

<p>Documents For The Reader Print Friendly Version Companion book for all of Stone Riley's Tarot decks By Stone Riley © 2015</p>	<p>Excerpt: Document #5: The Fig Tree: Where The Paintings Came From</p>
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> **The Fig Tree: Where The Paintings Came From**

Beauty is our surest source of Wisdom; Nature is our clearest source of Beauty; Love for each other is our strongest voice of Nature.

There was a fig tree where I was a child, filling one corner of our little house's little yard. Its beauty was amazing.

Indeed, after my childhood study of that tree, beauty seemed so mysteriously far beyond human knowing that the word "beauty" seldom even passed my lips for the next forty-odd years. Instead, I would speak and think of "joy" as the real spiritual fundamental of existence.

I would remember stretching out my little self through the summer's sweet close fragrant shade along thick viney limbs, the green light kaleidoscopic in my human eyes, the stiff big leaves rustling like paper in the breeze but so fuzzy against human skin, the fruit so strange and good. In unaccountable entwining ways the fig tree was perfection far past knowing. That was beyond.

But joy was inside me. I am joyful; I exist. That was knowable and known.

Then suddenly there was another summer day – me now far away and fifty-five years old but still there consciously a spirit in the fig tree – but now knowing more.

Now suddenly my self was felt to be obviously the viney wood – the sun soaked leaves, the strange good fruit and all – and all of this was known by its self, the self which was its self, my own self, to be extremely beautiful surpassing joy.

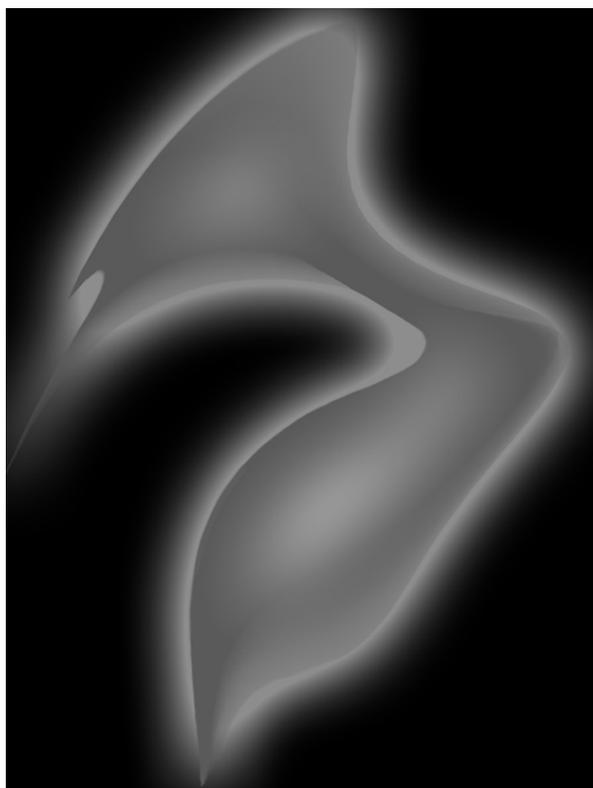
Of course the mode of this awakening, at last, was erotic love.

. . .

I was a lonely quiet child, for so I learned to be and learned I was. Happy laughter sprang up from my heart quite naturally, but in that house it found poor nourishment.

Our mother, from some cause forever now uncertain – perhaps her father's early death and then her brother's then her mother's – was a worried and sometimes despairing woman.

Our father, though he was the one who set the fig tree sapling in its place, was a very earnest brooding



"The Fig Tree" Digital image by SR

man. His childhood had been wounded by starvation poverty and then his youth by the desperate struggle of panic fear and dauntless courage in a great war.

This woman and man who made us – a girl, a boy, another boy who was myself, and then another girl – did right by us. Their love proved itself by unstinted labor that fed and housed and clothed us year after year, and in a gentle discipline that taught so well. They gave us health, honesty, literacy and cleanliness.

But love was not spoken in that house. It did not speak nor was it spoken. There was no tender touch. There were no kisses. There was not even wishing for a kiss.

. . .

In my childhood study of the backyard tree, the thing I noticed most was the viney kind of curve its trunks, branches and twigs all made. I have tried ever since, in poetry and paint, in clay between the fingertips, in word and deed, in every art, to make that powerful curve.

It was a compound line reporting all the aspects of reality at all points it inhabited, the gravity and wind and sun and mechanical adhesion in the fibers of its wood and its evolution through previous habitats and its role in the evolution of habitats and the moral tend-

encies of the universe and plenty more sublimely joyful dancing fluid interactions of reality far outside my knowing.

That is to say, I understood the curving of the fig tree was extremely real. It was much more real than my unconvincing notions of my self.

And so passed forty years and more, although with various awkward twists as I tried to stretch my self into that viney curve and never figured how.

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That summer I was fifty-five, I was in New England.

I was renting half of a strange ramshackle house on an unworked farm. This house's other half was rented by another fellow.

You'd surely say it was a run down place but he was doing photographs and I was doing paintings and it was a joyful spot. It was a four acre hay field hilltop deep in the highlands of big woods with a mountain view that would pop your eyes out. There was delicious air.

And that was new to me. The only thing in my experience you might compare it to was oceanside air – an air also full with fragrant palpable infinities of distant large and moving things about their business – but in this fragrant air of mountain hilltop, a place full of forest beings who cast perfume on the air, this very open and very clear bright but deep green place where you would see Sky and World in every glance, and you would constantly see it all flow with storm or breeze or flow with rain or vanish into snow, there I felt myself alive among infinities.

Beside an ocean, in whatever weather, I've always felt myself in danger and a foreign traveler. But here I somehow became immediately a native of the wooded hills.

Well, the other renter there, the art photographer, was a thoughtful fellow, lonely, very nice, courteous, kind. He lent me a valuable photo reference book to make a sketch and I gifted back a tiny canvas that he fancied. I'd feed his cat when asked. Now and then we had some tea and chat.

He, my good neighbor, attended regularly at a Buddhist monastery that was there, nearby somewhere among those hills, for their silent walking contemplative retreats were a spiritual treasure to him.

Me, I had my girlfriend up on weekends quite a lot.

This lady was the very person I had absolutely given up any hope of ever finding.

In fact, I had carefully calculated the arithmetical

unlikelihood that she could be alive on the same side of the planet as myself and was mistaken. I had composed a philosophic poem in which her nonexistence stood as proof of something in the universe. That is to say, logic had failed me completely in the search for her.

And I could not possibly even list the lady's charms – her forthright honesty and grace and wit and intelligence and generosity and strong insistent heart that was proven so amply since, for through her virtues she would later save my life – because at that time when we had only recently met, I mainly saw her virtues only through an utterly compelling intuition that could not be itemized.

And she was similarly bewildered by this peculiar creature me. Indeed, both our feelings seemed to be that we must simply throw away caution and absolutely work this out as we went along.

And our next door neighbor is a quiet lonely visual artist guy familiar with Oriental stuff.

And I guess you may have seen the famous photos of those old Hindu temples where sinuous entwining lovemaking couples, all smiling very sweetly as they serenely consummate the universe, adorn every sacred temple archway and pillar.

You may even be aware that the ornamental vegetation crafted in those famous temple carvings – the curving viney trunks and limbs and sheltering leaves which those famous undying lovers inhabit and enact so joyfully – are, of course, unmistakably fig trees. Those sculptured fig trees are, to be precise, the same *ficus religiosa* species under which the Buddha sat for his awakening.

And, you understand, in the past year, since months before we found each other, I had achieved sudden astonishing success in making beautiful paintings without yet knowing beauty is real. Repeat: without yet waking to the fact beauty is real.

Many paintings that will become Spirit Hill Tarot, if I may explain, were already crowded cheek by jowl among the others nailed up on my small rooms' walls – waiting since before I even knew that she exists – to greet her when she ventured up into the hills then stepped into my door, while others of them waited stacked among the leaning piles of canvases in every dusty corner.

Me painting like a lunatic, sawing and nailing frames between the painting sessions, me wondering what in the world I'm doing for all those months before she came.

. . .

So finally one day it is a lovely summer Saturday or Sunday.

A breeze that is quite irresistibly intoxicating in its meadow forest fragrance and also bursting with glowing sunlight radiance has all day been absolutely flooding the place through our open windows, all of which are open you may be sure.

She and I are cuddling, lounging very dishabille, luxuriantly satisfied for now, me more luxuriantly satisfied than I have ever been before in my entire half century life, you may be sure, and her too by every indication. Here we are in our little boudoir that opens on the universe, our little living room, which is at the back of the house where the wide window view of our steep round grassy hilltop, surrounded by the forest mountains, is more stunning.

It is a little room where big bright canvases over-filled with glowing shamanic vision and shining paint (three future Spirit Hill Tarot cards chief among them) cover all the walls above the tiny boundless island where we abide, we each touching each a fellow soul in the utmost holy intimacy of love.

I am growing actually hallucinogenic breathing in the scented light, studying the tactile structure of the mantic glowing visions that sunlight is sculpting on the breeze-blown moving sail-like surfaces of canvas stretched on wood.

When any human being starts to seriously explore their mind, to let it work and see what gifts it brings, they will very soon – very soon – feel the pretended boundary between their self and all the world dissolve. They may take courage in that vast mysterious state instead of fear. They may find their other self who is native there and lend that self a voice and eyes and hands and sex in this world here. So come many acts of brilliant creativity.

For me – I who have learned to trust my soul who lives there beyond, learned to marvel at its workings – to me by then there comes as well a kind of saturated dumb and sotted fullness, a savoring and keen surrender – there comes a fascinated and delicious utter giving of myself into the flowing energy of creativity as to the flowing bowl of ancient Dionysus.

So I am drunk with her and I have been forever so it seems, ever since at least our first kisses waking in that day's transcendent and transparent waking dream. And even so, the endless hour is still morning.

So Neighbor knocks. He's knocking on our front door, not the back, doesn't see us but the cars are out

there out front so he figures we must be here somewhere and he shouts a loud friendly confident hello.

I realize, suddenly, Neighbor will next definitely walk around out back, searching for us in the yard, sun-bathing out there with books perhaps as we often are, and there he will quite discretely peek into our living room's wide picture window just the way that I would do undoubtedly if the situation were somehow horribly reversed, and so I bellow back an answer.

After all, the lady has another life as a Quite Respectable Person who dresses very presentably you may be sure for a professional occupation in a city and goes home to the company of three dearly loved adult daughters who, I'm absolutely sure, cast unrelenting aspersions on the old nasty Hippie freak in the woods to whom their mom is inexplicably attached and to whom, therefore, I really don't want the lady carrying home a displeasing report.

So now I'm suddenly struggling to get this emergency sorted inside my head while rummaging among the bedclothes for yesterday's trousers.

The lady is amused. She pulls a sheet up to her chin.

. . .

So here stand two men, a screen door between them.

One stands out there in the stunning brilliant summer day, a bright day, standing on the doorstep looking up, outside looking in, holding a hand up to shade his eyes.

The other is an old stout fellow naked to the waist, silver hair and beard a tangled mass around his face, blinking and squinting there in the deep shade of the hallway, inside the dark screen door which he does not open.

But the old stout guy is leaning sideways now, bending like the hilltop willow tree that stands out there beyond the cars and little gravel parking lot, slouching onto the door frame. He has expended his reserves in dragging to the door and is now overcome with a peculiar exhausted relaxation. He is trying to button his pants.

Both men know there is a woman in there.

So of course I am examining this memorable situation. Of course I'm thinking Darwin thoughts about how Nature is our lives and we are Nature.

From this new perspective of Darwin dynamics I suddenly see that all this body love is biologically powerfully recruiting me to join a Clan that sorely needs a good Grandfather because Babies are coming

soon and the Matriarch of which suspects that she has stumbled on a quite exceptional candidate.

So my old lonely heart swells with relief and pride: She has chosen me for good reason. And I feel the blossoming of tender love that famous poets speak: Like a rose bloom erupting marvelously on a withered stem, I fall in love with her. That then suddenly disproves all my theorems of grief, so suddenly I begin at once surrendering the doubt and fear which all that loneliness always gave me.

But Neighbor is talking, as he has a right, shrugging ruefully, reminding me, apologetic since he clearly feels ridiculous – and maybe even feels made a fool and maybe even hurt – about the very interesting old wrecked beaver dam in the woods a pleasant walk away from there which he did mention a couple weeks ago one time, to his suggestion which I did indeed answer him that the lady and I would probably like to walk out for a look and to which he is going now to make some photos that are going to be very fine in this very fine light, so he shrugs again. And would we like to go?

And here, for your information, let me just interject that I am still sorry and embarrassed – ashamed somewhat in fact – that I never went with my good Neighbor to see that beaver dam which would have been interesting.

But now, in my intoxicated state, I am carried off by thoughts about the tender poignancy of life. I used to be so much like Neighbor just so recently and for so long before. And he is me of course. I have escaped that fate but should I rejoice or mourn? Of course I must do both and in them both know joy.

In fact, I am at last surrendering what remains of the fear and doubt my loneliness for so long gave me.

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So now I hear a footstep in the hall and turn and look.

Now comes the Lady in her person.

I have heard her step and looked and seen her coming from the living room into the hall.

And she is there.

I gape.

She is appropriately clothed. She wears her lover's shirt from yesterday, Gypsy bangles at her ears and silver finger rings. The shirt falls just exactly long enough to cast the Sacred Mysteries of Venus respectfully in shadow. In the hallway's dark this gleaming female soul is glorious.

I either gasp or moan.

So the Lady is in the doorway by me now, within

the darkly veiling screen. So the entryway is filled; no one will enter. She takes my arm in hers and strikes a friendly pose and says hello to Neighbor.

Neighbor's eyes fly to a spot in the air above and there they stay. But he says hello. Furthermore, he briefly, with quite commendable aplomb, outlines the friendly invitation to a scenic woodland ramble.

Before she speaks to answer him, she moves. It may be at first a gesture simply answering the friendly invitation in some normal way but then it is a dance. It becomes unmistakably an artist's pose.

Then it is indeed an apt quotation from great famous art which Neighbor loves, great art I know he loves because this pose of hers is photographed exactly and repeatedly in a photo reference book of South Asian temple architecture he recently took from his private shelf and opened to those pages of those photos with a lover's tender touch and then generously lent that book to me his painter neighbor.

In this brief dance, this divine erotic dance, the Lady took my arm to wrap around her back to put my hand exactly at her waist and there she holds it, her hand pressing mine with every silent signal of human touch that I must hold that curve of her fervent soul in strength.

So we are relaxed and yet we have embraced securely. And so, if I may say it in this way, the Lady's substance entwines in mine:

Her other hand goes up behind us, appearing on my farther shoulder and it grips; she gives her weight. She lifts her far foot just enough to put its heel above her near foot's ankle, so her knee arising slightly as the toe points obliquely down. So she is reclining on me like I am reclining in such languor on the wooden doorway post and I feel her relax, her substance now becoming mine so familiarly in an act of love.

So what is this? Are we truly beings carved above the temple threshold steps, truly? Are we not? For this blessed place where all this glorious mysterious art is done for such hidden reasons; is this not a place of miracles for that whole summer long – which has not ended yet – and are we not its clergy?

Somehow in true, true fact – in facts somehow assembled there out of the actual substance of reality by brilliant workings done in beauty – we are the fig tree now. And thus the powerful reality of beauty has been proved.

For me this is an ecstasy. And it resolves deep riddles of human joy and meaning.