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# Full Strawberry Moon

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### **Cherish**

*Cherish the love, cherish the life.*

*"Cherish the thought*

*of always having you here by my side (oh baby I)*

*cherish the joy*

*you keep bringing it into my life (I'm always singing it)*

*cherish your strength*

*You got the power to make me feel good*

*(And baby I)*

*Perish the thought*

*Of ever leaving, I never would."*

– Madonna Ciccone and Patrick Leonard

**T**hese are the words I woke up to. They played inside my head all morning as I grappled with the unexpected death of my dear sweet cousin last night. The stroke struck while she was on a holiday at her favorite place on the earth, surrounded by beauty and family. She always had exquisite taste and found the best place for her grand adieu.

She lived a life filled with much joy and abundance while focused on the things that matter: stories brimming from a lifetime based in the heart, family ties, beauty and giving deeply by sharing her therapy dog with those in need. She was always offering a smile and a hug to those around her. She delivered the right remark when it was required, striving for the best in herself and others. I will miss her very

much, as she was among my sweet tapestry of powerful women who showed me how to create a loving family. We were able to stay engaged with the deep wisdom that comes from long-standing connections.

I only regret that I did not see her last month when I nearly had the chance. There was no opportunity to thank her and tell her how much she meant to me one last time. But deep down she knew, for every time we greeted and departed over the many decades, we would always share a hug and a kiss, or more than one, as we would extend our goodbyes over many tens of minutes. She always told me how much I used to resemble one of her daughters who moved away, and then she would hold me by the chin and drink in the love in my eyes as a way of being closer to me and her daughter whom she missed.

Her love for family was nearly eclipsed by her love of her garden. That was clear when I recently visited her house and saw the colorful marvel she created. She took me on a tour, sharing stories of every plant, itemizing what they needed, how they thrived and what she planned next for each of them. She poured her heart into her garden.

It does not surprise me then, when I reflect on the experience I had with trees in Muir Woods, an ancient redwood forest on the coast of northern California,



that the woods would prepare me for her departure. I knew she was facing the end of her life, but we were still hoping for a miracle as she clung to life in the hospital far from where I was in the woods.

It was a cool and cloudy morning, still quiet when departing from the main trail to hike deeper away from the crowd. Winding up the hill, I stopped in front of one giant redwood next to the path, soaring many stories above my head. I decided to enter its silent embrace, as I placed my hand on its rough bark. Closing my eyes, I offered my exhale as its inhale, took its exhale with my inhale, melded with it and shared

to see many people leave, and like the tree, I would bear witness to their lives and departures.

The communication abruptly ended and I felt the urge to “get on with it.” “Enjoy the day,” was the message. Do not linger on the sadness, loss or things that are soon to be. Just move along and know that I will have what I need when I need it.

It was only a few minutes later during the hike that I came across another message from the trees. This time it was a circle of seven clustered in a tight embrace. Redwoods are generous in their movement

## *Oftentimes I receive a message back from the trees when I open a channel of contact with them.*

visions and stories from the places I have traveled in the world, opening my heart to its ancient wisdom.

Oftentimes I receive a message back from the trees when I open a channel of contact with them. This one did not disappoint, as I felt the energy racing towards me from the top of the tree, like a freight train of light and energy cascading down in a freefall of urgency to meet me. The message was delivered. In order to decipher its mystery, my body relaxed and fell into the rhythms and sensations of the communication. I rarely understand the messages through my mind, but my body knows how to read and receive every morsel. This one was grand and loving and very intense, like I was being held slightly off the ground in a bubble of a rubberized buoyant, bouncy and springy substance. It coursed through my being and settled deeply into my heart. I felt an infiltration of love, scanning and protection seep into all the cells of my heart and around my back, soaking completely into the surrounding skin. My heart was encased in a protective energy and was cleansed. I heard the message that the tree would be there for me while I experience many deep losses. Anytime I need to, I could return to the safety and love of this tree that has stood by and watched humanity and life over hundreds of years. I was to expect

to reproduce and connect. One main tree sends out shoots in the nearby earth so that others can grow in a circle of life, stretching toward the sky as a unit. This one had tall sisters occupying only a few feet of earth, trunk-to-trunk nearly touching, as they stood together sharing the same light, soil, bugs and air. A bright sun shined through the circle from above and the needles of the trees dispersed the light into columns of sparkling effervescence, reaching from sky to earth, through air and wood.

I captured a photo of the enchantment and received the next message that we are never alone. Though we may feel like individuals, and we should celebrate our beauty and uniqueness as each tree in the circle is different and beautiful in its own way, in truth we are all connected, living on top of one another in a tangled embrace of life force. The tall trunks stand on their own, each seemingly independent of her neighbor. But peek below the surface and you will find the other truth. All the roots bend, stretch, grow over and under each other in a nest of interconnection. It becomes a oneness made up of the individual experience. It is a unit of love, just like life, and just like death. You are never apart from, but are a part of, the whole.



The message continued; enjoy the circle of life. Your cousin is dying now, as will others soon enough, but know you are always part of the circle. Keep your heart open despite the pain that happens and enjoy the sunshine, the intimacy and the embrace of life.

As the hike went on, more messages were revealed, about being called into service even when others perceive your actions as departing from their expectations and approval. The idea surfaced of the need to pay attention to more than just your own calling, while being respectful to the needs of others. Another message focused on the importance of staying grounded while reaching for high aspirations to strengthen the outcome. A tender moment was shared with a boulder, perfect for sky gazing, as I rested my spine on its smooth surface and I heard and saw the beauty of learning to relax, allowing the earth to have your back and not needing to direct every move. The four-part harmony resounded in the message to trust, let go, close your eyes and open your heart.

And, finally, the message came to know when it is time to go home. Recognize when you have had enough and accept that it is okay to call it a day. Sometimes it is better to leave than to stay. By staying, you could create more harm than good by manufacturing additional suffering.

And that is the recent lesson I have learned from my sweet cousin. She knew when it was time to move on, knowing she had her time well spent, enjoyed, cherished and it was better to leave now than linger in the decay and pain she would have faced by staying. How fitting for her to pass away during the Full Strawberry Moon — a gardener's delight. She was always exquisite in her taste and timing.

I came home from my trip to the Muir woods, finding a gift from above. One Cooper's hawk feather was lying alone on the grass in the yard under the shade of the bountiful pine tree. I had not seen such a feather in the yard before. There was no sign of a struggle, broken branches, feather down or mangled bodies

nearby. There was no sign of disruption or intrusion. Just the one feather lying there by itself. It was six inches long and had five bands of dark brown stripes, sandwiched with four beige stripes on either side — a perfect offering. Was it from the heavens? Could it be a message from Spirit offered on the day of the departure for my dear cousin, scheduled unbeknownst to all, to take place before nightfall? Maybe it was just a gentle shedding from an errant bird passing overhead on its journey elsewhere.

Who knows? But what I felt and received was that it could be a special spiritual gift for me to discover. It could link me with my cousin and the message of the Cooper's Hawk: You are what you eat. Cooper's Hawks feed on other birds. This helps them balance life in ways we are not always expecting. We may not be familiar with the notion of eating our own kind, but without them, there would be overpopulation and we would be without their beauty.

Food, nurturance and health were parts of life I shared with my cousin. We acted as if there was always another chance to eat together for a celebration, reunion or shared sadness with loss. We were very aware of how food creates life and good or bad health. We knew that the thoughts and feelings we create are part of our spiritual nutrition. Mostly we were in touch with love and how food brings people together — a part of my love of nature and a remembrance of my dear cousin. €



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