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Making It Real:

Hermana Cristina's Well

by Starhawk

Hermana Cristina is a tiny woman, and every day she must draw the water for her family up from a deep well. The crank is stiff and the bucket is heavy and though she is pregnant with her sixth child she does not complain. She feels lucky, for she does not have to rise before dawn and walk the shoulders of the new highway for hours to find water, like many women do. And though her possessions and those of her husband and children would fit into two or three shopping bags, she has a home, although it is far away from the town where she was born and the family and friends she grew up with, for she and her husband fled as refugees during the war. The war was waged against those who could tolerate hopelessness and injustice no longer and so made a revolution against the rich and the powerful. But the revolution like so many things ended inconclusively and all the blood and pain and sacrifice could win only a partial victory against the death squads and the massive military might supported by the great corporations.

Hermana Cristina never learned to read and though she is worn and tired from bearing children she has nothing else of beauty with which to fill her home. She lives not far from the great road where women like her walk every day in the dust, searching for water. The road was financed by those same corporate interests through institutions whose name Hermana Cristina does not know. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the institutions of world corporate wealth lent money to some incarnation of a government she never voted for, in private negotiations never ratified by the people, to build the great road, which is dotted with gas stations like palaces, gleaming and clean, complete with glass box fast food stops where affluent visitors from the north could find comfort in familiar brand names: Ritz crackers, Hershey bars, Oreos.

Hermana Cristina feeds her family tortillas and beans. She feels lucky because many are hungry. They are hungry, though she may not know it, because in order to pay the interest on the loans that built the great road and the beautiful gas stations and the shops full of brand names she cannot afford, her government which she did not vote for must encourage the production of food to be sold in the countries of the rich and must allow those same corporations to build the great maquiladoras, the factories where her children may someday labor to produce the jeans and cell phones and computers they will not be able to afford on a wage of four dollars a day. While she is burdened with too many children her daughters may not have children at all because the maquiladoras produce wastes that eat away at ovaries and wombs, and in order to service the foreign debt and attract the same corporations her government has suspended the laws she never had a chance to vote for that could have protected her daughters' health.

Her sons will dream of the rich countries to the north, of following the great road up through Guatemala, Mexico. If they reach their goal they will stand on a street corner hungry and desperate in a foggy dawn, hoping for work. If they find great success they may someday ride to a laborer's job down the avenue where every stoplight is the turf of another beggar poorer than even Cristina, for they have no homes. This man was broken long ago when he was sent to fight an unjust war to protect those same corporations. This woman has just come out of jail: she lost her children when she turned to drugs to ease the pain of despair. This woman has AIDS and no money for a hotel room for the night, let alone the medications. This man still has a light in his eye and a smile but he cannot find a job because the factory that would have hired him has moved to El Salvador where the people work for four dollars a day.

The avenue is lined with the gleaming storefronts that sell jeans and computers and cell phones. An administrative assistant spoons sugar into her coffee and thinks herself lucky that she still has a job, when half her department was laid off when her company was bought out by a larger company. Her salary barely covers the costs of childcare and her credit card debt and the rent on her apartment which is high because for twenty years the banks have encouraged speculation and so many people want to live in this city which is headquarters for many great corporations. She does not yet know that she has cancer from the chemical residues in the food she eats, the same cancer shared by those who made the long journey north on the great road and now pick the crops and administer the sprays, the chemicals which the banks require farmers to spray because the banks have made loans to the corporations that make the chemicals. Nor does she imagine that she will lose her job when she cannot work and lose her health insurance, which in the name of freedom is not provided by her government, and that she will not live to see her daughter grow up. Or that the same chemical residues which have contaminated her breasts are seeping slowly toward the groundwater that feeds Cristina's well.

These connections are why we went to Seattle to shut down the WTO and why in the spring instead of planting our own gardens we will go to Washington DC to shut down the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Because we are no longer willing to acquiesce to institutions that do not cherish Hermana Cristina and her children and the beggar on the street and the administrative assistant stirring her coffee.

But because we are Witches we know that it is not enough to name the connections and identify the problems. It's not enough even to put our bodies on the line to stand against injustice. We must work magic. We must hold a vision.

So let us imagine a world in which the health of Hermana Cristina, the well being of her children, the purity of her well were the prime concern of every institution of power. We could relax in such a world for we understand that if Hermana Cristina's interests are cherished then so will ours be.

Let us imagine that the great economic powers of the world wish to free the slight and pregnant Cristina from the task of drawing water, and to do this in the way that will most benefit her children and later, her grandchildren. So that instead of loaning money to her government to pay a big corporation to hire engineers from the United States to build a giant hydroelectric dam that will flood the fields of small farmers, they decide to

give her a solar panel and a pump. But instead of sending her equipment made in the United States they will assure the future jobs of her sons and daughters by funding a small company in El Salvador to make the equipment locally, a company that will pay a living wage and will hold to strict standards of safety for its workers and its environment. And they will train young men and women to install and maintain the equipment, and these young men and women will be able to afford tortillas and beans and fruit and grain and good food for their families, and dress-up clothes to go out in and sometimes, a meal in a restaurant. And with the water from the well Hermana Cristina can grow a garden, and feed her children on papayas and bananas and fresh vegetables as well as beans, so that they grow bright and healthy and eager to learn. And the extra fruit she can sell to the young men and women for their families, and with the money she earns she can buy a new dress for each of her daughters and a new shirt for each of her sons, which are made by the woman down the street who no longer works in a maquiladora but has a nice little business of her own, where she can step outside in the afternoon and enjoy the sunshine. And because the purity of Hermana Cristina's well is the prime concern of the world's political and economic structures, the chemical factory down the way has been closed, the men of her district no longer travel out to cut cane on the large plantations which service foreign debt which has miraculously disappeared, but instead till their own small plots of mixed fruits and vegetables for their families, with some left over to sell, and use nothing which would contaminate the soil for everyone knows that the health of a people depends upon the health of the soil. And the papayas, the mangos, the coconut palms sink deep roots that hold the soil and make it a spongelike reservoir, and so the springs return to the hillsides and Hermana Cristina's sisters no longer have to rise before dawn to walk the dusty roadside searching for water.

And if her sons and daughters take the long road to the north, it is for adventure, for study, for fun. And there they might sit, in a cafe on the avenue, stirring their coffee grown under shade trees that harbor thousands of birds, beside the administrative assistant who is now the administrator of a healing center where those who have been wounded and broken by life are cared for. She's lunching with the former drug addict who is now a nurse. They're eating salmon from restored streams and flourishing fisheries, and wild mushrooms from extensive forests, and drinking organic wine, which she can afford because she lives in her own, modestly priced home built by the man with the smile and the light in his eye. And because the health of the soil and the health of the people is the prime concern of every political and economic structure in her country, too, there are no chemical residues in her food, no cancer in her breast, and she will live a long and healthy life and see the daughters of her daughter grow up in a world devoted to the well being of the land, the waters, the children.

This is a modest and possible vision. It requires no unknown technologies or new inventions. We already have the knowledge, the skills, the resources we need to make it come true.

What we need is the will, and the fortitude to confront and transform the structures of political and economic power that currently govern our world. A simple 'to do' list: dismantle the structures of globalization, revoke corporate power, rescue government from the influence of wealth, restore democracy--or maybe we never really had it.

And after lunch, the hot tub.

It's not new, the call to revolution, it's really kind of a nineteenth century or maybe a sixties thang, and hey, we've had a few and they mostly went rotten or proved inconclusive.

But maybe those were just for practice. This time, let's get it right.

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