

## The Red Feather in the Black Hand by Jody Levy

*I am thinking about beginnings, seizing the moment, reinventing a life. And in this beginning, an image beckons, as if it was rising up from a pool. Like Excalibur being raised upwards, gleaming, held in the hand of the Lady of the Lake. I see a red feather in a black hand and it beckons.....*

A few summers ago, I was traveling south through California and found myself in the coastal town of Mill Valley, at their depot or town square. It was a clear, sharp day. Hot, no fog, rare thing in the summer in Northern California. A crowd of about sixty people had gathered in the square, nestled amongst the hills and redwoods and I moved closer to see what had drawn their attention. There were three men standing absolutely, stock still. Marvelous creatures, really. Three men who had taken the freedom to invent themselves wholly anew.

There were two black men and one dark, white man, all of whom had bodies shaped like the cartoon characters on the cover of some Conan the Barbarian comic book. Muscles ripped and gleaming in the sun and wearing very little to cover the lines and curves of their bodies. They were clothed in a future primitive style-decorated and cinched and adorned with wide ornamented leather belts, chokers and bracelets, soft, short suede boots and chains and shells and beads and wearing loincloths. Deerskin, I think, something soft like skin, and scanty. The material barely covering the hard round globes of their asses.

They reminded me of the finest of Native Americans, tribesmen in Africa or Indonesia. How I imagine the ancient Mayan may have looked, festive and fierce and fantastic, and radiating some intensity and heat. Their hair was long and intricately arranged; it was braided and feathered hair, some hanging long and free, some up in sprays of ponytails, some cascading over the forehead like strutting peacocks, exotic fauna. And they were flaunting it, owning it, fully embodying this choice to be so different.

I was struck by their wildness, by their beauty. By their masculine strength and their stillness, their containment. It seemed as if they had broken some approval loop, and the energy of their attention was focused and turned back in on themselves. And they were so still, like stones or like those reptiles that sit on stones and become stones in color and shape. Like trees they stood; one man turned sideways holding a djembe, one man facing forward with arms reaching out and down at an angle, towards the ground. One man staring, black face forward, eyes unblinking, holding a huge red feather out to the crowd.

They had been standing there for forty-five minutes with no movement. That was what was being whispered by people in the crowd. Then, Tara, a woman I knew in the crowd, walks up behind me and says, "I think they want us to take the feather. Come up there with me for moral support." "Sure," I say, "And I'll offer some immoral support as well!"

So, we approach. There is an open, electric violin case covered in purple

velvet and

strewn with dollar bills, and an ornately scripted sign that says, *Take a scroll.*

We do and we begin to unroll it with mirthful reverence. It says,

*We are TROTH, a traveling theatre group.  
To begin our show, take the red feather  
and place it in the green glass bottle  
resting on the floor.*

Tara and I look at each other with pure glee. And then, feeling all eyes upon her, she steps forward like a child, wondrous with anticipation, my excitement making me rock up and down on my feet. And then quickly, she plucks the red plume from the black fist, placing it with great ceremony in the green, glass bottle.

She steps away, and I step away and in that instant they begin to move – like robots coming awake, like mechanical dolls in a diorama where you put money in, but smooth like breath and water. One reaches for the violin, one starts to sinew his spine like a snake and one begins a primal tattoo on the drum.

dum ta dum dum ta dum dum ta dum

I was astounded by their faith, by their trust in the moment. Would they have waited there unmoving, for an hour, two, a day??! Such grace. Such grace, as they waited for the spark of spirit to seed the animal of their being, waited for the environment to impregnate them. They were the pure pool of creativity, the wellspring hovering in each moment. And they waited, three hunks, honoring the feminine ultimately. The stillness, the depth, the pregnant passivity, the teeming void waiting to be penetrated by the world.

I was deeply moved. I was witnessing human beings living on the edge, being fully alive, trusting a life lived so outside of convention. Inventing themselves with beauty, with Eros, being their own authority. They were the play of consciousness, what the Hindus call Lela; which I take to mean as there is some relationship between the imagination in here and how the world shows up to meet it out there. They were inventing life as they wanted it to be.

I long for such trust, for trust in beginnings. To just start. Again and again. To turn to the universe and say, “All right sweet thing, come find me!” Each moment is this choice point. Each moment is the pool waiting for conception; for thought, consciousness, intention, activity from the neo-cortex, this new brain, this spirit to dive

into the ancient amniotic of our being. Yes, the desire to be both that pool, that vast feminine well and that spark of spirit, that masculine arrow.

Desire to receive, desire to plunge, desire to receive, desire to plunge. This union, this mating and marriage over and over, over and over. Don't we come here for this? To dive in here and trust this? Well, I do, I do, I do.