

Fire & Smoke

Seth Price, 2011

Used as a spoken word piece in the video *Fire & Smoke*, and as an LP track called “Pencil Legs,” on the album *Honesty*. Also translated into French and Lithuanian for the video *Language Lesson*.

There was a woman who lived down at the coast. She was angry at her daughter, who liked to tell stories. That’s how people are.

One day, the daughter ran off into the woods. She saw a beautiful lady standing in the half-light, with a strange expression on her face. The girl asked the lady where she was from. “The home of my people is far from here,” she replied, “but I’ve come to get you.”

Together they traveled through the woods all that day, and through the night, and all the following day. As evening fell, they came to a strange country where all was still and quiet, and not a living thing appeared. It seemed as if the colors of nature themselves had vanished, so gray and hushed was this place. The beautiful lady lead them to a curious sort of hut, and threw open the door. “Here is where you will stay,” she said, and pushed the girl into a stifling darkness.

Meanwhile, back in the girl’s village, her mother tearfully admitted that she had cursed her daughter and said, “May a ghost take her away!” *Something* must have been listening. A search party was organized, and slowly began to work its way into the woods.

In the hut, the beautiful lady gestured at the fire pit. “Girl,” she said, “get me some wood.” As if in a trance, the girl went out and looked for kindling. As she was hunting, a bird flew by and said, “You’re getting that wood for yourself.” The girl ignored it. When she brought the wood back, the woman looked at it and said, “That’s not the kind of wood I want.” Again the girl went out, and again the bird flew by as she was gathering wood and

whispered, "You know, that's for you." The girl ignored the bird and returned to the hut, and a second time the lady rejected the wood. The bird came by again and said, "This is the last time. When you go back, she'll cook you." "But it's useless," said the girl, "she has me under some power." The bird disappeared behind a tree and stepped out as an ugly little man. "Then we'll go together," he said, and they entered the hut.

"Two is better than one," said the lady. "Sit down." As the fire crackled to life the ugly man began to sing, and it was the most entrancing thing the girl had ever heard. The lady looked up, and began singing along, and by the time the pot was boiling she was completely enraptured. The man continued, and the fire grew larger and hotter, and soon it had burned off her legs. When she finally noticed, they were just sharpened sticks, and the ends were all blackened.

She looked down and cried, "What have you done to me?" The ugly little man stood, saying, "Quick, go!" The girl rose, and together they left the hut. *But the lady followed*, making strange and horrible noises. So the man turned and began singing once more. She stopped and began scratching in the dirt with her stumps, which were blackened at the end like pencils. Soon she was completely absorbed in sketching shapes and figures, and the ugly man and the girl ran away.

They made their way back through the forest until eventually they reached the girl's homeland. The girl's country-folk looked suspiciously at the ugly little man. "Is this the one that lead you astray?" they asked.

She looked at him, and he looked back.