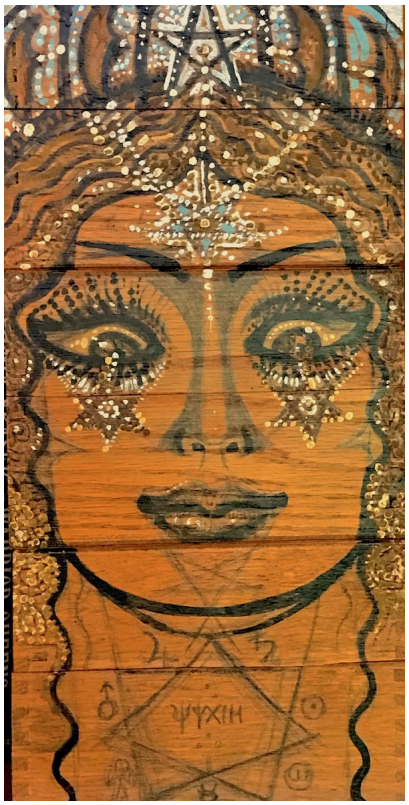



Gaia, Queen Spirit of Earth and its elements, is pregnant with the New Year and all that Spring brings. Impatient now with her winter-long underworld confinement, she is ready to burst forth. . Now the Queen of Winds softly fingers black, velvet-scaled Ash Buds. The bud endings of the twigs resemble the trident top of the Ash-rod Stang when a candle shines there, under her own softly swelling stomach. The Sacred Queen traces out the white crescent visible under the budding ends of the Ash twigs. Winds drop from the swarthy skies and whip up Ash branches and foam from ocean breakers behind the trees. The river swells to the very edges of its flood margins, where stand the wind-loving Ash trees. Sweet and salt waters swirl together in the muddy delta. Wildly the Queen stirs the winds with a black-bud-tipped wand. She glides out into the thundering tidal margin of the twisting river. Next to the river, swelling buds on tree tips ooze sweet nectar, and from the blazing crescent of her loins, amniotic liquor bursts out. The winds recklessly snatch it up into mist and carry it off to dry the land. Whirling madly, the winds tear dead branches from the groves, brandish them in air, and dash them into the mud.

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Ash whips in hand, the Queen of Winds and her entourage retreat to a little enclosed meadow the wind has cleared of water. The Faeries beat the bounds of this clearing with their Ash whips, while the Queen and her attendants prepare the center with gorgeous quilts and pillows for the orgy of birth. All the Fays lightly thrash each other and the Great Queen to hasten parturition from her straining limbs. The litter of leaves and branches tossed down by the contest of wind and water is raked into little piles all about the meadow of delivery. Then these are set afire. The smoke twists up like the heaving body of the Queen - like hungry snakes and muddy rivers, the sullen, wet plumes of soot rise heavenward. The Fays scatter the ashes to feed the drying loam.

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Some of the hardier Ashes follow the courses of Califia’s rivers even after the other water-side trees have given up. In parallel columns along the banks, they can be seen striding off into basins and plains until the very waters themselves surrender their beds. The Queen positions herself to give birth. The Fays sway as they pass their hands over the Queen. Calm energy pours through fingertips to sooth her taut flesh. Zephyrs carry the green scent of new life.

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