed of making, repairing and replacing the machinery. But the city of the gurutzeak was vulnerable. Its controlled crops did not have enough flexibility to cope with the variation of wind, sun and rain. It could only do so by shrinking until its borders were defensible and the people of the gurutzeak felt that they had to be on constant guard against the forces of the hiruhanka.

The dark lady began to laugh and the white knight held up his cross to her and said "You will never defeat me because whatever you do I can copy and improve on." "Can you copy her?" and she called on Mari. He called on Buruza and those two appeared to the four of them. A deep sleep fell on Hartzza and Artagala and in their sleep they clung to one another and in that sleep they conceived a child who was destined to embody the spirits of Olentzero and Neskatezeru and lead the people out into the spaces between the world, having within his spirit the ability to shape space and transcend time. For that reason mount Aunamendi is sacred to the conception of Hartzume the Olentzero.

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