

The Earth Beneath My Feet

South East Queensland

As I stirred from sleep, only the broad outline of the dream hovered at the edge of my consciousness. It had been of my mother, and of her favourite golden wattle tree. While the finer details of the dream escaped me, a lingering sense of wellbeing remained.

I stretched languorously, feeling every muscle in my body awake from its slumber. I tensed and relaxed my hands, which had toiled all the previous day in the garden. The muscles in my calves reminded me gently of their exertions; my feet remembered the miles they had walked behind the wheelbarrow. I stood before my mirror, seeing the early morning light reflected in the eyes which gazed at me from its surface. My own eyes traced the hills and valleys of my body in the mirror, its beauty, its strength, its imperfections, its familiar shape, colour and texture.

Outside my open window the dawn chorus sounded, a joyous cacophony of bird song, trilling and rippling through the air. It seemed as if the birds shared my pleasure in the new day. The early morning sunlight was shining through the trees, touching each leaf and branch with a delicate brightness, highlighting the dew drops which had not yet burned away. The creamy white trunk of the scribbly gum, with its mysterious runic writing, gleamed with a stark beauty. I breathed deeply of the crisp morning air, drawing it into my lungs, feeling it fill each tiny vessel with energy, precious fuel for my body.

In the kitchen I laid the table for my breakfast, placing a bowl of flowers in the centre – bright faced nasturtiums, ruby red bougainvillea, rose tipped gum leaves – picked the previous evening from my beloved garden. I set out fresh fruit, orange juice and cereal, bowed my head briefly in thanks for the earth's bounty, then ate slowly and reflectively, savouring each mouthful.

After my meal I stepped outdoors, my feet bare on the cool damp grass, and walked quietly around the garden, observing the results of yesterday's work. The tiny green seedlings I had planted stood proudly on their delicate stems, their baby leaves not yet unfurled. The pile of clippings and fallen leaves waited to be added to the compost heap, to be recycled as nourishment for next season's plants. Silvery snail trails revealed where industrious molluscs had already found the new plants. A kookaburra swooped from a branch above my head, seized a hidden worm in its broad beak, shook it vigorously from side to side and swallowed it greedily.

All around me the natural world pulsed and throbbed, teeming with life, each separate element striving to achieve its potential, to survive and flourish in a complex and interdependent struggle for existence. With the clarity of early morning vision, it seemed to me that this tiny corner of the world was engaged in a complicated dance of life and of death.

I opened all my senses to the pattern of this dance. In my mind's eye I could see the earth's energy lines deep below the surface of the grass, mirroring the complicated network of arteries and veins under my own skin. My body was attuned to the pulsing of the earth, its regular beat in time with that of my own heart. I could feel the breath of nature in the air around me as each plant inhaled the carbon dioxide which I exhaled, and returned it to the atmosphere, and to me, as life giving oxygen. It seemed as if my bodily boundaries were slowly dissolving, my personal margins breaking down, until I could not easily distinguish where I ended and the world began.

It was not an unpleasant feeling; indeed, it was a welcoming, wholesome, whole, almost holy feeling, as if I was being held in a gentle nurturing embrace. I opened my heart, my mind and my body to this caress, allowed it to touch my soul, warming, healing and strengthening me. Perhaps I was particularly sensitive to the fecundity of the world around me, perhaps I was intensely aware of my own female physicality on this beautiful morning: whatever the reason, I experienced this touch not simply as benevolent and impersonal, but as deeply personal, as female. It was as if the maternal spirit of the earth itself reached out to me in welcome and in love.

- Patricia Rose -