

Carts rolled by lazily, their wheels scattering flecks of iridescent dust, sparkling blues and reds and greens in alternating hues. Pedestrians lurched between the carts, heavily overburdened with reinforced packs, tottering and speaking angrily in alien tongues. Haim curled up in a pile against the curved arch of a doorway as though he were nestled in bed, smiling out at the market's insanity. Two weeks of unshaved fuzz girded his balding pate; dirt and spilled wine mottled his robes; his sandals were in tatters. A policeman walked by and gave him a respectful nod, bouncing with each step a foot into the air as though supported by pneumatic springs. *He must be on the journey*—Haim could hear the man's thoughts, even when he could barely hear his own against the background clatter.

Little birds began to gather about his feet, chattering in their own private language, eyeing him dispassionately. A few picked at small fragments of stone around his feet, and he kicked at them lazily. A slightly larger bird shuffled to the front of the gaggle, and began picking at the stones, directly where he had just kicked. Haim took another swig of his wine, and felt the lukewarm liquid slide all the way down his esophagus into his stomach. The corners of his vision began to blur and vibrate in strange colors. *Nearly there*. He swiped his foot at the bigger bird, and the tip of his sandal brushed its feathers. *Fuck you*, the bird thought. *So you do speak my language*, he responded. The bird twittered something unintelligible to its compatriots and flew off. *We all do*, whispered the stones, in their rumbling, laconic voices. *We're all here with you, we always have been*. Haim smiled to himself and snuggled closer to the stone arch next to him, feeling as though the universe was embracing him.

"Just one more and we'll be there," he said to no one in particular, as he reached into his threadbare sack and produced another berry.

"Where?" Startled, he turned to find a small girl with opaline eyes gazing at him.

"Everywhere, of course!" The girl seemed unimpressed. She stood up without breaking her gaze and watched as he plopped the berry into his mouth, savoring its chocolatey flavor, and rose.

"Can I have one?"

"Only initiates can have these, and besides, it was my last one." He took another swig of wine, and fumbled in his bag for another sticky patch, which he carefully affixed to the pock-marked skin along his left flank with the others. "You can have some wine if you want though," he said, offering the ceramic jug down to the girl, who he only just realized wasn't there.

The patch's chemical electricity surged into his veins and it was night but it wasn't the market anymore and there weren't streets, but rather only night and he smiled to himself because *I made it, even when those other fuckers couldn't and they said it wouldn't work* but he rather tried to smile because smiling doesn't mean much when you don't have muscles and he tried to think *but thinking doesn't mean much when there's nothing but thought and what's the difference between your thoughts and anything else when there isn't anything there in the first place. When the barren substrate of consciousness envelops your being and drags you down with a vestibular lurching horror that is no longer yours to control and the sensation and smell and character of vomit enters your being and becomes what had previously been you and the blackness itself vibrates with malevolent hatred at the horror of the abuses you have inflicted upon yourself, when emptiness itself reaches out and grasps your throat and shakes you violently and screams into your face at the abject disgust of your condition, what's the difference between your thoughts and anything else in the first place.* Wake up. I need you.

Haim awoke on the market cobblestones looking into the faces of concerned passersby, their thoughts no longer intelligible. He felt shockingly sober and surprisingly fresh, given that his robes were coated in a green vomit that vibrated in faint yellow-purple overtones.