

NAMES: TILLALEL

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By a very early age, I had learned the seriousness of sanctity—as far as it goes in relating to things unbound by the compass of the solvable. I knew, in other words, about the astringent potency of belief: what it was capable of and how it controlled and manipulated. There was one event in particular that stripped me forever from ignorance, and it began with nothing more than a prayer.

When I was but five years old, I took a liking to a rather precarious doll called St. Pebbles of the Sky. The doll was the priest of a concocted land—a mere childhood fairytale. He wore a tight black robe with a gray, pebble-beaded rope tied around his waist. Around his neck hung a wooden cloud, hung by the same gray, pebble-beads. Most distinct of all was his face. It stretched long, creating a moon of a chin that anchored large, round pebble eyes and a mouth that bent like a river. His head was bald and on it a map was tattooed in black ink, leading the way to a hidden empire in the sky.

I would sit St. Pebbles of the Sky next to me on car rides. He would look out one window and I would look out the other, searching, imagining, and believing in the city that I expected to find there. My older sister also rode with us, but she was not fond of my companion. She would ridicule our intentions and belittle our actions with words of sarcasm and disgust. I knew better than to be affected by what she said; I would not lay down my truths for her forceful dominations.

One afternoon, on the ride home from the grocery store, my sister had climaxed her annoyance in me by screaming terribly into my ear that there was no such thing as those fantastical lands existing beyond the eye's sight. She took St. Pebbles of the Sky and ripped the cloud amulet from his neck, sending pebble-beads to the ground in a miserable collapse. Before she let go of the doll, she threw him hard against the rear window, letting him rest at an unreachable distance from me. All the while, she continued to taunt me.

Deep within me, something escaped—a glow of emotion, a twist of compulsion. I began seeking after something that should never have been sought—not by anyone of any age, especially, no matter how impossibly, by someone of my age. I pleaded silently through the core of my intemperate anger. Past my thoughts and past my beliefs, I pushed my mind to places beyond reality's reach. Through mental urns of horrible communes, I released requests not heeded by emptiness, but by things that lurked infinite distances away in the spaces beyond scope. They heard my cries and my desires absolute, and one in particular came to my side. It came not in sight or in presence, but in enlightened transcendence, peeking through a window of unfathomable substance.

When I opened my eyes, I saw the empire in the sky. It was larger and grander than anything I could have imagined. Constructed of sleek, gray glass, the giant structure shimmered under the sun's light. Towers covered its surfaces; some were brilliantly tall and some seemed to reach indefinitely into the heavens. My sister saw it, and even my mother, as it soared in front of us, but it was there for only a couple moments before it vanished completely before

our eyes. My sister became very quiet after that and my mother kept asking us if we saw it. We turned on the news when we got home, but there was nothing about what we saw. With no proof to share with the world, the empire in the sky was our secret.

Belief is a powerful tool, but it was the desire within the belief that conjured the sinister from the saintly. My ignorance, my stubbornness—they afflicted the truth behind my eyes like the headless continue to blink. And in that conviction, as wicked or pure as it might have been, something was beckoned—or born, or brought forth—with the same allure as food to the hungrier. And the dreadful fact about that thrilling instant was that the thing that came was unique in itself—for not all appetites match, especially those of the nether regions. And this creature's appetite was not so easily fulfilled, for it needed something in return. And once I had freed it, it would not leave until it received its compensation.

When I laid in my bed after the day of excitement, trying to drift to sleep, the apparition-of-a-thing came to me—not at first with words or images, but with playful gestures and urges. Slowly, it brushed against the inner tapestry of my soul with its invisible manifestation. A feeling unlike touch grazed throughout my insides. Tightness, strangeness, and discomfort enclosed the entirety of my chest, sending me madly into paced convulsions of unrest. As this inhospitable welcoming occurred, I could not even mouth the words I desperately wished to yell into the night—words that might have reached my parents, words that might have even reached my sister. And once it sensed that desire in me to call out, it allowed my voice to ring, but in a fiendish growl, so that I did not wish to speak further than those two words it took to hear my enslaved voice.

While the intrusion against my essence continued, a girl of my same age appeared at the side of my bed. Her hair was a fiery red cinder that hung in a braided ponytail over her left shoulder, and her cheeks were full of blush. Her eyes were only brown, but they pronounced undeniably the signature of the haunting entity. Even in the dark, these attributes were made known.

"There, there, sweet child," she spoke. Her voice was soft and kind to the ears. "Do not be alarmed. Tillalel has only come back to finish what you started. You cannot ask for so much and not give in return. But don't worry, Tillalel does not ask for that much; it is something easy to give. She just wants to share in your life and in your family. She wants to help you in your troubles and walk beside you in your loneliness. She just wants to be your guardian angel. Let her be your guardian angel."

As a five-year-old child, I long from understood the severity and horror of what was occurring. I did not know what had been started and I did not know how to end it. All that made sense to me during that time was the fear boiling like a tempest beneath my skin.

"Please go away," I answered the girl, shocking myself awfully again with my manipulated voice.

"Tillalel cannot leave, but don't worry—she likes you. Be still now, and go to sleep."

The pressure in my chest then alleviated and I fell motionless atop my bed. Not a moment later, the girl began to sing in a whisper of charming words.

Fill the void softly
With warmth from other worlds
Delight in the madness
And the ancient ones' wails
Think of forever
And the moments never lost
Think of survival
No matter what the cost

Eventually, the affect of the melody became unavoidable, and I fell fast asleep.

As the years went by, the song never changed. The girl that sang the song did, but only to match me in my age. Whether it was the girl, or the mysterious tricks I performed, or the fright I instilled in people, Tillalel never left me. She was always there to hold me and encourage me in her ways.

I knew for the rest of my life the sanctity and strength of belief and the potency of its wake. Never did I hold the beliefs of people against them—though it never stopped the fun I had and terrors given in spite of them.

There was only one Tillalel and she was mine.

I remember vividly those words I spoke to her on my deathbed. They were beautiful words—words I hoped she would treasure always.

“My Tillalel, you have never forsaken me. How lucky I have been to have you in my life. You have been like a mother and never failed me. Finally, now, I will complete what you have asked for and eternalize our bond. Goodbye my angel, my love, my Tillalel.”