



Coda

From the Publisher

Being the official “baby crone” around here leads me to a unique perspective on the creation of *Crone*. I am very much a junior partner, a position I find a wee bit disconcerting. In my other publishing endeavors (*SageWoman* and *newWitch*) I am firmly entrenched as the Humongous Fromage — it’s my ball game from start to finish. Not here. For *Crone*, there’s an entire panoply of authors, poets, department heads, columnists, proofreaders — and of course, my dear friend and mentor Ann Kreilkamp — looking over my shoulder, and every single one of them knows more about being a Crone than I do.

The voices in my head are shrill. “If I’m not at the top of the pecking order, how can I take pride in my work?” “Don’t they understand what I’m trying to accomplish here?” Most insistent of all, “Why can’t I just have things *my way* for a change?”

Meanwhile, my local friends and neighbors blanch when I happily embrace the title of Crone as my fiftieth birthday approaches. “Why would you want to be called *that*?” a neighbor (a full decade my senior) told me recently. “That’s the next best thing to being dead!” Another (also in her sixties) wrote, “I’m not a crone, and neither are you. Remember, seventy is the new fifty.”

But deep in my heart, beneath sinew and bone and pumping muscle, I long to belong to the Crone. I glimpse Her in my life like a hummingbird darting past my kitchen window; an iridescent flash of color, and She is gone. Wistfully, I find myself glancing where I last spotted Her, longing to see Her again.

It’s all part of the same thing: my ego-irritation at being forced to collaborate; the refusal of my friends to accept that I am happy about my wrinkles and greying hair; and my longing to grasp the essence of *Crone*. It’s all about surrender, about letting go, about opening up to the uncertainty of life. It’s all about moving past fear into wonder.

Last week, a freak summer storm roared through the Willamette Valley where I now make my home. I was downtown at the library when a claxon-toned “Emergency Alert” came over the radio, and my husband called me on my cellphone to warn me about it. We discussed whether I should “shelter in place” or head home, an uphill bike ride that usually takes me about twenty minutes. Alan looked over the weather radar, and reported that the storm was some twenty-plus miles to the south of us, and looked to be moving about twenty miles an hour, so I decided to race it home.

As I pedaled steadily uphill, I noted the lowering sky and the metallic tang of ozone in the air, but saw nothing alarming. Fifteen minutes later, almost home but in need of a breather, I stopped at the top of a long hill to look across the wheat field that lies just south of our subdivision.

Flanked by the short, sharp slopes of Gales Peak on the eastern edge of the Coast Range, the Gales Creek Valley spread sinuously below me in a patchwork of forest, creek, field, and flower. But as I looked across the fields that afternoon, I felt the hair rise on the back of my neck. Rolling across the valley was a roiling cloud of dust, pollen, and debris, towering far above the trees and racing straight towards me.

I soon realized that it was a gust front — the leading edge of rain-cooled air that pushes out ahead of a thunderstorm — and the adrenaline hit my bloodstream; I jumped back on my bike and pedaled for home as if my life depended on it. Struggling to keep under control on the loose gravel bike path that crossed the park down the street from my house, I realized that I could not possibly get home before the storm arrived.

I was off the gravel and had turned onto my street for the final hundred yards up the steep hill when the wind reached me.

A blast of cold, a rush of sound, and I felt the front crash into me. It was as if a giant hand grabbed the back of my bicycle seat, and shoved me up the street towards home. I flew up that hill, easily twice as fast as I could under my own power. Then I

felt the debris and dust and pollen crashing all around me and watched in awe as every tree up the street groaned and bent double under the force of the gust. Pedaling madly, I reached the relative safety of my garage less than a minute later, where I watched the storm roar through our neighborhood for the next ten minutes. I waited for thunder, or lightning, or rain, but they never came and in less than half an hour, the wind-strewn streets were calm again.

In the moments before the front arrived, I knew that I was in the grip of forces far beyond my control. Yet, in spite of the obvious danger, I was more exhilarated than afraid. It was a moment of pure engagement, like being a child again, when everything was utterly beyond understanding, incandescent with the numinous halo of the transcendent.

As I grow more into my Crone nature, I am finding myself in this position of surrender more often. Already, my hands show the fissures of age and the eyes of my mother look back at me in the mirror. It is tempting to fight these changes or, even more commonly, to try and deny them. But I am attempting, not to resist these winds of change, but to cultivate a conscious state of submissive wonder. And in the deep intake of breath just before the wall of wind engulfs me, I can feel the steady hand of the Crone in her own. “Do not be afraid, my dear,” She tells me. “This, too, will pass.” And I believe Her, and wait for calm to return.

Namaste,

