

vision

At last Albino leads her out of endless tunnels.

"Now am I free to go?" she asks.

You've always been free," he says, "but you have more to learn.

"Can't I learn it in the sunlight?"

You have the gift of Vision. Use it as you choose.

~

Wheel. Book. Candle.

Candle. Wheel. Book.

Book. Candle. Wheel.

In her attic room, Sra searches for her Truth. Poring through a Book of Fortune, its leaves lit by a single flame. The candlestick is red. Her brain is a wheel in motion.

Wind harasses her oak outside while she snuggles deep beneath her cozy quilt to spin her dreams. Wind moans around the eaves while she plots out ways to count the stars.

Wind spreads itself like thick butter over the trees, fences and roofs of Stonybrook.

In the wind are tunnels. In the tunnels are voices. In the voices, there is Prophecy. Gathering is what this wind does best.

As wind gathers over town, Imp colours in her solitary corner of the sky. Red is for her anger. Violet for her hot tears. Numbly she rocks herself with blades of glass.

~

Imp is hanging.

Imp is hanging.

Imp is hanging.

"Is this something that I did?" Sra asks through cracked white lips. But no one answers.

Old Ones cut her down. They open up her body to hunt around inside for clues. Sew her skin flaps back together. Put the reassembled body into a rectangular container to bury in the dirt. Once and for all.

Monochromes file past. Some touch.

Men of God sit stiff, with tight faces, black suits, crossed arms.

Women of Men sit silent, their kerchiefed heads all bowed.

Nothing escapes. Nothing can escape.

Hovering in the corner of a ceiling, that is no way to live.

Overseeing bodies wrestling on a bed, that isn't any way to live.

Tightening a noose around your neck, that's just no way to live.

~

This is the way dust gathers. Here is the place.

This is how the dust becomes. This is the way.

~

"Imp's been buried," Mother reports wearily, tugging off black gloves and draping them across a chair. "She was your only friend. You should have been there for the burial. You should have come to say goodbye."

With all her might Sra bears down, shoving down her boiling rage with all her strength. "It's a good thing for that man," she says through tightly clenched teeth, "that there are more where she came from. Someone like him can always pick and choose another child. Unlike her, he has a choice."

The woman kneels at her daughter's feet and lays warm hands against her skin. "Honey," she pleads. "Look at me! Please look me in the eye! Tell me what you're saying."

"I'm saying it's a good thing for that man he has more children," Sra spits out. "He won't have to go without, now that she's been taken."

"Oh sweetie, I understand your grief. But even you must admit that sometimes you let your imagination get the best of you. You get so lost in it. It's not that I don't believe you, but you must be very careful with such accusations. Especially when they involve men in high places, like Imp's father."

"She told me herself!" shouts Sra, shaking off her Mother's hands. "She begged for me to help! I did what I could, but it was not enough. And now she's gone!"

~

Angrily, Sra calls on Albino. "I've been selfish," she tells him. "Concerning myself with Truth and tapestry and mouldy tunnels and your

foolish Prophecy. I let you lead me around in circles underground when I should have been up here, with her."

You were guided by your fate.

"I told her to have faith, and then I left her to fend off evil by herself. I let her down."

Albino shrugs. *You've done no wrong.*

"Why have you have deceived me?" Sra demands.

Deceived you? There was no deception.

"No deception! What about the time I've wasted trying to be worthy of your Prophecy? Even if it does exist, who's to say that it's the Truth?"

Albino sweeps his scornful hand across the town. *You think this is Truth?*

"There might not be only one path, that's all I am saying. It might not be as simple as yours or theirs."

Imp met her Fate. There was nothing you could have done to intervene.

"I might have helped her find another way."

Why do you refuse to understand? Fate cannot be changed.

"I don't agree," says Sra. "And I order you to leave!"

Albino pulls himself up straight. *After all I've done for you, you think you can just order me away?*

"Yes," says Sra. "That is what I think."

You're wrong. The time you had for wishing me away has passed.

Stubbornly, she shakes her head. "I order you to go!" And with a hiss, she evicts him from her grief.

~

She meets Menno at the track. He is curved and soft and coloured like a rainbow. His smile is sweet and washes off her cobwebs.

When she whispers in his ear, he giggles. ' That tickles!"

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Something about the rain, I think."

"I said let's go to the track, and run."

They fly around the oval with Sra a lap ahead.

"Wait!" he shouts after her but she just laughs.

"Catch me!" she calls back.

The second time she passes him, he stops her with his arm. "I said wait," he complains.

She shakes him off. "What's your problem?"

"I want to stop running."

"So stop."

"I want you to stop too."

"Why?"

"Because we're together."

"You can stop and watch me."

"I don't want to watch you."

"Why not?"

"If I stop, you should stop too."

"But I want to keep on running."

"Fine, then. Do it your own way."

Where are you going?"

"If you want to keep on running, go ahead," he pouts. "I'm leaving."

Sra stares after him. He may be soft and curved and real, but that is not enough.

~

Silver moonlight hits the gravel, bounces back into her eyes. It takes the shape and form of Imp. Albino chortles somewhere distant. No stars tonight, just moon. The full moon of the Equinox.

~

The sky over Stonybrook has opened up. Muddy waters flood the ditch where once a creek fed all the earth around it. Sometimes with Nature, there can be no turning back. There isn't any turning back, dead is dead.

Rain spreads mud which covers everything. Like moss growing in a rainforest, the murky blanket quickly covers the town.

Women clean. What they do best.

Men hoist. What they do best.

Sra's mother washes everything. Sheets. Pillows. Towels. Furniture. Floors and walls, until the whole house gleams.

"You could stop," Sra tells her. "It isn't going to come in here."

"But it feels so dirty," says her mother. "With all this muck around. Your sister tracks it in on her shoes."

"Make her keep her mud at her own house."

"She is my child. I can't throw her out because she brings in mud."

"She could show you some respect. But if you want to keep on cleaning after your grown-up married muddy daughter, go ahead. I can't stop you. But she's moved on. You should be free of her."

The woman glances at her child. "And you?" she asks. "When will you be moving on?"

"I don't even go outside."

"That's exactly what I mean. All you do is stare out into space." She dips her mop into the pail, wrings it, out and starts to scrub again. "What are you looking at out there? Are you ever coming back?"

"I'm sorry to offend you," says Sra stiffly. "Don't ask me to explain. But truly Mother, you can quit your scrubbing."

~

So she ignores her immobile child. Washes around her as though she is another fixture. Like a table lamp, a stool, a window seat. There is nothing she can do for her but wait it out.

Beyond the dead rose on her windowsill, Sra sees Albino walking, bent and white, leaning heavily against his staff, his magic silhouette bathed in moonlight. Then unexpectedly, he spins and waves.

Her hand drifts upward in farewell.

Between them, Imp dances on thin air.

Her hand falls.

Albino disappears.