

# The Goddess Calls

I can't say that I believe in fate, but I do believe that nothing happens accidentally. There are forces in the universe that put things in your path; if you pay attention, remain curious and alert, there are unexpected opportunities all along the way. I believe this because throughout my life, every time I've thought I've reached a peak, I've come to find out it was only a plateau. In 1970 I was forty-eight years old and the view from the peak I thought I was living on was magnificent. I was a successful advertising executive; I had a large and loyal client base, and all of my energies were devoted to servicing it, and making it grow. I had found my life's work, and I was good at it and it supported me in style. I had a weekend house on my beloved Fire Island and all the hats from Bergdorf's that I could want.

It was from this peak, with the admiration of my friends and through an office window that overlooked Fifth Avenue in New York City, that I gazed out upon the world.

One day, in August of 1970, I happened to glance out my office window and take in the view. One of the copywriters at my agency was standing beside me and his eyes followed mine, glancing out too. These weren't exactly idle glances – we'd heard that there was going to be a big parade that day and no one could help peeking out the window every once in a while to see the preparation for it on the street below. What the copywriter and I saw outside, on Fifth Avenue, were women, gathering in preparation to marching up the avenue. It was the first Women's Equity March and the crowds it was attracting, activists and on-lookers, were huge – 5,000 participants alone as it would turn out.

"Look at all of them," I said, softly, and what I was feeling as a sort of awe, I suppose, a wonder that so many women would come together on a hot summer day to draw attention to political issues that were important to them. Women's issues. Issues that impacted on the way women were able to live their lives.

Though my understanding of those issues was peripheral – what I'd read about them in the mainstream press and, therefore, meager – I felt for the first time moved by the sheer number of women out there on the street to consider that the issues on parade were, indeed, our issues.

Mine.

But, of course, that was just a ridiculous thought! I saw myself as a woman who had made it in the world. I didn't need to be liberated, I was liberated: I was at the top of a tough profession in the greatest, most unforgiving city in the world; I owned a home of my own; I dated who I liked and when I wanted to – what need did I have for a bunch of malcontents? And what was I doing \looking out the window anyway when there were projects on my desk that needed my attention? "Yeah," the copywriter returned with me to the work at hand and he scoffed, "guess they don't have anything better to do."

The copywriter was a young man whose work I respected and whom, by extension, I had also respected personally. One whom, I'd supposed, had given me respect in return. But suddenly I wasn't so sure about that. How he felt about me.

In what sort of esteem could he hold me when he could dismiss so off-handedly so many others of my kind?

Was I just the house broad then? The career gal making good in a man's world and not making a fuss about who really ran the place? Playing by the rules, careful not to overstep, eager to blend in, the token girl?

The body produces chemicals that create natural euphoria. "I have nothing better to do today," I said to the copywriter and my body kicked in to overtime assembly line mass production of those chemicals. "I think I'll go down and join them."

I left my office and I went to stand with the women in the park. I wasn't at all comfortable, at first – these were women with an agenda and, attracted as I was to the idea of it, I had no real concept of their collective politics. But I met them, and talked with them, and I exchanged stories with them as we milled about, waiting to set off. When the crowd began to move, I marched with them.

I wish I could organize into a neat package of words the thoughts that went through my mind as I worked my way along Fifth Avenue, one among thousands that day, chanting beneath unfurled banners and waving placards, clutching hands and clenching fists.

I could say that my consciousness was instantly raised, but that wouldn't begin to describe the sort of a high I was on.

I could say that all of the experiences of all of my life came together in one split second on that brilliant afternoon – all of the sexual put-ons and political slights, the sly pas de deux I'd had to perform with bosses and bankers and boyfriends for what suddenly seemed endless, aching eons – but Jane O'Reilly has already described that click moment so well, the instant the bulb finally goes on and the light's almost too bright for you to stand it. I could say that the march was a transformational experience but that phrase too is now overworked and feels inadequate to convey the sense of pride I felt that day in being a woman – how this pride was not at all an intellectual experience but one that effected my bones and my muscles and my cells. And my soul.

If, on the day of that march, I made reference to any deity it would most certainly still have been a paternal one, but I knew immediately that I had been called by some power greater than my own, to some higher purpose.

I had no way of knowing immediately what the purpose was, or the nature of the work that satisfying it would entail – that would take a few more years to become clear – but I understood even before the march had ended that my life's work was still undiscovered, ahead of me.

The copywriter who scoffed at me and got my feet moving down to the park that day must remain anonymous – I have no idea now what his name was – but I want to take this opportunity to thank him. The goddess used him as her instrument, and he was a most effective messenger.