

▪ monochrome marionette ▪

world above: treble

So she awakens from the river of time, and until that second, her memories are of eternity.

Now they scatter into the waking light, and she holds but one: the memory of a **shadow**.

She finds herself smiling at her white satin world, quiet and yet a little regretful. Silver is so beautiful, isn't it? It is pure white when you place it in the light—white like her fingers, slender fingers that hold all command of the world. But it's so elusive, delusive, tricky.

In her pale and masking smile, there are layers of darkness. She has lost something. A fragment of her life.

She feels as if some part of her memory has been locked away and forgotten, locked in a treasure chest with silver leaf.

She hears the lines of the treble, the flute in the wind—but where is the cello that once accompanied it? A memory within an ornate treasure chest with silver leaf, waiting on a dusty shelf somewhere. Its key has been tossed off the edge of a cliff, shattered on the rocks at the bottom.

Around her, the verdant trees are laden with white blossoms. This garden, she supposes, must be another side of her kingdom, the kingdom she hasn't seen before. It's white, the same white as those ancient shattered battlements she only vaguely remembers, wasted from the centuries of war.

But for now there is no fear. Whiteness is pure. She is the white queen. In eight rays she controls the world.



She is the puppeteer. She writes the play.

world below: bass

down

the

spiral

staircase



The world must be ending. There are blooms of darkness on the horizon, shadows playing with the mountains and screaming, chasing the children into the twisted forests of their nightmares.

A black ship courses on the water, and the sun is red like blood behind them. She can see everything: there is a black army closing around her from everywhere. Her castle is in jeopardy. She stands at the battlements, and waves the flag of her people.

But is this surrender? Her kingdom is white, and so is her flag.

Behind her, behind spiderweb curtains, the king is watching, fading surely. He is the world, and the world is him. Before the castle is captured, he isn't dead.

He is the world. He is the foundation. He is the flag that she waves.

His hair is tangled with the wind, and is it that easy for the enthroned? The world belongs to her.

"Knights," she calls, and they ascend the spiraling thousand-mile staircases. "Take the swans. Begin your attack."

No one knows. They think the king owns the world. They think that the king is the author. But has he ever been more than a figurehead, shifting from throne to antechamber beneath the chandeliers, watching the world through arching windows? Don't mind him, the castle walls will guard him.

The power has always lain with the queen.

She is the puppeteer, with ten thousand at her whim. She writes the war. She writes this titillating, scintillating play.

"Where is their queen?" her knights ask each other, as they watch the black army advance.

Her fingers dance with the puppet threads, and somewhere outside, a bishop commits murder. She smiles blithely to herself like a child at a circus, but that smile only holds pain. She knows the truth, a truth she cannot utter.

Their opponent has no king. They can fight forever, and never lose, never resign.

The light gleams in their eyes, and they see a silhouette: he stands tall on the mountain, black cloak collecting the night.

Black Magician.

But he is not the king. Their opponent has no king.

He *is the queen. He, too, writes this play.*

treble

She can't seem to remember anything before Eden.

There *must* be something; that cello melody is raging somewhere in the lower staff. It sings of what could be blood and blackness, too silent to be heard.

The shards of the key are crying.

With a sigh she turns, rising from the marble floor, gowns glistening in her pagoda.

Am I a prisoner? I think I am, a prisoner of circumstance, of love.

Cygnus smiles sadly at the divine bird behind her; she will never fly. But as long as she doesn't *know* she can fly, does it matter?

world in between: tenor

The moonlight shivers around them, and like ghosts at play, the shadows whisper out of the chandelier branches.

There seems only to be one—but in fact, there are two, masked behind black mirrors that look like moonlight, shadows that look like milk-white mirrors.

A child is crying at the heart of an obsidian-marble forest. With the blood on his black fingers, he is drawing pictures to keep himself company. They are strange pictures, pictures of eyes—but in them, he takes comfort. They are the only way he can see.

Through the lace and pillars, an angel is smiling. She is only as young as he. But she can see through the darkness that blinds him, and she knows she can try to help.

The light is piercing upon her footsteps. As the moon slips through the castle windows, she drifts to his side.

"You are lost," she whispers. His tears are black.

"And is there any way out? Look at these chains. I am the king, the one who is powerless. I was born to the darkness, and you cannot save me from it."

"Then I can stay in it. With you."

Down the white steps from the pagoda she descends, leaving her bird behind.
White too, like the structure of the garden and its drapery.

Look at these threads, and she glances at her fingers with a smile. *I am the queen,
the one who controls the world.*

alto

And so she learns to live, and so he learns to trust her.
And every day, she paints another white square on the
dark boy's wall.

She is the light. She learns to love the darkness. He
laughs to see her bringing this brilliance into his home,
little by little, shard by shard, like mirrors of the world
outside. Suddenly, he has sight, and he can see beyond
the black shadows that have been his blindness all his
life.

She continues to draw white squares on his wall everyday—never right next to each other, but apart so they can embrace the black. It's part of the promise. Black, white, black, white, over and over. Soon, their wall is a black-white checkerboard, and there is but a single missing white square left to draw at the corner of the mirror.

"And as long as I don't remember the world above," she whispers, fingers in his hair, "I will be pure."

They are falling. Falling in love. As they plummet, he ties silver threads around her fingers and holds them tight, tells her to keep them safe.

"Silver threads?" she asks. "Why silver? Silver is the moonlight. Silver is white."

"Because we will marry each other, I swear," he answers.



On the twisted mansion floors of light and shadow they dance, weaving lines between the checker squares, across the diagonals. Somehow, borne on swan wings, she is too fast for him. But he tries, and she is kind, moving one square at a time so he can follow. He laughs. The curtains are whirling around them like ghosts and flooded with moonlight, neither black nor white, *but somewhere in between.*

But soon they realise that things are not right. They have been dancing around each other for years, yet they cannot come close enough to kiss. Though she tries to draw that last white square on his wall so they become complete within each other, her fingers are always pulled away, just as their lips pulled apart, by the tide of something that hates them so.

And at last the world has had enough of their clumsy, contravening game, their insolence, belligerence. They must be enemies. They cannot touch.

Their world collapses inwards on them, their flimsy hope for a different reality. Running from the shadows, they know they can go nowhere. They stand in a room of shattered mirrors, and her feet are bleeding, her fingers broken against the pristine sheen of glass.

"This is so hard. It's the world, isn't it? It doesn't want us to be together."

"Yes, my love. But while we live, we can try. Promise we will try!"

"I promise! But if this is love, then why? Why does it hurt, as if it is hate?"

An apple hangs from the tree along the roadside, *red* as blood falling from a finger. Such a change from the stainless blossoms, and it draws her eye. Cygnus walks towards it, and comes to rest within the shade of its branches, pale branches that are heavy with white flowers.

With little hesitation, her hand rises to pluck it off, and she gazes deep into its rosiness.

Why can she not remember? She must have lived another life before, isn't that so? There must be another world, another life, besides this. It all fits. She must have murdered someone before. Even if she cannot remember, it must have happened. Something tells her so.

But if she has, then why are her hands so pristine? There is no redness on her fingers, no rust. Her gowns are as white as they have always been. She tells herself with shivering resolve: she is the white queen. She is pure, and she has never killed anyone before.

She glances at the fruit in her hand and wonders.

Is there no redness on my fingers?

And she takes a bite. Its flesh is sweet, sweet as venom.



Despair.

fall fifteen lines

White wings, everywhere. White wings, swan wings. Cygnus and her puppets.

"What has become of us?" she screams as they fly, because she can see the Black Magician's changed smile of malice from the black tower.

"Do you not remember, my queen?" he answers, and laughs into the wind. It sounds the same as before. "You let our love go. You gave up. Even though we promised to face whatever came, together. Until we finally married each other."

She is furious.

"And we did, Black Magician. Don't you remember? We faced it together, you and I. We stood while the mirrors fell. We stood till we were bleeding—and that was our marriage, wasn't it?"

"It will never be complete!"

And with a flourish of his night cloak, he turns away. "The last square, it hasn't been painted."

(That story—that story. It cannot be from this same life. It seems like a lifetime ago, a previous incarnation. Two different people. A different garden. A dark garden. A forest.)

We were in Eden then; where are we now?

*She clutches at the threads on her fingers. They are made of silver, silver like the light she loves, the light **he** abhors.*

ledger-lines

"Love me!" he roars, blood running down his face as she tries to pull him closer. Sightless eyes are flashing in the mirror shards, eyes painted long ago, rotting but never erased. "Love me, Cygnus!"

"I do!" she screams in answer, but the fragments are falling and slashing them apart, mirror fragments, key fragments.

She slips between his fingers, white from black. Blood from the wound.

"If this is love, then why?" he asks furiously. " *Why* does it hurt, as if it were hate?"

She sobs, because she cannot answer.

"Why?"

(Toss it off the same cliff, the treasure chest
of a lost time. The secret will be freed.)

a t o n a l

Shattered mirrors. Shattered keys.

*Her feet are bleeding, her fingers broken against the
pristine sheen of glass.*

*"This is so hard. It's the world, isn't it? It doesn't want
us to be together."*

*"Yes, my love. But while we live, we can try. Promise we
will try!"*

*"I promise! But if this is love, then why? Why does it
hurt, as if it is hate?"*

(The chest explodes, shards of wood whose edges don't remember which they used to touch. The silver leaf is ripped open, like autumn.)



BROKEN / SHATTERED / SEW IT BACK TOGETHER

The secret lasts no longer. She knows. She understands.



We were in Eden then; where are we now?



The poison is seeping like ink, ruining the story. Her lips are deathly sweet, so sweet that she is starting to hate herself.

She throws the fruit away, angry at her mistake.

Why did I taste this? Why did I let myself? I hear the cello, but it is not beautiful; it is a disharmony.

She denies that her purity is lost. This whiteness *must* be purity. She is locked in a white garden of silver arches—a caged bird that will never fly. As long as she doesn't remember, it doesn't matter. As long as she cannot remember, she is pure. As long as she doesn't know that she can fly, does it matter?

She closes her eyes, and the world flashes, between now and then and *then*, between the war, the mansion, the garden. Staves of a system that tore apart long ago and slipped into chaos. She remembers walls, black and white, and mirrors catching the walls, and blood spattered across them, red, red like the apple that told her the truth.

Is she pure?

I should have left it to fade. To die.

"I am the queen! The puppeteer! I control the world! I write the play!"

Her screaming will never be enough. Her blood is still ***red***. The threads are darkening.

Her hands are trembling, as she feels the pain seep through her. She cannot, cannot forgive herself!

She has lived thinking she is writing the battle, choreographing the dance, together with the king of the other side. She has believed so long that their marriage was in the shower of mirrors. She has believed so long that they share the kingdom now, share the story, the play—write it together along these threads.

Some things cannot be reconciled. **Darkness is darkness**, light is light. They can circle each other, they can weave—but they cannot touch.

They must stay different and apart. That is the rule. That is circumstance.

The last square is lost, somewhere in the
abyss of tears.



His ink is bleeding into her story
and where they mingle, it turns *red like blood.*

"Whiteness is purity," she cries in tears. "Blackness is taint!"

His smile widens.

"But are you sure? You forsook me. You told me you would never let go, but you did. Is that not taint?"

Where have you gone, my king? That was love, and I tried my best—I tried to love you, till I was fading in blood, in shards that were tearing us! Why do you believe otherwise? Why do you lay all the blame upon me?

Does it all mean nothing, the blood I shed to love you?

Then she sees.

That beneath that gleaming black gaze, his smile is strained.

*Around his fingers, tight and narrow, the puppet strings are still twined **black.***

Not black. Silver.

"Silver threads—why silver? Silver is the
moonlight. Silver is white."

"No."

"But all my life, silver has been white."

**"It depends on the colour of the walls,
doesn't it? In my mansion, silver is
black."**

Her eyes are full of tears. She glances helplessly at her own palms, the threads binding her own hands to the world, the world that she thought was her prisoner, her king. The threads that fooled her to believe she was the queen, the one who held all power.

If she looks close enough, she can see the faded bloodstains, ruining her fingers. The blood of the ten thousand knights she sent to battle—the blood of ten thousand deaths.

She has murdered before. She commanded
the murder of ten thousand innocents.

"That is the world, my love. You love another, only to be betrayed. You die only to rise again, and each time, the world is a little darker, but no different at all."

His smile struggles, beyond the haze of her tears. The mountain wind is howling.

His palms must be bleeding. But his gloves are black, and so is his blood. And she will never know.

These threads, the threads that he tied to her fingers when they fell in love:
they go the other way. She isn't the puppeteer. She controls nothing.

She is the puppet. The puppet of circumstance.

She is nothing, nothing but a figurehead. *She* is the one chained to the world.

**And somewhere at the other end of the shattering world, concealed by
the interlocking black and white of eternity—so is he.**

She smiles blithely to herself like a child at a circus, but that smile only holds pain.

Because only she knows the truth. And this is the truth.

He isn't just a queen. He is a king.

And so is she. They are both. They are prisoners of their own power.

And try as they might, two kings cannot meet.



We were born to be enemies, and enemies we must remain.

"And is there any way out? Look at these chains. I am the king, the one who is powerless. I was born to the darkness, and you cannot save me from it."

I remember, Black Magician.

Long ago, you were a king, and I was a queen. We wrote ourselves a fairytale; we fancied ourselves inside it.

You were blind, and I was your light. I thought you needed me. I thought you were my prisoner. I was wrong.

We dreamt of marrying each other, of sharing the kingdom, of loving each other. We dreamt of painting the walls in equal measure—half black and half white—so that our silver was neither one colour nor the other.

But the threads that we fancied to be gifts—they never let us go.



(In fairytales, love doesn't lose. It always emerges triumphant from the shards of war, and ascends the castle stairs to live forever.)

But don't you know? The queens are always the villains. The queens own the world, but they don't mean anything.



Now the sweetness of the apple stains her lips, and there will be no kiss to save her from its poison.



So the last square will never be drawn

and our worlds always be divided.

treble solo.

Cygnus lies asleep, within the only darkness in her world—the loving shade of the sinner's tree.

She has the blood of love upon her hands, and a thousand unfinished puppet plays, scattered across her tear-stained lap.



I swear there is a way to love you.