

The Case of the Missing Goddess

A “new mythology” detective story

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by Nathan Large



I wish I could say that case was my first missing goddess. Deities aren't supposed to go missing; they're all-powerful, right? But unfortunately, they can wander off. They get kidnapped. And sometimes, they get forgotten, misplaced by formerly loyal followers.

This missing goddess was a pretty big deal: Eostre, a goddess of Spring, the Equinox and the new Dawn. She'd left the previous year and hadn't returned for months. Some people were saying she'd been gone even longer. With her missing, the world was looking pretty grim. Grey, even. A group of concerned Nature spirits brought the case to my office, worried that they'd be frozen out forever.

I'm the guy you hire when the supernatural gets Shanghaied. The detective under the sign of the lantern. Finder of lost fleeces, apples, deadbeat tricksters... and misplaced goddesses. I took the case for no charge; after all, if the Spring never came, I'd get pretty hungry, myself.

I asked around the middle realm first, quizzing old texts, consulting spirits of memory, that sort of thing. There wasn't much to go on. The only mention I found of any "Eostre" was in the writings of an old monk, the Venerable Bede, and he was more interested in timekeeping and linguistics than tracking down a beautiful, fertile goddess.

I found another clue in her name and habits: her name, Eostre, sounded like some old words for 'dawn', 'star' or 'east'. That made sense. One of the big players, Sol... you know, Sunna, Helios, *the* Sun... was a star that rose in the east. I didn't think he... or she... would have much to share, though; pretty full of itself. But other stars followed the same route. Maybe this Eostre was hanging out beyond the horizon, in the land of the dawn?

I headed east, keeping an eye out for more leads. All around, I could see the evidence of Eostre's absence: icy ground, withered plants, and animals huddled under cover. We really needed her to show up and get to work.

I went so far east that I wrapped around to the west again, and still no sign of Eostre. She couldn't be on Earth; I didn't see any signs of Spring.

I started to think I might have to check for her in the heavens. That's no easy visit. They're still a little touchy about the whole fire ownership issue... but if I had to do it, I'd deal with the higher-ups to solve my case.

As I crossed up and out of the middle realm, I caught my first break: I spotted a borderland that was still fresh and green. In the distance, I was sure I saw a beautiful goddess enjoying the flowers.

I stopped off at the big hall in the center of the property and knocked; they let me in right away. Nice place, friendly people. After a moment, I was able to talk to the boss, Lord Ing.

“Have you seen the goddess of Spring, Eostre?” I asked him, straight up. “I see evidence you might be in contact with her.”

He laughed and explained, “We have our own sources of fertility here, but Eostre is not present. You might have mistaken her for my sister, Freo; a common mistake. I wish I could help you. Still, if no one on Earth knows where she is, then your best course is to seek into the past: the otherworld of the dead.”

Not my favorite place to travel, either, but he had a point. The memory of the Ancestors goes back further than anything I could access. I thanked the Lord and left, setting out again, this time aiming past the edge of the middle world and over.

I won't bore you with the bureaucracy I had to work through to get into the otherworld. The afterlife doesn't like living visitors, especially ones who want to leave after arrival... especially ones who want to take a passenger back when they go. I listened to five flavors of denial about how the goddess I was looking for wasn't there, she was in some other world, and so on. But my line of work carries some special privileges. Eventually, they had to let me pass.

Turns out, there are a lot of goddesses and even a few gods with winter estates down under. I found a guest suite for Inanna... already checked out. For a while, I thought my target might be moonlighting as Queen of the Dead, Persephone (alias Kore), but she, too, was on her way back upstairs. I was pretty sure that neither Mithra nor Attis nor any of the other dying-and-rising gods was my missing goddess. But they all had their marching orders; how did *they* know when to leave?

Where was Eostre? Not dead, not kidnapped by some chthonic bigshot, not wandered off and lost in the underground. There was no indication she'd been in the otherworld, at all. Either somebody was doing a damn good job of hiding her, or I was looking in the wrong place.

I headed back up, delayed again by the exit procedures. You think international flights have tough security? Try returning from the underworld.

When I got back to Earth, it was still cold. I was stumped. I thought I'd tramped all over creation, with nothing to show. Good thing I didn't give up. A migrating flight of birds tipped me off: flying south to north.

South? How'd they know it was time to leave? The same way all those goddesses and gods knew it was time to leave the underworld. Eostre. She must be around, somewhere... south!

I hurried down to the equator, and sure enough, there were already buds on the trees, grass poking up from the ground, and water flowing as it thawed. After a week hanging around the border, my patience paid off: there she was. I knew a Spring Goddess when I saw one. I caught Eostre trying to slip past, south to north.

“Where have you been?” I asked when I saw her. “There are a lot of Nature spirits worried you weren’t coming back.”

She gave me an irritated look. “I always come back. I’m a timekeeper. I go where I’m scheduled. Things have just been a little irregular, lately. I show up when I can.”

“Where *were* you, though?” I insisted. “I looked everywhere... the east, the west, the heavens, even the underworld. Nobody had seen you.”

“I didn’t go to any of those places,” she grumped. “Why does everyone assume I go up or down or west? The Spring goes from north to south and back again, and so do I. And when I travel, I use different names... whatever people in that area will recognize. I’m not going to get held up just because they don’t know who ‘Eostre’ is. I have a schedule to keep. On that note, goodbye.”

That pretty much solved my mystery. I couldn’t claim credit for “finding” Eostre, but at least I knew she was all right and on the job.

There’s *your* story: the goddess is alive and she’s always coming back... even if the schedule seems a bit off, year-to-year. Next time you or some rabbit stops by asking where the Spring went, I’ll know what to tell you: she went south for the Winter. Give her a break. She’s a busy deity.