

[Long time ago]  
by Leslie Marmon Silko

Long time ago  
in the beginning  
there were no white people in this world  
there was nothing European.  
And this world might have gone on like that  
except for one thing:  
witchery.

This world was already complete  
even without white people.  
There was everything  
including witchery.

Then it happened.  
These witch people got together.  
Some came from far far away  
across oceans  
across mountains.  
Some had slanty eyes  
others had black skin.  
They all got together for a contest  
the way people have baseball tournaments nowadays  
except this was a contest  
in dark things.

So anyway  
they all go together  
witch people from all directions  
witches from all the Pueblos  
and all the tribes.  
They had Navajo witches there,  
some from Hopi, and a few from Zuni.  
They were having a witches' conference,  
that's what it was  
Way up in the lava rock hills  
north of Canoncito  
they got together  
to fool around in caves  
with their animal skins.  
Fox, badger, bobcat, and wolf  
they circled the fire  
and on the fourth time  
they jumped into that animal's skin.

But this time it wasn't enough  
and one of them  
maybe Sioux or some Eskimos  
started showing off.  
"That wasn't anything,  
watch this."

The contest started like that.  
Then some of them lifted the lids  
on their big cooking pots,  
calling the rest of them over  
to take a look:  
dead babies simmering in blood  
circles of skull cut away  
all the brains sucked out.  
Witch medicine  
to dry and grind into powder  
for new victims.  
Others untied skin bundles of disgusting objects:  
dark flints, cinders from burning hogans where the  
dead lay  
Whorls of skin  
cut from finger tips  
sliced from the penis end and clitoris tip.

Finally there was only one  
who hadn't shown off charms or powers.  
The witch stood in the shadows beyond the fire  
and no one ever knew where this witch came from  
which tribe  
or if it was a woman or a man.  
But the important thing was  
this witch didn't show off any dark thunder charcoals  
or red ant-hill beads.  
This one just told them to listen:  
"What I have is a story."

At first they all laughed  
but this witch said  
*Okay*  
*go ahead*  
*laugh if you want to*  
*but as I tell the story*  
*it will begin to happen.*

*Set in motion now  
set in motion by our witchery  
to work for us.*

*Caves across the ocean  
in caves of dark hills  
white skin people  
like the belly of a fish  
covered with hair.*

*Then they grow away from the earth  
then they grow away from the sun  
then they grow away from the plants and animals.*

*They see no life  
When they look  
they see only objects.*

*The world is a dead thing for them  
the trees and rivers are not alive  
the mountains and stones are not alive.*

*The deer and the bear are objects  
They see no life.*

*They fear  
They fear the world.*

*They destroy what they fear.  
They fear themselves.*

*The wind will blow them across the ocean  
thousands of them in giant boats  
swarming like larva  
out of a crushed ant hill.*

*They will carry objects  
which can shoot death  
faster than the eye can see.*

*They will kill the things they fear  
all the animals  
the people will starve.*

*They will poison the water  
they will spin the water away  
and there will be drought  
the people will starve.*

*They will fear what they find  
They will fear the people  
They will kill what they fear.*

*Entire villages will be wiped out  
They will slaughter whole tribes.  
Corpses for us  
Blood for us  
Killing killing killing killing*

*And those they do not kill  
will die anyway  
at the destruction they see  
at the loss  
at the loss of the children  
the loss will destroy the rest.*

*Stolen rivers and mountains  
the stolen land will eat their hearts  
and jerk their mouths from the Mother.  
The people will starve.*

*They will bring terrible diseases  
the people have never known.  
Entire tribes will die out  
covered with festering sores...  
vomiting blood.  
Corpses for our work*

*Set in motion now  
set in motion by our witchery  
set in motion  
to work for us*

*They will take this world from ocean to ocean  
they will turn on each other  
they will destroy each other  
Up here  
in these hills  
they will find the rocks,  
rocks with veins of green and yellow and black.  
They will lay the final pattern with these rocks  
they will lay it across the world  
and explode everything.*

*Set in motion now  
set in motion  
To destroy  
To kill  
Objects to work for us  
objects to act for us  
Performing the witchery  
for suffering  
for torment  
for the stillborn  
the deformed  
the sterile  
the dead.*

*Whirling  
Whirling  
Whirling  
Whirling  
set into motion now  
set into motion.*

So the other witches said  
"Okay you win; you take the prize,  
but what you said just now -  
it isn't so funny  
It doesn't sound so good.  
We are doing okay without that kind of thing.  
Take it back.  
Call that story back."

But the witch just shook its head  
at the others in their stinking animal skins, fur  
and feathers.  
*It's already turned loose.  
It's already coming.  
It can't be called back.*