

Zlata Ruznikova Perenel, The Weaver

(8733.1 / Helen Diggle)

You find yourself walking in an unfamiliar city. Tall buildings of brick, stone, and wood rise around you, creating a sharp-cornered maze. The road beneath your feet is sometimes cobbled, sometimes paved with regularly-cut rectangles of stone, sometimes naught but waterlogged mud. You're alone, but you can sense people around you. As if you are moving through the ghost of a crowd the memory of an unseen, unfelt, bustling population. Above, between the roofs, you can see stars. Thousands of them, more stars than you have ever seen in the night sky before. They're brighter than you've ever seen them, a spray of different colours that sparkle and twinkle like precious jewels scattered carelessly across a sable cloth. You fancy that each one is connected to one or more of its neighbours by a barely visible line of metallic colour – copper, bronze, gold, silver. Like gazing up at a vast net.

Then, creeping gently from the alleyways, and the windows and doors, drifting down from the rooftops, squeezing up through the cracks... mist. Pale, pearlescent mist swirling between old stones. The mist coils and twists between the buildings, like fingers caressing a the cold, dead face of a drowned lover pulled from the lake. It insinuates itself everywhere, touching your face, your hands, your feet with the same insistent uncurious intensity it touches the walls, the cobbles, the roofs. The same soft, unhurried way it extinguishes the light.

As the mist continues to shift and surge you are struck by the awful realisation that you might have forgotten any number of things. How would you know, if you'd forgotten them? Could you mark an absence with any confidence?

All you know for certain is that you are alone out in the dark, who knows where, surrounded by walls of mist that press slowly, gently closer with each shallow breath you take.

It is time to move. You step forward, unsteadily at first and then with greater confidence, You cannot quite remember where you came from, how you got here, or where you are going but you know for a fact that you are going somewhere and that you will meet an old friend there. You have not seen them in several years – not since they died.

As you pass between the boundary stones – each one half a head taller than you, marked with a patina of the ages – you trade a muted outline of ... something... with your finger. You think it might once have been a crude carving of dancing figures, but now it is just blurred lines and the suggestion of frenzied, unsettling movement.

The stone is dry under your finger. You expected it to feel damp. Mist-soaked as it is.

There is a path once you are between the stones. The mist presses even closer, but stops at the edges of the path. Without quite registering, your mind accepts that there are tiny

shapeless stones marking the edges of the path. Dozens of them, close enough that you could barely slip your thumb between them.

The path winds through the streets of the village, with thatched houses to either side. You vaguely recognise the place – perhaps you grew up here or perhaps it is the place where you live now or... it's hard to remember and probably doesn't matter exactly where it is. One village is just like another when you cannot see the people. The mist presses in close enough that you imagine you are in a tunnel made of white sheets and for a moment you have a sudden unexpected awareness of having been her before – of having a memory of having been in a place like this before now. Then the memory is gone.

The path winds, and you wind with it. You become aware that there is something in the mist with you. Something large, and predatory. The stink of it assails your nostrils, a shaggy, furry beast. A sleek monster, ready to strike. You pick up your pace, but at the back of your mind you know you can't outrun it. It has your scent, now. It is coming for you.

Ahead, through the mist, you see fingers of stone. Smooth, carved stone shaped by a knowing hand. Columns of white granite that thrust impudently up toward the invisible skies. You move faster, with a half-formed certainty that if you reach that place you will be safe from whatever is hunting you.

The pillars mark the frontage of a cyclopean old structure. Carved steps pass between them, to an open doorway. Beyond the doorway there is light – silvery, shifting, not entirely welcoming. Cold. You step through, and behind you echoes a roar of something terrible, suddenly cut off. Within moments the memory of everything prior to passing those gates seems muted, as if it happened to someone else years ago.

Now you are in a great echoing hall – out of the mist at last although there is a peculiar optical illusion that makes you briefly question whether you are really out of the mist or whether everything around you – all the columns and stones and the half-visible statues of hooded figures, each one bearing an unlit lantern raised in their left hand as if they are looking for something – are really there at all or whether you are still out in the mist.

There is a circular stone well towards one end of the great chamber, and you can see that the silvery light comes from it. Leaning over the well, peering into it, is a figure wrapped in a tattered white robe. They turn as you approach, with a gentle sound half surprise and half satisfaction. They seem familiar yet at the same time you are certain you have never met them before. You would remember if you had – their features are very striking.

(Although, let us be clear, if you tried to describe them, any detail of them save their tattered white robe, you would falter after a moment and fall silent, frowning perhaps, wracking your brain for the right words and finding them eerily absent).

You talk, a little. About... things? About... is it magic? Is it about magic that you talk? It seems so immediate and intense in your memory – the knowledge that you spoke at length about arcane topics, both of you animated and excited. Yet when you try and remember exactly what you spoke about, when you try to summon back one word of it, it all falls apart in your hands.

After... a pleasant evening of chatter and swapping stories about... things... your host offered to share something with you. You remember nodding, and offering to share something in your turn, as is only fit, probably the contents of the peculiar silver flask you don't remember picking up but which now weighs heavily in your pocket. With one hand they reach down into the waters of the silver pool – like mercury, like quicksilver the waters ripple and flow – and draw up a handful, offering it toward you, perhaps to drink, perhaps to anoint yourself.

Then it fractures – all the liquid at once breaks apart in a thousand thousand fluttering wings. Ivory white, dust white, snow white, milk white moths. Untold numbers of them fluttering up from the figure's hand, from the well, a cloud of beating wings. They brush your face, leaving the finest tracery of mothpollen there. They crowd you, forcing you to avert your head, to cover your eyes. The noise is barely audible and thunderous at the same time. You dare not open your mouth for fear the moths will...

Effect: Until the start of the next Profound Decisions Empire event you can perform the rituals Cast Off the Chain of Memory (Night/4), Infant Starts with a Blank Slate (Night/12), and Transmogrification of the Soul's Echo (Night/60) as if you had mastered them; if you have already mastered this ritual, you may perform it as if you have one additional rank of Night magic. You should keep this vision and show it to a referee if you perform this ritual.

Roleplaying effect: When you wake up, you are aware that you have forgotten something. Something important, but you cannot (of course) remember what. That certainty will fade a little as time passes, but won't go away entirely until you next experience restful sleep. Furthermore, for the rest of the day you will find that you have forgotten little details. Names, what you were planning to do, certain words. Your conversation will falter and fall silent, as the words you were about to speak run out of you like water from a sieve.