

THE PASSAGE

Marcie Marcari

The earth shook. The women gathered.
The chanting
 of The Women Of a Thousand Generations began, their hands intertwined.
I breathe low, moaning deep through my body to touch the depth of sound they generate.
 And for a moment I am with them.
“We’re here-with you, you are one of us-you can do it!”
 One of them
I breathe.
The coals glow-mocking my strength
 Embers flick their tongues tormenting my courage.
I step onto the coals-
The *Women Of a Thousand Generations* push closer to the embers-
 their faces glowing from the coals.
I keep my eyes on them, focusing on THEIR ability to push through the pain,
 to keep walking in spite of their fear-
 remembering that they made it to the other side.
I find MY courage and step again.
 I feel the embers and wince.
The Women start beating a drum.
 I find their rhythm in my abdomen, and slowly more forward:
 One step- look at the face.
 Second step- focus on the eyes.
 Third step...
I see the African dancers, rehearsing their steps as I walk my last few.
I see the circle being set-the fire at the center, the food and festivities.
This will be the stage for my welcoming into this elite group-
 this *Women Of a Thousand Generations*.
 my heart swells.
I am close to the end now, and my body starts to shake-Spirit stronger than flesh.

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I want to give up-to step on the cool grass
And off these coals.

I look for the faces, and my eyes meet theirs.

One of them smiles.

She who is With Woman, reaches out her hand

Her face is the clearest, eyes at my level.

“Listen to your body and do what it tells you” She says-no trace of concern.

The chanting changes: “Listen to your bo-dy”

In rhythm, hands are again joined, like an infinite chain.

I realize just how many have gone this way before me.

The one who smiled places her hand on the shoulder

of the One who is With Woman-

with me,

and I breathe, stretching out my hand to grasp the outstretched.

I am about to cross over-

Silence comes over the Universe.

I am near the end-

my body aches,

my mind is empty of everything but that last step.

Last step.

Hands grasped.

Cool grass.

On my toes, cooling my feet-

my arms reach out to claim my prize-

“Reach down and take your baby.”

I hold him to me tightly, and proudly take my place in the chain.

I am now a WOMAN OF A THOUSAND GENERATIONS.

The celebration begins.