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“When you enter”

She appeared in the middle of the Calling Ritual. The ritual was exactly for that purpose, but they had never seen it work. They circled each other, layered in tiers up the hill like a living flower. They sent out their considerable energy and song into the Calling, but never before had a person appeared in this way. Usually, people wandered in, drove or flew in, or the Lost who walked along the borders came across people, pulled them from where they had nearly taken root, and brought them to the healing pavilions. But the people they found were never the one that they called. There was no time in their world, so they could not tell how long they had called her- they simply said they called for her always.

The woman who appeared was not the one they called, but they knew their duty and stopped the Calling Ritual to care for this small piece of flotsam from the Realms of Time.

She appeared quite suddenly- one moment the rounded, grassy top of the hill was bare, and the next moment she was just...there. She was lying as though she had been there a long time and a curtain had been simply pulled aside to reveal her, clutching a spear, her eyes open wide, darting from side to side with an alarming, feverish brightness. Her clothing was drab in woodsy colors of brown and olive; she was dressed sturdily with buckles and straps holding up her skirts to reveal sturdy boots of animal hide; her garments had many deep pockets, and belts to hold weaponry. She was beautiful, in a fierce and feral way, with her tangled curls and bright, wild eyes. They did not recognize her, the girl-woman that long ago they had named Jackdaw;

they were not used to the Realms where time flowed in one direction, where people grew up and changed.

She was chattering; like a brook or a tree full of birds, she threw out sentences to the sky, sometimes grasping the air in front of her with the hand that was not holding the spear. The other hand clutched the spear tightly; she seemed to have forgotten it, but no one could pry the spear loose or open the frozen little fingers.

“They float. Burning pyres trailing up, columns of ash, a river holds their dead,” she spoke forcefully, as though trying to explain or convince. “Into the tunnels the human souls, don’t you see,” gradually, she became aware of the circle of faces leaning down over her. No one had dared to touch her after those few first attempts to remove her spear, for fear that she might lash out with that spear instinctively.

A surprisingly strong little hand grasped the deep carmine robes of a man standing nearby. “All one.” she babbled, “All one. London burning, San Francisco burning. Scenery, just folded over.” she spoke earnestly and feverishly, as though she had to communicate her message. “Seas folding, lands unfolding, the scarring by our own hands to our own bodies, *ubuuntu*. My humanity...depends on your humanity.” They tried to calm her, to soothe her- their hands fluttered gently around her; they bent and swayed like a ruddy kelp forest, distressed by this new development. There was an undercurrent of excitement, anticipation, as if all were holding their breath- they had waited for this for so long; though they had no measurement of time, they knew it had been long- this was not the one they Called, but she was a messenger of sorts, if only they could decode the message.

A woman pushed her way through, climbing the hill from the bottom of the spiraling group. She gently touched arms to move people aside, ducked between them, coming to stillness as she stood finally beside the small woman who lay crumpled on the ground.

“Jac.” her voice was a whisper, as quiet as a startled intake of breath. The girl on the ground did not loosen her hold on the man’s robe, and did not stop her feverish chatter. She spun images that dizzied the listeners. She reeled so swiftly from achingly beautiful descriptions of the most microscopic forms of life- interactions of insects so small that the human eye could not see them, or life in the depths of the sea that were unknown to the listeners- to descriptions of such immense scope, it seemed as though she were looking at the world from far away enough to see events on opposite sides of creation mirror themselves unknowing. She flashed from horror to beauty with no change in her emotions; all was expressed in an equally forceful, fervent and inspired tone.

The listeners swayed, wavered, entranced. The man whose robe the small, crumpled form grasped finally lifted her into his arms in a single swift motion. The girl did not react. She let go of his robe and gestured wildly with her hand; the other hand still clutched the spear awkwardly along her body, the hard shaft of it angling up under the man’s chin.

“Take her spear,” he said, in a quiet voice, the voice of one accustomed to being obeyed. They moved in to slide her spear from her, and none could pry open her fingers.

“Let me,” the woman, who had been standing there quietly observing all this time, bent over the girl softly and whispered in her ear, putting her hand around the girl’s on the spear.

The girl’s hand unclenched slowly, and the woman slid the spear out. The man looked at the woman sharply, his lips tightening. The woman met his gaze steadily, almost defiantly.

“She must go to isolation,” he said, “she must be drained of this. If she survives, we will hear what she can tell us.”

“No.” the woman said firmly. “she will not do well there with these visions alone. She will come live with me. I will tend her.”

“You would risk contamination?”

The woman didn't answer, but looked at him steadily. He turned and walked down the hill; people parted before his progress like gentle red flowers, some glancing shyly at the girl, others moving closer to stare more boldly at her feverish, staring eyes. She talked all the way down the hill, her voice jarring in the stillness. The woman followed their progress with hard eyes, her hands clenched around the spear. Her jaw was tight, but her brows smooth and determined. She lifted her chin, picked up the spear in one hand and the trailing skirts of her russet robe in another, and started down the hill after the silent crowd. They did not speak; in an almost eerie silence, they drained off the hill like a pool of water reflecting the red of the setting sun, flowing to the village, their robes rustling softly.

The woman watched as the man, with his still-gesticulating burden, branched off from the group and followed the leaf-strewn path through the trees that led to a small, sturdy cottage. Isolation. The girl would be placed on a comfortable bed; she would be visited once daily to make sure she had adequate nourishment and her linens changed; she would be cared for physically but left completely alone, the solid door barred until they deemed that her “madness” has passed.

The woman's hands clenched. Jac. She had known her right away, even if the girl hadn't been carrying her spear. “Cora.” She tried out her old name softly, as she opened the door to her

building and stepped inside. The word sat oddly on her tongue, but it awakened many memories that had long lay dormant. Whispering her old name to herself was like coming on a favorite sweater in an attic trunk; the sound of it unlocked the door to a flood of things she had forgotten.

Other women slept and lived in the building, so she entered quietly; people in this society were seldom alone, as a “safety” measure. Cora, as the herbalist, was at least granted a workroom with a bed- she had a room of her own, a thing unheard of in the Village (as they called it) except for those with professions that were useful to all.

She hurried up to her loft, only letting out her breath when she had shut the door softly between herself and the others in the house. She moved her hands up and down the very familiar wooden haft of the spear, seeing how it had changed with Jac’s use. The corners of her mouth lifted slightly, her eyes softened. Jac. Here again. She wasn’t sure what she- no, what the two of them- would do; she had no plan, but they would figure it out together. She would not leave Jac in that cottage, isolated, for Jac was in great danger now.

Cora propped the spear against the wall where the open door would conceal it if someone were to come into her room. Zimri would, of course, remember the spear, but Cora didn’t want to worry about that just yet.

She unfastened her robe and shook it out, hanging it on a hook beside the door. She had useful, plain grey clothing, such as they all wore. It saved a lot of time not having to choose garments, but sometimes Cora missed the color and texture of different fabrics, the self-expression in such choices. She shook her head, a puff of laughter escaping her lips- Jac was here, and she was standing around reminiscing about clothing? There was work to be done.

Cora bustled to her workbench, taking down dried herbs from where they hung along the window, busying herself with bottles, jars, and a bunsen burner; her hands moved swiftly and surely, and soon her jaw unclenched and the tension around her eyes relaxed in the soothing, familiar movement. She would not leave Jac in that cottage. She would bring her here. That, at least, was a beginning.