

MARILYN ARSEM
RED IN WOODS (blood on the snow)
excerpts from audience interviews

AUDIENCE # 1
Date of event: 2/16/91
Sunset: 5:18 pm

What happened I have divided, as I've thought about it, into themes, I guess would be the word. One of them had to do with, I guess I'd call it fantasy, if you include fairy tales, and mythology and other sorts of fantasy, which is sort of obvious, or would be if you were there. And the other thing had to do with frustration and I found that the man was a frustrating experience, and some of it had to do with, for lack of a better word, loneliness, I guess. It felt lonely.

The fantasy part, the suggestive, is sort of obvious. It occurred to me, when I read your descriptions of the event in the newsletter. The title is Red in Woods and I thought of little red riding hood, and that turned out to be appropriate, but I really didn't know what I was getting into.

It began with following the red thread and that sounded like "Theseus and the Minotaur," and I think that was probably my first thought. The first thing that I encountered along the path, that I noticed anyway, as time went on I began to wonder what I had missed as I would go along... But the first one was another red thread which spiraled up around the tree trunk and it made me think of a snake, but I didn't know what to make of that. The next one was a toy red teapot which I thought was interesting, but I really didn't have any associations with that. But I could see up ahead of me a little girl, sitting on the other side of the brook, and after I negotiated the brook I spoke to her and she responded in a surprising way. She asked me if I would help her across

the brook and up the hill to her mother, and this all made me think of Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass and I thought that sort of thing was going to continue to happen. I did those things with her, and then continued on my way and I encountered other things along the way.

I think the next thing that I noticed was some red beans in a partially rotten branch or log which made me think of "Jack and the Beanstalk," but then I noticed, I guess almost out of the corner of my eye as I was about to go on, a little red container, which I opened. It contained some raspberries which I ate, all of, and I'm suddenly feeling hungry. But then I saw that I had missed behind me, because I could see it, a red spider web up in the air over my head. It was over my head, it wasn't by then, but I went back and looked at it and there were reddish stains at the bottom of the tree trunks from which it was suspended and I thought of blood and that something had been caught by the spider in the web, and had bled, and I went on my way.

And probably by this time, I can't remember all of the things, at least in order, even maybe not in order, all the things that I encountered, but pretty soon I think I came to the little table which had food set on it, and this I thought was very funny, and it also made me think of the Mad Hatter's tea party. And also somewhere along there, maybe it was at that point, I thought of Cocteau's tale of Beauty and the Beast where things would magically appear with food and other things set out for the Beauty, as she went through the palace. I had already heard, I thought I heard, cracking sounds in the wood and I thought that someone might be walking around, and stalking me, keeping an eye on what I was doing, but I could never see anyone. I went down into

this hollow and sat down at the table and had a meal which was fun and satisfying, except for the fact that it was cold and in order to negotiate the food I had to take my gloves off, and my hands got cold, but the hot tea was the best part at that point. I guess before I even sat down I began to think well maybe someone is going to join me, but I noticed there was only one chair so that wasn't too promising, but I sat in the chair and I sort of hoped for a while someone would come. I stayed there quite a while, and eventually continued on. I don't remember what the next thing that I came to was. (pause)

I tried at most points to do something, to interact somehow with what was going on, like eating the food or the raspberries. Once there was a sort of an urn or vase of a sort filled with a red powder and so I dumped some of that on the rock around to make my mark, I guess. I could see ahead of me, while I was doing something else, but I can't remember what now, a dog, and my first thought was that it was someone in a dog costume. I couldn't see very well, of course it was dusk and perhaps that was what you had in mind when you had set all of this up, that at dusk you can't see things and they become ambiguous and you're not quite sure what you're heading for.

Which reminds me, it was supposed to be done in snow filled woods, well it wasn't snow filled woods, it was snow spotted maybe, and I think that made it hard because there was several times when I lost the thread, literally. I think that if it had been on snow it would have been easier to see. But I thought the bell was a funny idea, he was barking at me, he or she, I didn't notice which for a shaggy dog and I went up and petted the dog and talked to it and it was friendly. And I checked these bones hanging over it

which were a little grisly, and, (swallows, pause) but that was...

I guess when I encountered the little girl it probably stirred up some expectation that I would encounter other people and so I looked for them when I was sitting at the table and eating and when I encountered the dog. That wasn't another person, but it was an improvement. It turned out not to be a person in a dog costume, maybe I had that association because I had hoped I would encounter someone.

And eventually there was someone, and I could see someone up ahead while I was reading a little pamphlet which had a version of the little red riding hood story, and I could see up ahead there was a person standing there in the dusk. I couldn't see very clearly but it looked like, what it made me think of was a wanderer, or maybe a traveler from a medieval story or a wizard, you know. I thought of a wizard, and I was looking forward to encountering this person.

On my way toward him or her, I lost the thread and while I was trying to find it again, (throat clear) - I don't know why I thought it was important to find it, but I did, this person suddenly went away. And because I lost the thread, I thought that maybe the thread was to go to the left where this person went behind some trees or bushes and that I was supposed to have gone that way, and would have met this person there, but the thread didn't. It went to where the person had been. When I got there he or she wasn't there, so I went to see where they had gone and I couldn't find them. I didn't look that hard, but I didn't see them.

And on the ground was a, I don't know what it was, a piece of fabric of some kind which was not red, and it was green which made me think that it had been dropped

by accident, and a cap which was reddish but was not exactly red. I didn't know whether they were there intentionally or not, or part of a game or I guess I felt at that point that maybe I wasn't quite sure what was going on, (throat clear) but I picked them up and carried them with me, I can't really say why.

The other specific time that I thought I might be about to encounter someone was when I came into the lower area where there were a number of little lamps burning. To get to it I had to go through, stoop under, some bushes and there were a number of chimes or bells hanging there which I rang. This all stirred up memories of a play, I think it's for children, which my aunt had a copy of when I was a child and used to read, and it had to do with fairies. The scene reminded me of that but I kept thinking perhaps someone will appear now among these lights but no one did and if they did I didn't see them. Every once in a while I still had the feeling that there was someone around, but that I didn't see them.

Along the way of course I left out some things I encountered and I don't know if there is any point in trying to remember them all, none of them stands out in my mind particularly. One container I found had some liver in it, which it seemed a little negative. I didn't particularly like that, and I didn't understand why it was there, and I had no associations to it except that it seemed unpleasant. (pause)

Then I came to the end and the last thing I found was a note to me saying that my car was to the right which didn't surprise me. I think I had said to you, when we got there in the car, that I had hoped you knew the way because I was lost but either, as soon as I got out of your car, or when I brought the little girl back up to

there, I saw a sign that said the Middlesex School and so I realized that we had been around a large circle and that we were back roughly where we had started, so I wasn't too surprised then that my car was near by. I took the cap and the fabric that I had picked up along the way and hung them on a tree, as my last parting contribution to the activity, before I got in the car and went off.

I think another part of the frustration didn't just have to do with feeling frustrated with no contact with people, but with the feeling that it was difficult to get involved in the event, as much as I guess I wanted to. When you were driving us to the starting point, and you and I were discussing computers and I had thought later that my head was still full of trying to install the software in my new computer and how one has to be careful and follow the rules and be meticulous about things and maybe some mind set that I had built up by first of all by doing it for several days and then by talking about it, had made it harder for me to engage things more.

For example, when I saw the person ahead was actually there, if it had dawned on me that this person might disappear, as soon as I saw him or her, I would run ahead and have kept them from getting away, but, at the point at the moment that this person left, I wasn't looking in that direction exactly and I didn't chase them but I would have otherwise, I think. And of course the whole thing was a little spooky in atmosphere and it is hard to say exactly what I would have done. (pause)

I'm trying to think of what else I can add to that but my mind is, going ahead to, you know, the next day or the day after, I'm not sure which. I think it was two days after, I came downstairs in the

morning on my way to work, or perhaps it was Sunday morning, I can't remember which morning it was, but I thought I saw through some closed blinds in the front window, someone moving around just outside the window. I went to see what was going on and there was no one there. There was this, (pauses to pull out a red scarf) which was draped on a rhododendron outside the door, and was blowing in the wind, which was why it looked like something was moving. And I thought that surely this was a coincidence. But in fact, there had been a single unmatched running shoe on the doorstep across the way from me for several days, and I didn't know why, and no one ever moved it, although the people were at home. And I thought this might be more of that, but the redness, of course, was suspicious, so I left it there to see if someone would claim it and take it away. No one did, so finally at the end of that day or the next day, I lost track of the days, I took it in.

And the next morning when I came out there was a red glove lying on the ground near the doorstep, and this I didn't think was a coincidence. Ah, so I took that in, (pause) and that was Tuesday I think. And then Tuesday night I was on my way out in the evening and decided to leave something in exchange, and I looked around for something red in the house and I couldn't find anything suitable, and finally I noticed this red envelope which a Valentine card had come in, and there happened to be some tape and scissors right at hand so I just quickly made a box and didn't know what to put in it, so I cut out a heart and put it in, in keeping with a valentine, and put it out in front and wrote "to Red" on it and sure enough, the next morning it was gone, and there were some cranberries on the ground, so I figured I was in some sort of peculiar dialogue with someone. My daughter

didn't know what to make of all this. (laughter)

Let's see so I guess last night, last night there was a snafu. I had made something else red, and let's see, (looks for something) - this is the glove - last night I still didn't have anything red but I found a sort of rubber, almost translucent pink bug, which I almost put out but it wasn't quite red and it had a few splotches of blue on it so I commandeered my daughter's fingernail polish and painted it red, and hung it on the black thread, outside the door. However, when I came downstairs this morning, it was lying on the counter in the kitchen with a note from my daughter saying, "look what our friend left us." (laughs) She had come in very late last night.

So I went outside and looked to see if anything had been left and there was nothing there and I started to hang it up again, and then decided no, that nothing was left this time, so I didn't. And then actually I looked around further from the door and didn't see anything. But when I came home for lunch during the middle of the day there were some cranberries further along in a place where I had don't walk as frequently, but there they were. My only thought about all of this was that it was somehow designed to keep me reflecting on this event until this interview tonight, and that worked pretty well for a couple of days, actually, but by yesterday it began to wear thin. (long pause) That's about all I can think of. (pause)

It was ambiguous when the glove appeared, but the funny thing is that, I'm trying to think which day, Wednesday, maybe, I was walking to work and there was another red glove lying in the gutter, out in front. I felt I had missed a day somewhere, and so I wondered if that

glove had been there and I had missed it, if it had been somewhere else and I had missed it and somehow it wound up in the gutter. Or more likely, I thought it had nothing to do with all this but it was red, and so I couldn't help noticing it.

When it was more present in my mind I would just spend a moment or two during the day thinking about the event, reflecting on it and seeing what other ideas I had about it and whether I could put it together in a cohesive way. And then it must have been Tuesday, I guess, I think it was Tuesday morning, I found the glove which confirmed something was going on. But Tuesday night after I went to bed, I lay there thinking about the thing a lot, and just sort of going over it in my head, I think I was about half asleep, but it started stirring it up and after that, I got more intrigued with playing the game of exchanging things with whoever it was and seeing what was going to be next. In other words, I became more interested in the here and now and tomorrow than in last Saturday... the area around where I live is not the same as the woods...

I'm trying to remember where it was, but once in the last couple of days I thought I heard my name called. It might have been near where I live, but I'm not sure, I think it was, and I looked around. Was it you?