

From *Ceremony* (Leslie Marmon Silko)

Long time ago
in the beginning
there were no white people in this world
there was nothing European.
And this world might have gone on like that
except for one thing:
witchery.

This world was already complete
even without white people.
There was everything
including witchery

Then it happened.
These witch people got together.
Some came from far away
across oceans
across mountains.
Some had slanty eyes
others had black skin.
They all got together for a contest
the way people have basketball tournaments nowadays
except this was a contest
in dark things.

So anyway
they all got together
witch people from all directions
witches from all the Pueblos
and all the tribes.
They had Navajo witches there,
some from Hopi, and a few from Zuni.
They were having a witches' conference,
that's what it was
Way up in the lava rock hills
north of Cañoncito
they got together
to fool around in caves

with their animal skins.
Fox, badger, bobcat, and wolf
they circled the fire
and on the fourth time
they jumped into that animal skin.

But this time it wasn't enough
and one of them
maybe a Sioux or some Eskimos
started showing off.
"That wasn't anything,
watch this."

The contest started like that.
Then some of them lifted the lids
on their big cooking pots,
calling the rest of them over
to take a look:
dead babies simmering in blood
circles of skull cut away
all the brains sucked out.
Witch medicine
to dry and grind into powder
for new victims.

Others untied skin bundles of disgusting objects:
dark flints, cinders from burned hogans where
the dead lay
Whorls of skin
cut from fingertips
sliced from the penis end and clitoris tip.

Finally there was only one
who hadn't shown off charms or powers.
The witch stood in the shadows beyond the fire
and no one ever knew where this witch came
from

which tribe
or if it was a woman or a man.
But the important thing was
this witch didn't show off any dark thunder
charcoals
or red ant-hill beads.
This one just told them to listen:
"What I have is a story."

At first they all laughed
but this witch said
*Okay
go ahead
laugh if you want to
but as I tell the story
it will begin to happen.*

*Set in motion now
set in motion by our witchery
to work for us.*

*Caves across the ocean
in caves of dark hills
white skin people
like the belly of a fish
covered in hair.*

*Then they grow away from the earth
then they grow away from the earth
then they grow away from the plants and the
animals.*

*They see no life
When they look
they see only objects.
The world is dead for them
the trees and rivers are not alive
the mountains and stones are not alive.*

*The deer and bear are objects
They see no life.*

*They fear
They fear the world.
They destroy what they fear.
They fear themselves.
The wind will blow them across the ocean
thousands of them in giant boats
swarming like larva
out of a crushed ant hill.*

*They will carry objects
which can shoot death
faster than the eye can see.
They will kill the things they fear
all the animals
the people will starve.*

*They will poison the water
they will spin the water away
and there will be drought
the people will starve.*

*They will fear what they find
They will fear the people
They will kill what they fear.*

*Entire villages will be wiped out
They will slaughter whole tribes.*

*Corpses for us
Blood for us
Killing Killing Killing Killing*

*And those they do not kill
will die anyway
at the destruction they see*

*at the loss of the children
the loss will destroy the rest.*

*Stolen rivers and mountains
the stolen land will eat their hearts
and jerk their mouths from the Mother.*

*The people will starve.
They will bring terrible diseases
the people have never known.
Entire tribes will die out
covered with festered sores
shitting blood
vomiting blood.
Corpses for our work*

*Set in motion now
set in motion by our witchery
set in motion
to work for us.*

*They will take this world from ocean to ocean
they will turn on each other
they will destroy each other*

*Up here
in these hills
they will find the rocks,
rocks with veins of green and yellow and black.
They will lay the final pattern with these rocks
they will lay it across the world
and explode everything.*

*Set in motion now
set in motion
To destroy
To kill
Objects to work for us
objects to act for us
Performing the witchery*

*for suffering
for torment
for the still-born
the deformed
the sterile
the dead.
Whirling
whirling
whirling
whirling
set in motion now
set into motion.*

*So the other witches said
“Okay you win; you take the prize,
but what you said just now--
it isn't so funny
It doesn't sound so good.
We are doing okay without it
we can get along without that kind of thing.
Take it back.
Call that story back.”*

*But the witch just shook its head
at the others in their stinking animal skins, fur
and feathers.
It's already turned loose.
It's already coming.
It can't be called back.*