

Emotion's Journey

I stagger to my knees, feeling the stickiness of blood as rocks thrust themselves beneath my sunburned skin. Sweat blurs my vision, and the dozens of blisters that pierced my feet with bitter stings split open in a hot, bloody agony. I swipe at my watering eyes, looking for a place to rest, because if I don't rest, I'm certain to collapse into a defeated misery. A silvery shimmer in the distance sends Relief, in a pale green dress, a wreath of gold atop her blond tresses, dashing towards me, lifting me up, and I stumble desperately towards it, already imagining the coolness of clear water streaming down my parched throat. As I let myself fall to my elbows before the dent in the earth, I cry out with utter dismay and Despair glides in front of me, her dreary gray garments swirling in the dust, her long dark hair hanging in a curtain down her back as Relief falls into nothing. The shimmer is nothing more than a vision of heat to a weary soul. My eyelids close. With or without water, I need rest. I let myself sink into darkness. As I always do, I strain my mind for memories. When I'm alone, and it's very quiet like right now, I can catch far away glimpses of my parents when I was very young. My mother laughing and dancing around the kitchen, my father grinning broadly, sweeping me high into the air, me, squealing with delight. Both teaching me things every day, like where rainbows come from, how *asha* is Swahili for hope, how hedgehogs don't like heat, and me giggling at all the random information I learn every day. A faint smile tugs at my dry lips, causing a flicker of pain, and, sitting up, I am reminded of where I am, and I realize I have silent tears spilling down my flushed face. *Still*, I think *all this will soon be over, one way or another*. I sink back down, this time into a thoughtless sleep.

My eyes flutter open, and though hunger still tears at my stomach, and my dusty throat seems to twist in anguish, a tiny amount of strength has returned to my shaky legs, and I push myself up. How long has it been since I had water? Two days? From behind me Panic grips my

arm tightly, her pale face going paler, her pastel dress hanging in tatters. After how far I had come, to die of thirst... “No!” I say aloud, though it hurt to speak, jerking away from Panic.

“Come on Ruby!” I tell myself fiercely. Then, turning to no one in particular I add, “I *will* make it, just you wait!” To whom I am telling this to with so much confidence I’m not sure, as Panic has slunk away. But I make myself walk again, trying to ignore the pain that flares with each step. As I walk, I force myself to think of something other than my pain and exhaustion. As it often does, my mind drifts to why I’m here, so that I don’t have to think about the agony. I was a young, frightened child in a train station, the surly policeman snarling at me, demanding where my parents were. I was ten years old, staring out the orphanage window undecided whether to go out and play because my black eye had just barely healed. I was eleven, the orphanage director gently shoving me towards the thin-lipped woman, commanding me,

“Go on Ruby. You get a new home now.” I was thirteen, the thin-lipped woman shrieking insults as I stood meekly beside the shattered vase. I was fifteen, taunts of my parents ringing in my ears. I was screaming, crying, fleeing, desperate to get away. Sensibility, in her plain dress, and neat, but ugly hair, barely able to thrust a sack of essentials into my arms. Rage and Fury, clad in fiery gowns, hurtled after me as I ran towards the village, their footsteps pounding in my ears. And then, there it was. Shimmering with possibility. The gorgeous sea of frozen gold promising freedom, and a memory pushed its way through my frenzied thoughts.

“It’s true, there’s magic at the end of the desert.” The villagers told everyone. “All your greatest desires become reality. You just have to reach it.” So, despite Sensibility pleading me to stay, I took off, scrambling over the sand dunes. Once I was out of sight of the little town, the very air seemed to hum with magic, the golden sand sparkling, the few cacti and even tumbleweeds, glowing with their dusty colors. But after the first day, I had stopped admiring it

and began loathing it. The weeds, hard dirt, and sand dunes that were extremely difficult to scale. I almost turned back once. Almost. But I didn't. And so here I am. But something worse pounded against me. Pounds against me now. Something worse than anything else. Doubt. Deformed and hideous, clothed in rags, she hisses in my ear, taunting me, and telling me I can't. And I start listening. What if I don't find anything? What if I never came to the end of the desert, and collapse with exhaustion and fatigue, unable to go on? Or perhaps I will reach the end, and there will be nothing there. Then I would die. Alone.

"No!" I cry aloud. "I won't!" And I would have kept shouting defiance to the desert if my throat wasn't so dry and sore that it felt like it could split open. But Doubt drifted away, leaving me alone again. I kept walking, wincing with every step, and thought about the end. *Soon*, I thought. *Soon I'll be there, and everything will be alright.....*

After another night on the cracked, tortured ground, I continued walking, hardly able to slide one foot in front of the other. Today, however, I can feel it. Death is inching towards me, her eyes dark depths in her chalk-white face, her midnight hair flowing in thick coils, her pallid dress curving in slow, sweeping twists. Doubt is stalking me again, and as I stagger on, occasionally sinking to the ground, I feel Death lay her cold fingers on my neck, the other brandishing her sickle.

"Not yet!" I gasp. "Please, I'm almost there!" Death narrows her eyes at me, but I slip through her grasp, treading on, and on, and on. And then, I see a fragment of white in the distance, shimmering like a pearl. Hope, in a flourish of white lace, her dark curls adorned with calla lilies, nearly chokes me as she grips me. Death stalks sulkily behind. As I near my destination, Joy, in a light dress of gleaming pearl, copper hair rippling, and crowned by ferns and flowers, along with Relief, dance beside me, while Doubt fades away. Finally, I am there.

Tears flow down my face. While gazing eagerly around at the radiant flowers, sparkling water, and trees bejeweled with lustrous fruit, I feel a hand on my shoulder. And, turning, I fall, sobbing, into my mother's arms, while my father hugs us both.

“You're home Asha.” He whispers.