



Painted Cave

I left them long ago; and they didn't even notice.
I stayed behind just enough, enough to make them laugh;
when the monsters were laughing they weren't dangerous,
and so the best part of me could escape into the dark

and go deep: until there was simply a light like a candle,
searching every winding tunnel and every plunging abyss;
step by step, leaving the monsters behind
and down here grew the child that none of them missed.

Down here in the dark, my shadow self,
stayed secret and awake and alive.
While in the light, well; I became what I needed to become
in order to survive,

survive this unfair, unforgiving life,
living a lie rather than the truth face.
But I worked so hard, pretending to be like everybody else,
I forgot who I was; I became my disgrace,

became lost in a role that was written for me,
a toothless jester waiting in the shadow,
hovering for scraps of approving laughter;
but there was another me that they did not know.

Deep, down in the dark, a lost fey child
discovered a whole kingdom underground;
there in the very bones of the earth
the runaway was spellbound

by paintings - of people - and birds - and beasts,
the rock was covered in ancient art,
telling tales told from before there were words -
just images flickering in the dark.

Great animals charged hunters who threw back spears,
on the rough stone whole generations lived and died,
and everywhere, the shapes of hands, outlined in red and ochre
reached out, brushing time aside.

The hands that had once touched the stone,
now reached out to me.

The rock that heard the old stories first,
now heard the plea

of a lonely child, scattered and lost,
a refugee from fear and fright,
and the darkness became - soft, -
and in the flickering light

beasts moved - and breathed - and lived -
and bellowed and roared and ran
and a figure crowned with horns, impossibly tall,
summons lightning with both hands.

And these are the dreams of the jester,
sleepwalking his life; lost in the light;
sleep brings these whispers from the shadow twin
telling stories of painted nights.

And dream by dream, they discover each other,
each a stranger in their own land,
reaching out, in the dark, trusting
that they'll find each other's hands,

as they walk away from the past
by doing the unthinkable;
abandoning the role of their lifetime,
becoming themselves, and so becoming invisible

to the monsters who never knew them,
and who don't want to understand,
why their jester would leave them -
for a cave of painted hands.

That journey into the endless dark,
helpless, naked and exposed
is what the monsters are most afraid of,
and so, to them, the cave is closed.

And the memory of monsters fades, like a scar,
into the past
of a fey dreamer who paints silhouettes of hands
on the walls of the cave of the painted dark.

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