

Title: *Born of the Boldest Sun*  
by Meredith M. McCann

2400 Mellwood Avenue, Apt. 605  
Louisville, Ky 40206

Date 07/14/2020

Abstract: This is a curious short story based loosely on a dream about a mysterious old woman and a young man.

Permission Statement:

"I, Meredith McCann, submit this unpublished manuscript, written by me and entitled, Meredith McCann. I assign the following rights for usage of my manuscript by others:

All. I place this manuscript in the Public Domain. Anyone can use it however they wish, including for commercial purposes, although I do ask my name as original author be retained."

Date 07/14/2020

Signed: Meredith McCann

*'Born of the Boldest Sun'*

By: Meredith McCann

The old woman fed us rotted food. She'd been dead for decades. She had a hole in the wall just outside her kitchen. Peering out at the clouds or up into the stars — she held onto whatever nugget of life she could find. The old woman, herself, was not in such good shape. Her tattered clothes had been eaten by mice gathered in the doorway, hoping for some scraps. We always felt uncomfortable in the evenings, asking to leave. There was something about her. She reminded me of an aching feeling at night when you've been alone too long in the dark.

I didn't mind at all going alone to her house in the afternoons. She'd take me on walks in the woods and knew where all the best creek-beds were to dip your feet in and all the cliff sides that took your eyes for miles without reprieve into the Redwoods of California.

We didn't live so far from her, my wife and I. Having lived there her entire life, my wife knew almost everything there was to know about the old woman. She had lost a child when she was young. Heartbroken, she moved herself into the woods without saying a word to anyone. Some say they could hear her wailing out there like a lone coyote calling for its mate. It's been years since the trees rustled with that noise of her cries. She's just been out there so long now like a sedentary piece of the land.

I came from a family with too many people in it. We could hardly afford our groceries and there should've been one less of us and, well, I always felt that one less person should've been me. I understood the old woman's need to disappear. On our long walks in the woods we felt so very small, exactly what we needed to feel. With our footsteps in tandem we built a rhythm all our own.

I tried on occasion to venture into town and buy her some fresh flowers and vegetables. When I would bring them back to her home she would feed them to the raccoons. I think she felt withering food and her decaying flowers masked the smell of her own rotting flesh. She was right, with the musk of a second-hand shop and the off-kilter sweetness of those rotted peaches it wasn't so bad.

The one thing she never ran out of was sugar cane. It found its way into some afternoon lemonade. We would sit on her porch, high above the tree-line in Philo. Only in Philo could the dead be so welcomed among the living — so left to their own devices without being poked or prodded for entertainment. Here we respect the dead, listen to our heritage, and dance among the spirits in the forest.

Though when I would head to town I could hear whispers from locals questioning how she died. I didn't know the truth of it. No one did. It almost didn't matter because the old woman didn't seem to mind. It was just part of her story, you know? Nothing to dwell on but the locals always needed something to speak of — Between the squirrels on the rooftop at the post office and the

freshly painted lines in the road there just wasn't enough to talk about. Some people just need something to say. The old woman wasn't like that. She never seemed to nervous in the silence.

Her solitude kept me calm on our long hikes in the afternoon. If she chattered too much we wouldn't hear our footsteps, and if we couldn't hear our footsteps what was the point of being out there? Anyway, the boys in the post office needed something to talk about and that had nothing to do with the old woman, with the way the sun rose on a dewy morning or the way the sunset over the mountains. It had nothing to do with anything at all.

The old woman cracked walnuts on her porch. I think she liked the sound it made in the woods. She never ate them. Just left them in a pile on her porch for the creatures to pick at. My wife would join her and they would sing old hymns.

*"Morning has broken, like the first morning  
Blackbird has spoken, like the first bird  
Praise for the singing, praise for the morning  
Praise for them springing fresh from the word."*

I think it comforted my wife. As if the old woman knew exactly what to sing to remind her of her childhood. I wish we could've taken her with us, my wife. I bet she would've enjoyed that.

One afternoon the old woman and I started on a walk as if it were any other day. Our stride always so aligned and feet still wet from the creek. When the sun met us midday we circled back towards home — only there was no home — just the neighbors' long stretch of drive next to us and the field that was always at our right. As the shadows sprawled over the hillside I knew we had finally gone to no place in particular, to nowhere, because there was 'nowhere' left to go. Our footsteps sounding off like the beat of a loud drum and the pulse of a thousand years behind us. We headed towards the sun.