

# Shades of Red

By Sanjana Manghnani

I take a seat on a rickety old park bench, I can hear the traffic, and the clip clop of shoes as busy adults hurry to work, the subway roars as it passes under the park. This is the heart of the city, where towers of metal and glass line the horizon, obscuring nature from view. I soak it all in. Then out of the corner of my eye I see a lady with her back towards me. She's flying a red kite. She looks odd. She's wearing a black hoodie that looks too big for her. Its hood is pulled down low over her face. She has a bright purple skirt on that goes down to her knees. Her rainbow tights make her look like a little kid. Just then my phone rings. "Hi Mom."

"Cassandra it's 8:35."

"Okay."

"Bye."

The opened page of my sketchbook beckons me to draw the Lady with the Red Kite, but I know I have to leave for school now or I'll be late. I hope to look at her one last time, but as I turn my head, I see her drop the kite and vanish.



You walk in the fresh air. You're limping, but you need to do this. You can feel your energy draining out of you. This is important, you tell yourself. Your head hurts from being pressed against the door of The Council Room. *Stupid Elders*, you think, *they have no idea what's going on, that it's happening again*. You're angry that you have to do it again, but the future rests in your hands now. If only you could find the portal.



"Cassandra?" I hear my mom call.

"Yes Mom." I drop my sketchbook and pen on the dining table and head over to the study. The light is dimmed and my mother's silhouette is dark against the white wall. When I walk over and sit on my chair my mom puts a history textbook on the table in front of me. "Mom. I don't want to do history!"

"Cassandra, I'm asking you to do this as your teacher."

30 minutes later we're interrupted from schoolwork when my mom's phone starts to ring. She picks it up and sighs when she sees that the call is from her employee. "Hello. Yes. What? An emergency? At the bookshop? Okay I'm coming."

She lets out long sigh. "Cassandra I have to go to the bookshop."

"Do you have to?" I don't want her to go. I don't like being alone in an empty house.  
"Cassandra." She gives me a look.  
"Fine"



Your palms sweat. You think that you're lost, but you've lived here for more than 1,000 years. Darn your old dying mind. The portal can't be too far away. Your hurt foot screams in pain when you step on a sharp rock and your wound is cut open. Your mind spins and you lose your balance. The last thing you think is, I might not be able to stop her this time. Then your head hits the ground with a loud *thunk*.



I see her again after mom leaves, the Lady with the Red Kite. She looks mysterious with her black hoodie pulled over her face. It sends chills down my spine, and instead of being awed by her, I'm frightened. I lean in close to the window to see her better, and she turns her head as if she's looking at me. I'm baffled. Her kite drops down and she disappears.



You wake up with people bickering over your face. Your headache grows and makes your head throb. *We should throw her out of the realm, she's an old hag.* You hear. *No, keep her. Figure out what mischief she's up to this time.* With all the bickering you might as well faint again. *She's mental!* Anger bubbles up inside of you. You get up and scream, *Stop!* Your heavy breathing leaves them speechless. It feels good to finally get to scream at them, but then the Elders part through the crowd. You let out a long sigh. *What are you doing **venefica**?* Insults. The Elders should treat you right, but they insult you in dead languages so the rest of the people don't know. ***Strigae involaverant et aruspices multiplicavit te.*** You tell them. That was a mistake, you realize. The youngest Elder walks up to you and slaps you hard in your face. It burns. You watch as the Elders wave the people away. Then the oldest Elder speaks. *You do not have any right to call us witches and wizards.* Then he leans in close to you as if to give you a final warning but what he says surprises you. *I know that you are trying to stop her. I will help you find the portal. I won't let them harm you. Your secret is safe with me.* You are pretty sure your face is red but you manage to act like he just threatened you. As the Elders leave you think you might actually be able to do this.



My heart beats rapidly. I just saw a woman vanish into thin air. I remember this morning at the park when I saw the same lady vanish. I wasn't sure then if she actually disappeared. An odd looking envelope on the table catches my eye. **If you have seen the Lady with the Kite, open this.** It says on the top. I rip it open. **The lady is targeting you because you are important now or in the future.** There's sweat dripping down my neck. I hear heavy footsteps echoing in the hallway. I drop the letter before I can finish reading it and back up against the wall.



With the Elder's help you've found the portal, you just hope that the child has received the letter. You might be too late by the time you get there.



I'm thinking about everything in the letter and what I've seen so far. I'm trying to piece the puzzle together. The letter said that I was of importance now or in the *future*. I'm surely not of any importance now, so that means I'm important in the future. The Lady with the Red Kite cannot possibly know what happens in the future unless she is from the future. I'm shivering, and it's not because of the cold. The footsteps get louder. The doorknob is turning. I'm half expecting it to be my mother. The door opens and the Lady with the Kite walks in, black hoodie and all. Her kite's flying.



You arrive into the world called Earth. It is different from the Realm. The child's house is easy to spot because of the dark energy swirling around it. She's already here. The child is going to die.



The Lady with the Red Kite is in my house. "Hello Cassandra. Let me introduce myself." Her voice is soothing and flowy, and it gives me the urge to pull down her hood and see her face. "I am well over 1,000 years old. I am from another world. I attacked it so I've been punished and I am eternally trapped between your world and mine, but with my kite I can travel to anywhere in the space-time continuum. My hobby is killing people." she sees the horror on my face. "Yes child, I *am* going to murder you." I can imagine the sneer under her hood. The Lady with the Red Kite moves closer and her purple skirt blows even though there's no wind in the room. She is no more than a foot away now, she can probably hear my heart thumping rapidly. She slowly pulls down her hood to reveal a beautiful face that I'm shocked can belong to someone with the description that she just gave. Her lips are a rosy red and her cheeks have the most beautiful pink tint to them. Her eyes are gray and her penetrating gaze makes me feel like she can see into my soul. She leans in close and whispers in my ear, "My kite was once white, but the blood of a hundred victims has turned it red, and it's about to turn one shade darker." I'm shivering. The door opens again and an old lady who's limping walks in. The Lady with the Red Kite turns, "Accalia, we meet again."

"Nova, let go of her." the lady named Accalia says.

"Little sister, don't try to stop me again, you don't know what it's like to be eternally trapped between Earth and the Realm." the Lady with the Red Kite, Nova, says. "You become the first to discover my habit of murdering people. So I'm changing the future." Nova tells me. I wonder if this is all just a figment of my imagination. My thoughts are interrupted when Accalia screams, "Nova!" And I notice a knife at my throat, with my blood on it.