

UNTIE the STRONG WOMAN

Blessed Mother's Immaculate Love
for the Wild Soul



Clarissa Pinkola Estés, PhD



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REST SWEET SLEEP QUIET PEACE FRIENDS SOOTHING HEART HEALING BEAUTIFUL DREAMS

Totus tuus ego sum Maria



BLESSED MOTHER IMMACULATE HEART MI MADRE MIRROR OF HEAVEN, IVORY TOWER, ARBOL DE LA VIDA,
STAR OF THE OCEAN, PLEASE PRAY FOR ME RESTORE ME STRENGTHEN ME HEAL ME... MY GRATITUDE IS YOURS
FOREVER, I AM TOTUS TUUS-

FIRST WORDS

Our Ancestral Great Mother

Opening Blessing: *Totus Tuus*, I Belong to You, Blessed Mother

With needles and thread, soft red felt, and white ink, I carefully appliquéd and shaped words, extra leaves, branches, and birds onto a bought quilt to hang over my bed to serve as a doorway to sleep.

I named this doorway *Totus Tuus ego sum María*, for it is a love letter to the Great Woman, a letter constantly being written and delivered, a letter from the heart that says, “I am yours completely *mi Madre*. Please pray for me and stay with me Blessed Mother.”



In a world that is often heart-stopping in horror and breath-taking in beauty, but too often scraped down to the bone by those who leak scorn with such soul-sick pride, it is the Blessed Mother, who is so unspeakably gracious with brilliant inspirations that pour into us—if we listen, if we watch for them.

Thus, there is such blessed reason to seek out and remain near this great teaching force known worldwide as Our Lady, *La Nuestra Señora*, and most especially called with loyalty and love, Our Mother, Our Holy Mother. Our very own.

◀ Ex-voto: “Our Lady’s Blessing Quilt for Beautiful Dreams”

She is known by many names and many images, and has appeared in different epochs of time, to people across the world, in exactly the shapes and images the soul would most readily understand her, apprehend her, be able to embrace her and be embraced by her.

She wears a thousand names, thousands of skin tones, thousands of costumes to represent her being patroness of deserts, mountains, stars, streams, and oceans. If there are more than six billion people on earth, then thereby she comes to us in literally billions of images. Yet at her center is only one great Immaculate Heart.

Since we staggered out of the Mist eons ago, we have had irrevocable claim to Great Mother. Since time out of mind, nowhere is there a feminine force of more compassion and understanding about the oddities and lovability of the wild and wondrous variations to be found in human beings.

Nowhere is there found a greater exemplar, teacher, mentor than she who is called amongst many other true names, Seat of Wisdom.



In Blessed Mother's view, all are lovable; all souls are accepted, all carry a sweetness of heart, are beautiful to the eyes; worthy of consciousness, of being inspired, being helped, being comforted and protected—even if other mere humans believe foolishly or blindly to the contrary.

If, following in the pathways laid down in the stories of the “old believers,” if after the old God Yahweh Jehovah who seemed to spend inordinate time creating and destroying, thence came to us in huge contrast, the God of Love—then Our Blessed Mother is the ultimate Mother Who Gave Birth to Love.

She is the Mother who ascended whole, the Mother who has lived through wars, conquests, conscriptions. The Mother who has been outlawed, done outrage to, squelched, carpet bombed, hidden, stabbed, stripped, burnt, plasticized, and dismissed.

Yet she survived—in us and for us—no matter who raised a hand against her or attempted to undermine her endless reach. She is writ into every sacred book, every document of the mysteries, every parchment that details her as Wind, Fire, Warrior, Heart of Gold, *La que sabe*, the One Who Knows, and more.

And most of all, she is writ into our very souls. Our longings for her, our desires to know her, to be changed by her, to follow her ways of acute insight, her sheltering ways, her trust in goodness—these are the

evidences that she exists, that she continues to live as a huge, not always invisible but palpably felt, force in our world right now.

Even when she was *una desaparecida*, disappeared by thugs and dictators over the many decades of the so-called Cold War, which was really a time of darkness meant to destroy the voice of souls across vast lands, we dreamt of her at night regardless.

We saw her colors and her flowers, her roses, morning glories, lilies, bluebells, marigolds, and more appear at the side of the darkest roads, despite being told she was gone and never existed to begin with.

We espied her on the roadway through the trees. Our Lady of the Birch Grove basilicas, Our Lady of the Sycamores, Our Lady of the Shrine of the Pines, Our Lady of the Redwood Cathedrals. She remained with us, even though outlawed for us to even think of her, to even imagine her. She was there nonetheless, for she is the quintessential Mother who does not, will not, leave her children behind.

Even when her cottages and groves and *vías*, pilgrimage roads, were erased from maps, or renamed, or plowed under, she appeared to us in our travails and moments of white-heat creating anyway—pulling something stubborn from the ground of us, helping us to let die what must die, helping us to let live what must live.

She will share her breath with us when we feel we have lost ours. She will warm us when we are too cold, and cool us down when we are too hot—in emotion, in spirit, in mind, in ideation, in desire, in judgment, in the creative life of the soul. She tells us to be gentle, but she will tell us too, “Be friendly, but never tame.”

All we have to do is ask and she will be there in ways that we may see/feel immediately. Or, we may have to reach toward her, apprehending her in a new, not at first completely comfortable way.

St. Francis of Assisi was said to have rushed from cave to cave crying out in lamentation that he had just lost his God and could not find Him any more. But God told Francis He’d been there all along, that Francis had to learn to see God in all His many guises.



Thus, all we have to do is heart-call and she will make her way through walls and across water, under mountains and through iron or gilded bars to make herself known. All we have to do is *remember* her, and she is instantly with us—teaching, re-centering us in her spiritual outlook, hiding us, comforting us, helping us to truly see—like what is called in old

Yiddish a *mensch*, one who is innately wise. In Buddhism this is referred to as *bodhi*, a knowing place. We Latinos call this being *ser humano*, one who has learned through travail to become a true human being.

Our Lady is Compassion personified, and shows up wherever she beholds human spirit and soul in heartbreak, in injury, in fatigue, and also when the road is long and the gold of the soul's charisms and talents weigh heavy in creative life, or when the life of the family or work are raveled. Especially so then, she bends to tend to the needful soul.

She will show up in our thoughts, our dreams, our inner knowings, our sudden awarenesses . . . with the most useful spare wheel, the lever, the spiritual muscle, the needle and thread, the warp and the weft, the clay, the materia, the music, the nourishment, the difficult insight into, the brilliant thought, the doorway to new attitude, the exact encouraging word needed.

She is here with us, has always been here with us, will always be with us no matter which "here" we cross over or into.



By this work, I hope to make her more visible to those who have not yet seen her, make warm invitation to those who have been estranged from her, or who have traveled far away from her for far too long, help calm a little those who wish to fossilize her living being, and help mend a little those who have been shamed for asserting she not only exists, but is central to their being and has informed their strivings to follow sacred life in ways that nourish the soul deeply, and that may or may not show in public in obvious ways.

This work was written to let others who love her so and those who have been with her for a lifetime, and those who have as yet unnamed yearnings for the Holy—know they are on the right path—that often steep and winding path of following her.

Thus, for all souls, these enclosed stories, prayers, and images I've written here about her exemplary ways, her charges to us, her ancient ways in our modern times, are meant to be windows blasted through the thick concrete walls that some cultures have built around and over her living presence to sequester her, to "disappear her" via only appearances duly "pre-approved," allowing her to only say previously vetted words.

This work is formed especially to let any soul who longs toward her, walks with her, dreams toward her . . . to know they are surrounded

by fellow travelers who do not “believe” she walks with us: From our bones outward, we who are fellow travelers *know* her and *experience* her up front and cheek-to-cheek. We are, together, all of us, the sparkling flashes of light on her ocean of love. We are together the flashing of innumerable stars on her mantle. You are not alone. We are together—with and within—her.



This work is in the tradition I was raised and consecrated in—to her, Our Blessed Mother. As a young child, out in the rural lands where we all lived, I was taken before the altar in a tiny chapel the size of a kitchen. My elderly immigrant family women in their big broken-down shoes, and two even more elderly nuns in their dusty black skirts and veils, were my sponsoresses.

I have always had the suspicion that our consecration to Blessed Mother derived from the most creakingly old ethnic traditions in the Old Country villages. And that perhaps consecrating little girls to Holy Mother for life, pledging these wild-haired, jumping-rope, winged little girls to solemn vows to Our Lady—vows of Chastity, Obedience, and Loyalty for life, when only six years of age—was likely not done in congregations that were more melting-potted, more tidy, and reserved—not so get-down-gritty immigrant.

However, I took my troth with all the seriousness of a child as bride of Espíritu Santo—a child’s bright calm heart—and I try to carry that troth with the same child-heart now—succeeding, failing, trying again. Like most muddy angels, I have to strive, not to be devoted to La Señora, for that is easy, but to remember to live what is known—which includes being dazzled by learning her, to see her concretely, how she speaks to all—if they choose to have a listening ear and a listening heart. I so hope they do and will, and that I do and will, *siempre*, always.

Thus, I have tried hard to live the beautiful devotion I was given to carry in this rough-cut and cracked earthen vessel I am made of. In this work, I hope to share with you what that journey with her has been like—certain windows into the interior of the sacred—that will help to introduce Blessed Mother to those who have inklings of her but yet too, little experience.

I hope to re-introduce her to those who have wandered away perhaps, but are seeking the literal mother-lode again, and for those too,

who have lifetime devotions to her, I hope to delight and strengthen and deepen all.



May these words awaken a little bit to a good amount, any unused corner of the heart, any portion that feels friendless. If anything, Blessed Mother is indeed that: the ultimate friend to the friendless one.

Thus, if I may, I would like to not “end” this chapter, but to *abre la puerta*, open the door— by blessing you. If you’d like to receive this, just incline your head a bit, and open your hand, your palm up, in whatever way is comfortable, or place your open palm over your heart or over whatever of your body or life needs strength, care, healing. This is how I was taught by the old believers of my immigrant families to receive Blessed Mother’s healing grace.



BLESSED MOTHER BLESSING¹

My prayer for, and to, and over the crown of your life is this . . .

We lift you up so your soul can be seen by Mother Mercy,
she who checks doorways, sees through cracks
and into corners where souls often hide, seeking refuge.
She who is the Immaculate Heart sees you easily,
greet you warmly, remembers you with love,
for she is
the Mirror of Heaven,
the Tower of Ivory,
Obsidian Blade,
Star of the Waters,
Seat of Wisdom . . .

We lift you up so Blessed Mother can see
all that you need now
in order to bring goodness and contentment,
healing and health,
understanding and love

—to you and to your beloveds—
in every possible way.

And especially, may all these be given to you
in ways you can most easily see and understand . . .

and in ways you can put to immediate good use.

We lift you up because you were knitted up
in your earthly mother's womb by One Greater . . .
not only born already blessed . . .
but also born as a blessing on all of us . . .

Do not forget this,
for we have not forgotten you.
And neither and never has your Greater Mother.

Let you walk now forward into this day,
both deeply blessed and blessing others
with the magnitude of Our Holy Mother's love.

Aymen

. . . which means in the old language—Let it be so.



CHAPTER ONE

Meeting the Lady in Red

The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face

We were going to something called a lake. I was so joy-jolted.

No longer young enough to wear just skin and nothing more, after four years of age I had to wear strange scratchy clothes. I thought wearing clothes was like being in prison . . . and I now wore shoes that never bent right in the ten places a foot bends naturally.

My hand-me-down clothes included skirts that hung down to my ankles, or else were too tight in the neck and arms. It was like being a mermaid caught in a net that bound you, crunched you, choked you, tied you down, left deep red circles all over your wrists and ankles, your waist and neck.

But today it was early winter, and I was dressed in two itchy-baggy handmade sweaters, and woolen leggings that had elastic bands that went under my black rubber boots—the ones with the silver jingle clasps to buckle me shut into them. I had been buried into a big brown coat that swirled around my boots and a too-small hat that pinched my fine fly-away hair in the elastic.

But, I was puppy happy, for we all were being taken “for a drive,” meaning spending precious coins on gasoline just to treat others by going fast in a rusty

◀ “Red Woman Lake”

old car. This time we were going to “drive fast” so our uncle could show off the “new-used” car with four mismatched tires that he’d won in a poker game with other immigrants in some smoky hallway.

So, we veered down the road to the Great Lake, Michigan, a huge inland ocean not far from the little village of six hundred people where we lived in what were called saltboxes, meaning four rooms arranged in a small square.

At the lake, it was even more icy-cold as everyone piled out of the hulk of a car. Within a few moments everyone looked like they had red cherry juice on their cheeks and noses, which went nicely with all their flashing gold teeth.

As the grown-ups toasted each other with bright yellow liquid in tiny etched glasses, as they all stood laughing on the high bluffs overlooking the sunset on the lake, as the cold wind blew away their steaming words to each other—I, as the only child present, slipped away unnoticed.

I went down three long concrete staircases, holding onto the iron-pipe handrail high above my head. One step down, then my other foot to the same step, then again, one step down, bringing my other foot to the same step—and thus I made it to the very bottom and onto the wet brown beach.



This was the first time I had ever seen big water since I left my mother’s womb. The waves in the Great Lake, Michigan, were the size of big bolts of red and yellow lace in the late sun—waves rushing into shore, breaking apart, but with the strength of lace having brawn enough to move tree trunks and parts lost off ships. Bringing those big objects in and slamming them onto the shore, and then gently taking them out again, over and over.

I came from grandmothers who made lace with what seemed like hundreds of bobbins and threads trailing—and when I saw the lace on the waves, I wanted to go out into the lake where I imagined there might be old women somehow, watery old women, making all this red and yellow lace in the deep.

So with full open heart, I ran right into the cold lake, my rubber boots filling with heavy water immediately. I could feel some spirit under the water wanting to take my legs away from me.

And that’s when I first saw her, the lady in the water coming toward me. The sky behind her red with sunset, and a sudden Holy Spirit white