

## ADVENT 1992

My name is Jerusalem.

I have been on the road for as long as I can remember, hiding when I can, selling myself into slavery when I have to in order to survive.

I don't have a clear picture of all that happened Before. Before I left my birth-place and passed through the deep waters. Memory for me is a tightness and pressing in my chest; words swallowed; a look down and away in shame and fear.

I know I have a child. She was brought into being by the power of God. It is a long, long time since I have seen her. Ages past. I don't know where she is now. When I close my eyes I can see her dimly: a chubby little cherub of a toddler, just learning to speak, golden curls, eyes like the summer evening sky after a storm.

This morning God said to me, "Find the child."

I suspect they tortured her, maybe killed her. I don't know. I don't want to know. I picture her face, and I cannot bear to even imagine her spread-eagled and gagged, beaten and raped, and so I don't. Long ago I thought, "I will die if I feel this pain," and then I stopped thinking and stopped feeling and went away. God led me out into the desert saying, "Leave your home and your parents' house, and go into the land that I will show you. You will be free." That was a long time ago.

This morning God said, "Find the child. She has not been destroyed. She is of me and I am the strength of her shining. And as for you: your journey is far from over, and you cannot go on alone. You need the child, for she is the only one who knows the way. The little child will lead you."

I am so tired. I stopped, tried to sit down, but I cannot rest, I can never rest. The ground in the desert is all sharp stones and broken pieces of lives and dreams. The sunlight burns into my bones. I cry. I weep. I sob. In relief that I have made it this far. In grief at the devastation that was my home. In terror and guilt because of the child. How she suffered. How I abandoned her.

Hours went by. Years. Whole lifespans of false hope woven and unraveled.

This afternoon God looked at me long and hard. I could barely move to raise my hand in greeting; so much blood has oozed out from the wound of my open heart and seeped into the desert sands.

God looked at me and drew me into loving arms. Whispered in my ear. "Comfort, comfort, Jerusalem." Oh, the tenderness of God's voice, deep, and soft, and sweet. "The war is over. Your slavery has ended."

I felt nothing but my tears. I pulled away to search God's face for truth. God, are you speaking the truth? God let me look, and see, then reached for me and held me closer.

The war is over. The secrecy and the prostitution can stop.

God's body is warm and heavy against mine. God kisses my neck. I close my eyes and see her, the Small One, the little child, grown majestic and awesome, tall as the heavens, her sunlight hair adorned with the stars, her mountain body clothed with the sea, Vision and Courage dancing with Wisdom before her. She is singing, and her voice is passionate and true like thunder and the wind.

I long for more than survival.

I will find the child.

Ellen Oak