



Parting ways...

"Don't make me do this, Phyllo!" said Bob.

"I'm not making you do this. I don't make you do anything. I just point out the way you should go. No more no less. You know what will happen if you defy me," said Phyllo.

"I know what will happen if I let that little girl stay with them," said Bob.

"You're so sure that you'll throw away everything? Even your chance of finding your brother?" said Phyllo.

"I was never meant to find my brother, was I?" said Bob.

"No," said Phyllo.

"Guides don't give answers," said Bob.

"I'm not your guide any more," said Phyllo. Large, fat tears fell from his eyes. Bob had never seen Phyllo cry before this time. With his bare feet dragging the cuffed and unwashed overalls he took one step aside. Voices in his head echoing, *sacrifice yourself, save her, don't do this you'll just become like Alex. You should have never let her go.* He stepped out and crossed Phyllo's path. He wasn't sure if he was doing the right thing but he could feel the voices cheering somewhere in his mind. One voice screaming no. He turned his head to look at Phyllo and asked him one more question.

"You've made your decision now you must live with it for as long as you can. Don't waste your moments questioning a decision you've already made. None of us know how many grains, how many moments you have. Those moments are yours and yours alone use them wisely," said Phyllo.

Back inside...

"Mama, I was just a lookin!" shouted a little boy. He was being pulled away from the bordello tent by his ear.

"Edgar, you keep moving. I told you young men don't go to places like that," said the woman. The boy brushed past Bob standing in front of the bordello tent. Faint hints of disinfectant and cheap perfume caught his nose on the breeze.

Back at the bordello Alice and the other girls stood before the opening. They were ordered to stand in a line and pose before the onlookers. Alice watched as men carrying folded robes walked out among the crowds. She quickly noticed with slight hand gestures some men, for a small price, were

quietly handing out the robes to the more leery lecherous men. She even saw one tell his wife that he needed to use the outhouse only to double back to purchase a robe. The hooded robe covered a man's entire body. Some men just entered the tent without a robe. One of them shouted, "Save your money for the whores you fucking cowards."

Alice stared at Bob. The look of malice she gave radiated heat. One of the handlers came by and asked Alice to change her attitude. Alice just stared back at him. Even the handler backed down for a few seconds, before pressing something hard into her back that made her wince. Bob took half a step forward before he stopped. He waited for the ladies to enter the tent. Making a quick hand gesture he purchased a robe and entered.

Old friends...

Alex wiped his brow and his lips nervously. He still had mud stains on his knees from the urine puddle. "So how have you been little buddy?" said Alex, trying to sound casual.

"I've gone through two others," said Phyllo.

"So you're answering my questions. Means you won't take me back. God dammit I could use a smoke. Any chance one of those string pullers brought that into the world yet?" said Alex.

"No. Do you think you'll let entropy take you now?" asked Phyllo.

"You ask that so casually. Easy for you a creature that doesn't die... You know we're born wanting to stay alive. And all you fucking guides ask us to do is sacrifice it all for the hope that it will all work out in the end. I don't know why I should believe, you don't even give us reason to believe. You just ask us to believe and you give us a direction like God's personal windup toy. Fuck you!"

Alex got up and walked towards the the dragons and horses. Phyllo padded his little feet behind. He had that far-off dreamy smile stare. Alex so wanted to smack the smug contentment off his face. Reaching his powder blue Ford Alex realized that the hourglass was sitting on the hood, the bottom portion still filled with shiny sand. He reached over to take the glass and turn it over. "May I reap the moments I have sown," said Alex. The glass didn't turn over. Trying with both hands Alex could feel his muscles straining to move the glass. He simply couldn't turn the hourglass over.

"That is a defiled piece. You can't simply spin it over and reverse the damage you've done. You can go back and right the wrongs which you have done. But you know that it is easy as forcing each grain of sand back up through the hourglass by hand. It can be done. I am willing to show you the way," said Phyllo. He reached out his knobby little fingers towards Alex. Those oversized puppy dog gray eyes stared into Alex's.

Alex picked up the hourglass. He opened the clasp at the bottom. Sparkling shiny sand poured in from the opening. He held as much of it in his hand as he could and closed the bottom with his thumb. Precious tiny grains slipped through his fingers. He smiled at his fistful of moments. With his other hand he opened the top. Staring at Phyllo, Alex smiled. Phyllo just tilted his head to one side and waited. The smile vanished from Alex's face. He moved his hand full of shiny sand towards the opening. The shiny sand flared into brilliance in his hand. Alex watched as the fingernails on his hands grew out 7 inches and his knuckles withered. The skin turned into translucent paper as liver spots and moles sprouted like mushrooms. Alex set the hourglass on the ground careful not to break it as his hand aged 30 years in a

matter of seconds. As soon as he was sure the hourglass was safe he flung the dark sand onto the ground. It melded into the ground instantly. A patch of fresh green grasses sprouted from the ground. A start of a sapling and all sorts of insects paraded on their new found oasis of life. Alex watch the spot of concentrated life grow before his eyes.

Phyllo walked over towards it. He bent his little face down and inhaled the fresh air. "After the entropy comes new life. But entropy doesn't understand. Entropy is a snake eating its own tail thinking that it will eventually be satisfied," said Phyllo.

"You called me an agent of entropy. So I'm an agent that brings on new life," said Alex. He had a slight smile on his face. He gave out a little smoker's cough.

"No, you give the death that comes before new life. You just don't realize that even entropy has to die," said Phyllo.

"So why don't you kill me?" asked Alex.

"That's not my role," said Phyllo.

"When I first met you I thought you were an angel. I thought you are here to take me out of purgatory to heaven. Because I believe in Jesus Christ deep down in my heart and I thought I would be saved," said Alex. "I thought it was funny that you had insect wings. I realize now that an angel must be some kind of creature that is attracted to the smell of the shit God crapped on us all."

"Don't be so melodramatic, Alex. The only time you ever went to church was when your mom forced you. You hated every minute of it. You wore crosses because they were fashionable and everybody in your hometown had the 'Jesus Saves' bumper sticker. You believed in the lotto tickets you bought more than you believed in God," said Phyllo.

"You know I liked you a lot better when you didn't answer questions and you were just full of mysteries," said Alex.

The other side of velvet...

Men, some of them still in robes, wandered about the walls dragging their fingers across the dark sweat stained fabric. He could see unshaved, unwashed bodies mouth words into the cloth. They ran their tongues across the cloth trying to whisper sick words to the women on the other side. In the back Bob could see two men with the hooded robes pulled over their faces. Their hands were in each other's robes, feverishly manipulating one another. Bob looked for Alice but couldn't find her. He tried to make his way to an opening to the other side. He was stopped by a fat man. "This side's for customers the other side's for staff only. Don't like it, I will throw you out," said the fat man.

Bob looked up and down the wall and scanned for an opened place. The fabric stunk of bad breath and fluids Bob didn't like thinking about. He couldn't find an opening to look through. He tried calling for Alice. One girl on the other side said, "I'm Alice. I will take care of you. It will just cost 100 grams." A small hand reached out thought the velvet to touch Bob's member.

Bob knew this wasn't his Alice. It didn't even sound like Alice. He stepped back from the wall. A man walked up beside Bob. He put his fingers to his lips. "Keep your mouth shut and I'll let you go

next," said the farmer as he produced a pocket knife. He cut a small opening in one of the folds. He lowered his britches and put himself through. Bob could see by the way he bunched the fabric around him he was hiding what he had done. He reached up holding a small red pouch marked with K1 on it. It was a 1 kilogram bag. There wasn't actually a kilogram of shiny sand in it. All it contained a lead key. Each key was marked individually and serialized. The key represented one promise of 1,000 grams to whoever held it. It didn't take long for him to get a woman interested and by his motions Bob could tell what he was up to.

Bob didn't want to watch this. He turned away and saw a man approaching him. The man had a club in his hand. "I'm not with..." was all Bob got out before the club came swiftly down on his skull. His vision unfocused and then went to black.

The rippist...

Alice wandered the halls. Trying to find a way out. Looking for the walls that didn't have dirty farmers on the other side of them. Alice found several girls gathered around one specific spot in the wall. She could tell what they were getting up to. She could see by the one's gathered dress what was happening. Alice made eye contact with the gathered women. One of them made a move to grab Alice. Alice turned and rounded the corner at a run, knocking the madame off her feet. Indignant, the old woman stood up and seized Alice by one of the childish braids they'd put in her hair. She turned her head and marched her back towards the group of women. The women scattered like birds, leaving the man still hanging out of the hole in the wall. He was unsatisfied and was loudly whispering words of protest. The madam walked up and quickly seized a hold of his manhood. She was gently satisfying him with her hand speaking words of kindness in a voice of innocence. With her other hand she made hand gestures to staff members. An impossibly old hunchbacked woman padded over at a flat-footed run. She produced a curved needle and some thread. With an odd grace and a face of pure focus, she quickly began to sew the man into the fabric. The motions of the needle were timed perfectly with the madam's manipulations. Alice marveled at the how little blood there was. She also marveled that it took five stitches before the man knew what was happening. Only then he began to struggle to pull away. Alice saw as a body pressed against his back pushing him against the fabric, blocking his escape. Alice could see the man violently shake his head back and forth against the fabric. She could hear the wild shouts and pleas coming from him. In only a few minutes it was done and his member was securely sewn neatly into the wall.

"You can enjoy yourself one more time before we remove you from this establishment," said the Madam. Alice could see a set of hands curl around the man's shoulders and hips as he hugged closely to the fabric. He trying keep from being pulled from the cloth.

"I have strayed from the path laid out before me. I have seen the the faults within myself and pray that you show mercy on me so that I may stay off the restricted route in my life. Let me walk forth a changed man. I shall heed the legend, know my key, and I will know the words of my index. Though the scale of my crime is huge, let me walk forth a changed man. Not in the body but in the spirit. So that I may evangelize against the wrong I have done," shouted the man.

From around the corner five women came holding candles. In a sweet voices they sang,

The stitches in your cock will pop right out, pop right out, pop right out.
The stitches in your cock will pop right out and you'll never do that again.

The sound of your screams will echo through the tent, echo through the tent, echo through the tent.
The sound of your screams will echo through the tent and you'll never do that again.

Alice tried not to watch. Scarlet grabbed her head and twisted it to watch. "I was going to be the next one at the opening. I was going to make a lot of money. I will just take what you've made today and the next day until I decide we're even. Remember, this girls who run and tell the Madam about things they have no business suddenly don't have tongues to satisfy their clients with," said Scarlett.

"Why didn't he just go to the room further down the hall? There he could do anything he wanted to," said Alice.

"Because, they charge twice as much and then they want a cover fee on top of that. Ladies only get half the money the gentleman pays. The house keeps the rest. I could've made quite a bit of money off of that opening today. But it will be a long time before any man dares to try this again," said Scarlett.

Alice could see the man fighting his natural urges. But the madam's skill was greater than his control over his own nature. As soon as the first drops of his seed plopped on the carpeted floor he was pulled away.

There are sounds in this world that aren't meant for humans. The sound of burning frost in the morning is a sound only meant for the insects that crawl on the ground. The eerie echo of wind through a canyon reflected off of large wings is a sound reserved for few birds. The wet ripping sound of human flesh and the panicked wail of a grown man being removed from his first childhood friend is a sound reserved only for the special girls of the bordello in Carnival.

Interrogation...

The bloodcurdling wail woke up Bob. His heavy body was being dragged across the ground. With a few swift motions, he was unceremoniously dropped into a chair and his wrists were tied behind his back. Bob only saw the back of a very large man leave the room. In front of him was a large desk and next to it was a safe. Written on it in faded letters were the words Wells Pinkerton. Bob began to look about the room and spot many anachronistic things. An electric timepiece shaped like Pac Man with the words "Puc Man" written on it. There was a small ET figurine. "The least that's normal," said Bob looking at the small gray figure with an elongated neck. It was holding a bag of M&Ms.

The madam entered the room. Bob didn't have to be introduced to know she was in charge. "Why did you hit me on the head? I'm just a paying customer like everyone else," the words came slowly to Bob. He knew he hadn't been out that long. He was pretty sure he only had a mild concussion. Unfortunately his scalp was cut and he could feel the blood running down the side of his face.

"No, you have a relationship with our little Roxie," said the madam. "One of my boys saw how you two looked at each other while she was out on parade. I don't know who she is to you. She is legally obligated to me. Now if you want to spend some time with her. We can arrange that. In fact we can arrange all lot of things. You're a finder." When she finished she had a smile that matched her eyes. Her face wasn't used to having genuine expressions on it. She had spent so long trying to look pretty when lying that honest happiness looked unnatural and ugly on her.

"What makes you think I'm a finder?" said Bob.

With a quick head movement, one of the madam's goons walked over reached in past Bob's robes inside his coat and pulled out a small yellow doll and squeezed it. "Don't have a cow man!" exclaimed the yellow doll in blue shorts.

"I have need of someone like you. Someone who doesn't have to travel to find things that aren't here. You can just reach out and pull them in. That is a very valuable skill. You could make a very fine living with the skill like that. If you know the right people that is. From the way you're dressed I could tell you haven't found the right people," said the madam.

"Not interested," said Bob.

"Well, then we'll keep our little Roxie here," said the madam.

"Fine then. I am free to go right?" said Bob.

The madam made a motion with her hand and one of the goons jabbed a needle into Bob's arm. Bob could feel the needle scrape against the bone inside. As intense as the pain was, it faded quickly. Everything started to melt inside Bob's mind. The fear and the panic slipped away. The pain in his head went next. It was as if his body was being filled with warm delicious joy starting at the tips of this extremities. Bob watched as they pulled the needle from his arm. He could see a string running from his arm to the needle. Bob could see all the strings. Before he could only feel the strings if he forced his mind there. Now they all blazed before his eyes. He could see all the connections. He didn't even have to focus. Everything made sense. He could also see that glorious gold line the ran from his chest towards his brother. He could recognize that connection anywhere. He followed it with his eyes wanting so hard to see where it led to. His eyes didn't have to travel far because it stopped only 15 feet from his chair. It lay on the ground shining, glorious, and severed forever.

Mr. Darr Shane...

Alice walked through the halls. She was in a daze from what she saw. She thought of Toby and how he had suffered. She felt sorry for that poor man that had been skinned. The rip was still there. The blood was drying on it. No one wanted to be near the place after what had happened. Alice was about ready to leave when she heard a voice. "Hello little Alice," said a man. Alice turned to look and saw the body form of a very tall man standing pressed against the curtain. Alice could see an eye looking through the money hole. That hole was 7 feet off the ground. The brown eye looked at her. "My name is Darr Shane. You're a very pretty girl and you've been very good. Would you like a treat?" said Darr Shane kindly.

"I guess. You're the man who pulled that farmer away from the wall and..." said Alice.

The head slowly nodded. "I have something very special for you. Something nice and fresh for a nice young fresh girl. Would you like it?" asked Darr Shane.

Alice didn't want anything from this man, but she didn't want to provoke him either. She just nodded slightly.

"Good. Just walk over here," said Darr Shane. Alice slowly and cautiously walked forward. Alice thought she heard rustling of paper behind the wall of velvet. "On your knees, little one, and close your eyes and soon you'll have a great big surprise. That's it, now just open your mouth. That's a good

girl. Lean forward just a little bit more." Alice did as she was told. She felt something bump against her lips. At first she thought it burned her. Then she realized it was just wet and cold. It went deeper into her mouth. She tried not to gag, she tried not to taste it.

To Alice's shock she realized that it tasted sweet. It tasted like cherries. "There you go. It's all yours now, little one, you can take it back to your room and enjoy it by yourself," said Darr Shane in a way too kind of voice. "Do they have popsicles in your world?" Alice nodded. She had them once before when a traveler came down the road into town on a white pack dragon. He was lost. When the townsfolk asked him what he was selling he told them it was frozen candies for children. He sold all he had for only 10 grams of shiny sand. Alice remembered that he called shiny sand gold. The man seemed so nice and so happy. It sickened her when she saw the the town pointed him in the direction of an oncoming brown windstorm. She wondered if the nice man in his pack dragon full of treats survived. The taste of it brought back the vision of the little white pack dragon with its painting of treats and smiling children thumping down the dusty road towards the sky darkening with a swarm of dirt mites. All the while mechanical music played. She could still hear the tones in her head as she walked away and sucked on her cherry popsicle.

"Puff the Magic Dragon lives by the sea..." sang Darr Shane behind the wall of velvet.

Graduation day...

" Well little Roxie you didn't slow me down after all," said Scarlet. She shook several bags marked 1K, 2K, and even one marked 10K. "I get to purchase my time with Mr. Darr Shane. Soon I will be an empress. And if you ever come to my court I'll happily let you wash my feet."

Alice pull the popsicle from her mouth and said, "Good for you." She strolled right past Scarlet. She walked over towards an empty bunk and climbed onto the top.

"Did you pay the madam for your room and board tonight?" said the girl underneath.

Alice leaned over the top of the bunk. Her head completely upside down, her shoulder length blond brown hair hung straight down. The disintegrating remains of a popsicle stuck in the side of her mouth like a cigar slurred her words slightly, "Fuck off cunt or I will cut you." There were is no emotion in her eyes and the girl the bunk underneath it ever said another word. Alice laid in her bunk not moving, not speaking, and not sleeping. Her fingers rested on that cold knife she still had hooked to her skimpy undergarments. It was time to leave.

The nature of things...

Bob began to regain consciousness. He could still feel the longing, the yearning for that artificial joy that flowed through his veins. He could feel his body wanting to grab hold of that string again as it slipped away from him. He had wanted to feel the pain of losing his brother's string. Now that he could, he wished he was high again. "I understand how people could become addicted to that stuff so quickly," he said out loud.

"He's coming around!" said a male voice.

"Ask him about the stuff," said the madam.

"What is this?" asked the man. He held up one of Bob's objects in front of him. The stupid man blocked the light so Bob couldn't even see it through his unfocused eyes. He was barely coming down from the intense high.

"It's a children's toy," said Bob. "They're all just children's toys. That and other bits of crap. Lost things people think they need. Things people don't know they need. None of it's ever anything useful. None of it's ever of any use." With that the man struck Bob across the head with the club. It didn't help Bob's focus but it sure killed the last bit of the buzz he had from the drugs.

"Why would you collect these things if they don't have any use?" asked the madam.

"They collect me more than I collect them," said Bob. "Untie me and I'll show you what some of those things can do."

The madam looked over at her henchmen in gave him the signal to remove Bob's bonds. Once free, Bob sat up. He was naked. He could see his clothing cut to ribbons laying in a pile. Every trinket and gadget was splayed across the madam's desk. Bob saw the device he needed.

A scream came from far off in the tent. A man came running into the office. "The new girl, Roxie, just cut all whole through the wall and escaped," said the man out of breath.

"So what. We'll just get a new girl," said the madam.

"She escaped through Darr Shane's room. She's seen. Darr Shane is livid," said the man. He sat down and grabbed his arm. There was a 5 inch cut on it. The cut wasn't bleeding. Bob looked at that cut closely. The man wasn't clutching it. He was massaging his left arm. "Darr Shane is severing his deal. He's not going to deliver his stuff and is getting ready to go right now."

The madam ran from her out of the room, taking her goon with her. Bob looked at the man who came running in. He was now grabbing his chest and his legs gave out beneath him. Bob walked over and looked at him. He could see ice crystals around the cut on his right arm. "Did Alice... I mean a little girl with dirty blonde hair?" asked Bob. The man only nodded a few times before his pupils turned into black serving dishes. Bob got up walked over and picked up the device. It was the the device Phyllo said he would never need. He stepped over the man with a cut arm. The man's chest contracted as the ice water blood struck his diaphragm. His last gasp looked like an exhale of midwinter fog. Bob had no doubt that cold knife Alice carried did all that with just a scratch. In the hallway Bob found one of the discarded red hooded robes. He used it to cover his nakedness as well as hide the device. It didn't take long for him to find Darr Shane in the room with all the shouting. Bob stood out side of the fold and listened.

"I was disturbed, Rose. You know I don't like being disturbed when I'm having fun," said the man Bob assumed was Darr Shane.

"I'm sorry. Allow me to get everything straightened out and you could start again," said the madam.

"No, I'm not in the mood. Next week. We'll do the transaction then," said Darr Shane.

"I can't do that. I need what you promised. Can you give me at least one barrel? A few gallons to

show good faith. My master will kill me if I don't deliver him something. I have the boxes he requested but he wants the fuel. The stuff we produce here won't work in his dragons," said the madam panicked.

"If you get yourself a finder. If you can get one of those to pull the right fuel through it will become part of this world. Then you won't need me muling stuff back and forth. Then again, you don't have a finder. So you'll have to do what I ask or else you wouldn't get any of the precious things your master needs. Shit, I'm going to be late for my shift. I'll see you next week, I should have a couple barrels of diesel for you," said Darr Shane.

A 7 foot tall man stormed out of the room. He pushed Bob to the floor, Bob's feet went straight up in the air exposing himself to the world. Darr Shane just laughed, "Farmer freak."

Bob got back on his feet and looked around. The 7 foot tall man had left. All this was a trade for a couple gallons of gas. So some other guy could run some kind of car from another world here. *At least Alice's safe*, he thought. Then again, he thought, he didn't know if Alice was safe or not. Then Bob turned and entered Darr Shane's room.

Loves end...

Alice couldn't get the thoughts out of her mind. She couldn't believe what she had seen in Darr Shane's room. She knew it was all a lie. But she didn't think it would be like that. She found the Carnival tent. She tossed the man at the gate a 10 gram bag. She still had a sack holding a few hundred more slung over her shoulder. She found it in Darr Shane's room and grabbed it before cutting a hole in the wall. The show was in progress when she came in. An usher with no arms stopped her. She tried to walk around him but even without arms she still couldn't manage to get around the man. "Wait until the act is done and then I will find you a seat," said the armless man forcefully yet politely.

On the stage Alice could see the group of people merging and shaping their bodies into all sorts of different shapes. At one point they became a giant ball and rolled around on stage, then they split into two cubes. Alice couldn't help herself but cracked a smile as she saw that the numbers on the dice were faces. Looking around Alice could see the children smiling and laughing as the adults stared in horror at the people in the stage contorting themselves into positions that were both unnatural and fluid. She could see the different colored skin tight suits they wore. She began to pick out how they were using the colors to form pictures or to make shapes that looked like rainbows. Soon Alice found herself forgetting the horror she'd seen earlier as she watched a moment of beauty given to her by people who had clearly more to be sorry for than she did.

The show stopped and Alice was allowed to take a seat. In the next act, Toby came onto the stage. He was naked except for a loincloth. Several people in green outfits came lunging around and dancing with him on stage. Somewhere beautiful springtime music was played. Quickly the tone changed to sadness as brown-dressed dancers came on and danced away the grass dancers one after another. Toby was left alone on the stage. The brown-dressed dancers came back onto the stage quickly, holding large knives. They tied Toby's hands to a chain. The whole show was so choreographed that Alice had no fear for Toby, until the blood started to pour. Toby's body was spotlighted against a dark background. The dancers in brown costumes ran knives over his body and carved away portions of his flesh. Alice watched in terror. She tried to storm the stage but was stopped by the person sitting next to her. "It's all just a show. You'll see. He is just mimicking all those who have lost so much because of the brown wind." An old woman placed the stub of a hand on her lap to calm her. Alice just looked at Toby's form hanging lifeless from a chain covered in blood and now missing limbs.

After the show had ended Alice wandered backstage. Toby was standing whole and complete. He was covered in sticky stage blood. He was wiping himself off with a damp cloth. Each stroke gave new definition to his body. She never seen him looking so fit and full of life. He seemed so complete. He was the bold boy she once knew. He can live without the part he had lost. She would just be so grateful to be held in the hands of someone who wanted her for the right reasons. Toby turned to face her. "Hello Alice, I'm glad you came. The mistress of shows foretold you would be here to witness my joining of the troop. It was fitting symbolism that you'd see my sacrifice performance."

"What do you mean? I got hundreds of grams. We can leave right now. All I have to do is ask the guide which way to go and I could take you with me. We can leave that dirty old man and his creepy kid behind," said Alice. Alice knew the words were ringing hollow in her own ears.

"I don't belong with you anymore. You know that. I belong here with my people. With those who have lost flesh and still wish to give more," said Toby. Behind him Alice could see the line of people. They weren't performers. They were just farmers and laborers who have lost limbs and eyes to the brown wind. She could see the mistress of shows comparing body parts from her own performers. Making matches she lead the pairs behind a screen. There two tables covered in white linen sat. There were several wash basins and trays covered with shiny metal tools. Between the tables was a man dressed entirely in red. He wore a mask that one side was smiling and the other side was frowning.

"You give your limbs to people for a price?" shouted Alice.

"The price is very small. It is only to cover our operating expenses and to make sure that the receiver knows the value of what they're asking. Because of this they get to live complete and full lives. They are returned to the state they were before the Brown winds took what was theirs. And we live in the grace and beauty of knowing that we shall live on in the lives of others giving back to the world. Through this we gain a sense of completeness that no one beside us will ever know.", said Toby.

"But you're not like them. You have only lost a few inches of flesh," said Alice. She ran over and pulled him close to her. He was still sticky from the stage blood. She pressed her self completely against him. But she could still feel the absence of what had been removed from him. If she could just pretend it didn't matter long enough for her to believe it herself she could keep Toby forever. Toby didn't hug her back. He just put his hands on her shoulders and gently pushed her away from him.

"You don't understand. The piece of flesh I lost wasn't my manhood. It was you," said Toby. Those were the last words he spoke to Alice. He turned and walked away from her back towards his people with the line of desperate souls who long to regain what they had lost.

Darr Shane's room...

Bob walked inside. A fluorescent lamp hung above. It flickered on and off slightly. The bulb itself swayed slightly. Its diffuse light gave everything in the red room a slightly greenish glow. In side the room were crates and boxes covered with green tarps. Bob pulled one of the tarps aside. There were stacks of magazines and newspapers. Boxes stenciled in languages that Bob had no idea where they came from. He picked up one of the magazines. On its cover was a picture of a paramilitary uniform. Underneath were the words "John John Kennedy: New Hope for the Republic of the Northern Union." In the background was an American flag but where the stars were there was a simple German looking eagle in white. "Well this didn't come from my world," he said. He put it down and saw a newspaper, on the cover was "Who Will Be the Next President?" On the cover was a light-skinned black man and older

white woman. The names underneath were Obama and Clinton. "That can't be a normal world where a Muslim is running against an old white lady?" said Bob. He thought about what it would be like to visit a world like that. "It must be some messed up place," he said still speaking to himself. He ate his own words as he rounded the corner.

In the center of the room was a white chest freezer. The lid was left open. A ringlet of unnaturally red hair hung over the side. Bob walked over and put the hair back inside the freezer. He didn't have to look at the body for long to understand what it had been placed in the freezer for. He quietly shut the lid. He left the room leaving Scarlet the Empress in her sarcophagus of ice.

Bob couldn't take anymore. He couldn't sit idly by and watch this world eat its own youth. He had seen horrible things at the hands of the rider. What the man to Darr Shane had done to that red-haired girl needed to be answered for. "Let the dark winds take me if it lets me stop a man like that.", said Bob.

Bob, wandered over to the Madame's office. Most of the goons had been wandering around. They were too busy trying to deal with the frantic demands of the madam to worry about one customer who was in the wrong place. Bob stood outside counting the men coming and going from the room. When he would sure the madame was alone he entered the room. The madam was scrambling through her paperwork and possessions. She looked up with an annoyed face. It instantly brightened when she saw Bob pull the hood back. "Look what ever you want. I can pay it. You want a pretty girl. You want a pretty boy. I don't care. I just need you to..."

"No." Said Bob. He could hear Phyllo's warnings echoing in the back of his mind as he readied the device. He pointed it at her head. She looked at it in puzzled confusion. The same look that was literally frozen into the lifeless redhead still in the freezer. "No more trinkets. No more toys. I speak with this. It is God's finger and I call it Yod." She had no understanding of what it was or what it had been brought into this world for. She never would. And the madam of the Carnival bordello exited the world and the gun entered to fill her place.

A path...

Alice stood on a small hill of dirt. She was outside of the tents. A strange loud sound came from the Carnival. She could feel sound echoing off the trees, and changing the world around her. She turned back. Alex with his powder blue dragon rolled to a stop a few feet from her. Reaching over, he opened the door and swung it open. Inside Alice could see the hourglass still empty. The sound of a man run behind her made her turn her head. Bob, covered only in one of the bordello robes was running. He was holding something in his hand that was smoking. He ran up to her and stopped. To her right was her father and the man that raped her. To her left was Bob, a fat man naked other then a robe and something smoking in his hand. In front of her was the carnival with a group of people walking towards them shouting. Behind her was the the forest. Voices started screaming in her mind. She asked them, "Do I go with my father? Do I stay with Bob? Or do I just go into the forest alone?"

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