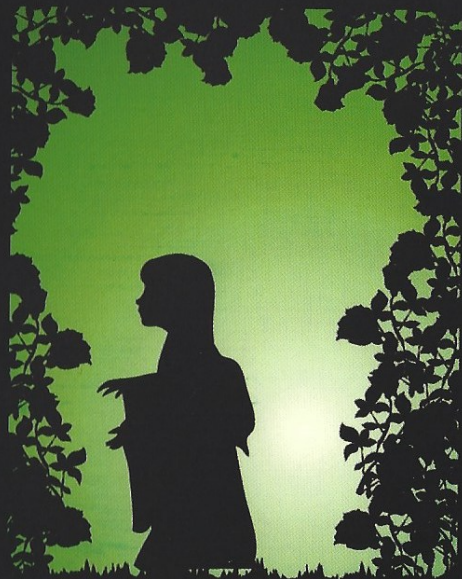




Little Apple Dolls - all artwork and likenesses © Ufuoma Urie 2005



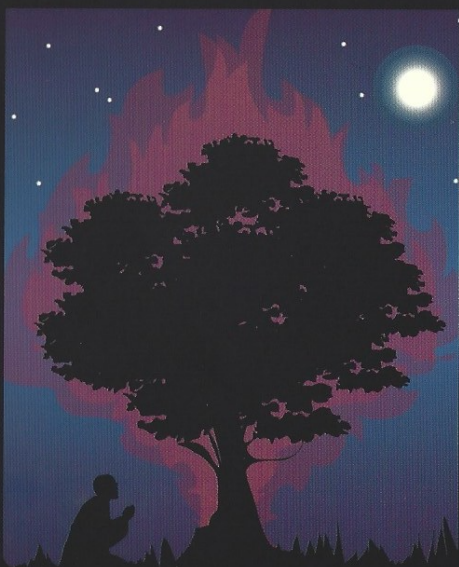


Irae's most favourite thing to do was tend to the roses in her garden. It was this she prized above all things. Little Apple Red says she would care for the garden and speak to the flowers as if they were old friends visiting for the day. Sometimes she would have tea parties, spending hours getting everything ready. The garden was one of great beauty.



Wherever Irae walked, small flowers bloomed in her footprints. Willows and pines grew alongside the stony paths. The tops of their branches seemed to touch the sky. Tall hedges surrounded the garden. So tall anyone that passed by could not see inside, like there was no way in and no way out. Irae had never left the garden but had never known this. Her mother and father had kept her there since she was able to walk. Little Apple Red says Irae's birth had been a difficult one. They cared for her as if she were an egg.





They had prayed to the gods for a child for many years and were finally blessed with one in Irae. She had been born many times before but had never lived pass infancy. Little Apple Red says she had lived because in their prayers they had promised and bound part of the child's spirit to the tree gods. Now they believed some part of Irae kept the garden alive and as beautiful as it was and that there was none greater in all of the land. "It is safest for her there... This garden is the world and our daughter is the queen of it... What use is the outside?" Her parents would say.



One day Irae was tending to the roses, talking to them about their day and what plans they had when she heard a sound that seemed to come out of nowhere howling a low and painful cry. Irae was scared. She had never heard such a sound. It was coming from the other side of one of the surrounding hedges. She began to back away from it, fearful of what it might be.



Just then a small flame appeared and began to burn a hole in the centre of the hedge. Little Apple Red says within seconds the coin sized gap had grown into a boulder sized opening. The flames had eaten through the hedge with ease and created a tunnel large enough for someone to walk right through. Irae looked through the hole.

Little Apple Red says a little white dog lay hurt on the other side. He looked like his white paws had been dipped in red ink. Irae, curious about what she saw before her, went to the little white dog. Irae had never seen such a thing. What strange creature was this? Birds and moths she had met, but not this. She looked at the dog for a long time and thought: if I can touch you, then you are real. There will be nothing to be afraid of. She bent down and patted the little dog on the head. The little dog's cries seemed to get louder. Irae smiled. "You are as real as I am. There is nothing to be afraid of." Irae felt a cold breeze move through her from the little dog to her hand. The little dog's paws were white again.

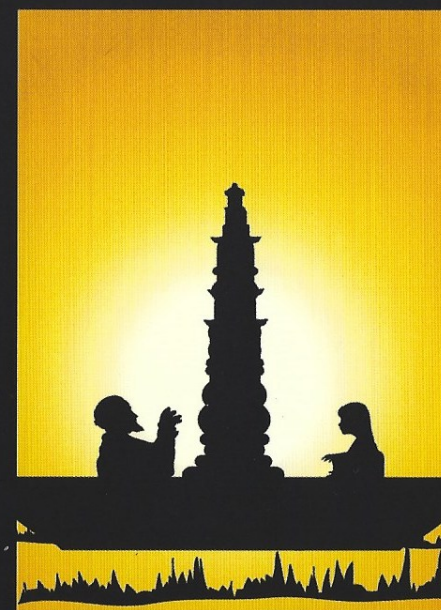


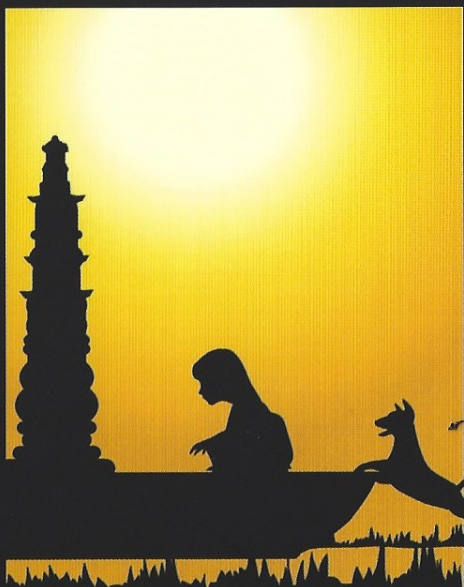




What strange feeling is this? She thought. Little Apple Red says the little white dog jumped up and began to run in circles around Irae, barking happily. Irae laughed a high and pure laugh like sweet milk and clouds made of cotton. She thought the dog must have been some magical being she had heard her parents speak of. She thought it was the most wonderful thing she had ever seen. The little dog heard rustling in some nearby bushes and ran off. Irae was excited by her new friend and followed him. She found herself amongst more trees different from those of the garden. What new world is this? She thought. Little Apple Red says the further she moved away from the opening in the garden the colder she became. Flowers no longer grew in her footsteps, but it did not matter; there was a whole new world to see. She walked further into the wood.

The little white dog was sniffing round a stone fountain nearby. She watched the dog in wonder. What would he do next? Little Apple Red says the little white dog began to bark furiously like something was wrong. Irae ran to see what he had found. She looked into the large shallow pond of the fountain. An old man lay floating, face up. Irae climbed into the pond. The old man was pale. Looking out into nothing. Irae wondered how a man could stay underwater with his eyes open. She called to the man but was without a reply. It must be some trickery she thought. If I can touch your eyes and you do not blink then it is a trick.





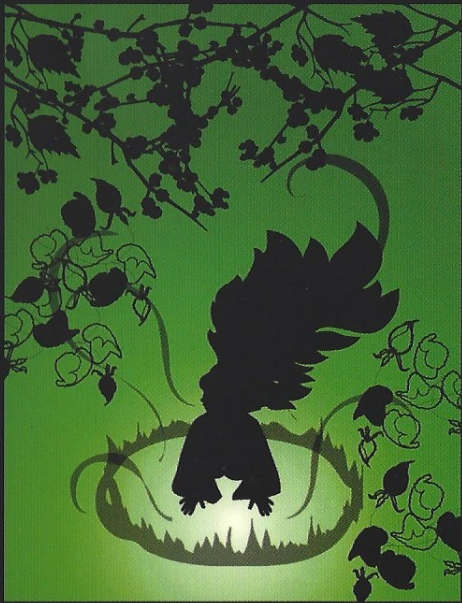
Irae reached into the pond and felt the old man's face. Again Irae felt a breeze rise from the old man through to her fingertips. She shivered without meaning to. Little Apple Red says the old man sat up suddenly and coughed violently. Irae jumped back amazed. The little dog barked madly. The old man was coughing and gasping for air, splashing about the pond as if he had been taken over by some spirit.

"I fell!" cried the man, "I fell and could not get up! Everything turned black! The gods sent a miracle! You have saved me!" Irae could not speak. She found that she could not answer the old man. Words would not come to her to describe this new world outside the garden.

Passers by had heard the old man's shouting and ran to see what the trouble was. "There is no trouble here," the old man cried- "I drowned and she saved me!! She brought me back to life. You must come and meet my family. Miracle workers are not born everyday!!!!" It was not long before news of Irae saving the old man spread throughout the neighbouring villages. The Little Girl sent by the gods who could bring one back to life. Even a little white dog even follows her- proof that she is pure of spirit they said. The old man's family praised Irae for her courage, felt sorry for her that she could not seem to speak and took her and the little white dog in as their own.

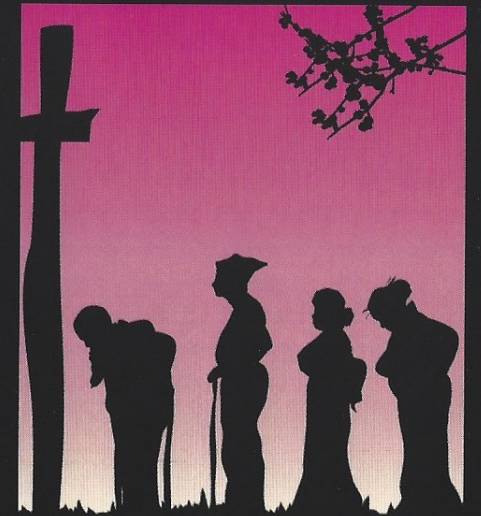






Irae found that the old man and his family had a large unkempt garden. Little Apple Red says on entering it for the first time she sat in a bed of weeds with her small hands stretched out in front of her. She dug her little fingers deep into the dirt and closed her eyes. The earth beneath her glowed red. A gust of wind quickly spiraled above and around her then settled as fast as it came. Irae had not known it but the old man's granddaughter was watching from the out house. Little Apple Red says Irae transformed the garden into some sort of paradise.

The old man's granddaughter ran to tell her grandfather of what she had seen. The old man was curious and had to see this for himself. He saw that Irae was petting the stump of an old tree that had grown in the garden. The old man rubbed his tired eyes. He could not believe what he saw. Before Irae stood the pine tree as if it had never been cut down. And the garden... as beautiful as Irae.

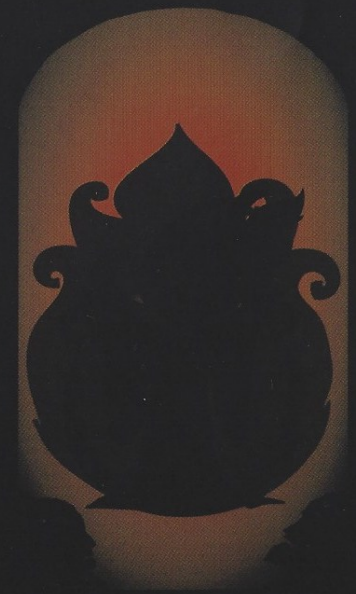


Everyone soon heard of Irae's "healing" powers and came in their hundreds to see the old man's garden and to be cured by the great Speechless Irae. If one had been driven mad or possessed all it took was a hand shake from Irae and they could be healed. And even when they were cured, the slightest pain like a sore thumb or an itchy nose, Irae would put right. As Irae cured the "sick" she would not only feel cold breezes moving through her but find that she could not smile nor have happy feelings anymore. Her feelings of wonder and joy in this new world had turned into sadness and bitterness. Soon after she began to lose her sight.

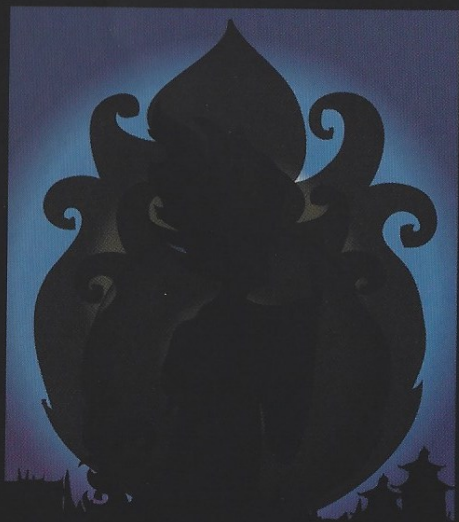


Irae would spend the evenings by herself. Staring into space. The little white dog would sit in her lap and keep her company. Petting him made her feel a little better. Still she could feel something black was growing the pit of her belly. Irae did not know why she could not speak or laugh anymore or could not see the flowers and trees she so loved. It angered her that everything she touched, she made better but made her lose her mind. Why do I feel this way? The family sensed something was wrong but were afraid to ask Irae. Sometimes they could hear her cackling to herself. She would not eat or sit with the family. She just wanted to be left alone. Still people came. But the family did not turn them away. Little Apple Red says Irae's bitterness grew into anger and from anger to rage. She was now blind.

One evening after the family had eaten their late meal they heard a scream. Like broken glass and paper cuts. It was coming from the garden. The family ran to see what had caused such a sound. Little Apple Red says something had set Irae alight from inside. A black mist formed a ball around her. Irae was destroying everything in her path. The little white dog cowered in a corner. The family tried to reason with Irae. Pleading for her to stop. Irae was past sense. Past thought. She was blind to their grief and deaf to their cries. People ran from their houses out into the street on hearing the noise only to find Irae their speechless wonder tearing the village apart. She still could not see but the black mist worked for her. Leading her. Protecting her.







Irae moved from the garden, through the house and out into the street turning everything to ashes. Little Apple Red says Irae could not and would not stop. Where flowers had grown before, fire and chaos were left in Irae's trail. The people began to throw stones and rocks at her. This only added to Irae's anger. The black mist spiralling her grew and threw anyone who stood in her way high into the air. Irae continued into the wood.

Little Apple Red says the little white dog had followed Irae. She could sense that something was near and turned around quickly. She was going to destroy anything that tried to stop her. The little white dog ran towards her barking. When she felt her old friend the black mist around her settled for a moment. You. You started this. I remember now! She thought. The mist became wild again and chased the little white dog deeper into the wood. The dog ran towards a hedge. He had come to a dead end and could not run away. Irae was not far behind.



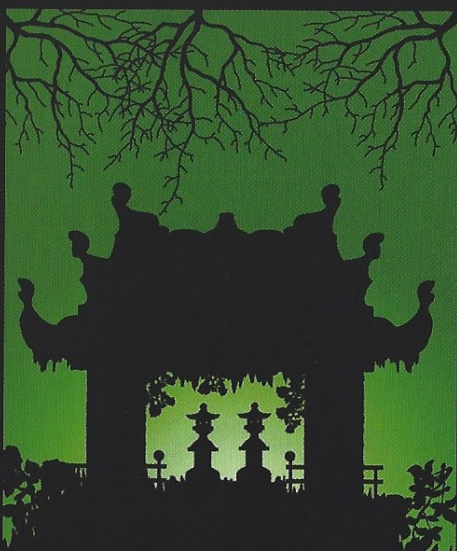


Little Apple Red says a strange thing happened. A small coin sized hole began to burn in the place where the little white dog had touched the hedge. The little white dog tried to run further along the barrier but was cornered by Irae and the black mist. The dog, now barking madly at Irae backed into the hedge. Again a small opening burned where he had been.



Irae's black mist swallowed the hedge and the little white dog whole.

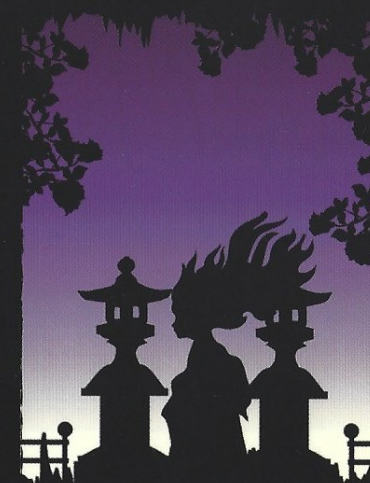




But then Irae sensed something that she knew. When she walked forward, the black fog around her suddenly vanished. Irae blinked as if she had been awoken from a dream. Little Apple Red says behind the place where the hedge had been was Irae's garden. Time had passed but she did not know how much. The perfect world her mother and father had kept her in was now filled with weeds but still beautiful. Two shrines had been made for them in the place where Irae would hold her special tea parties but she had not aged at all.

Little Apple Red says Irae's absence from the garden had made it wither. It also caused her parents great sadness. They had gone looking for her all those years ago but had lost all hope when they could not find her. They had tried to hard to protect Irae from the world outside the garden. It was not perfect like the one they had created for Irae but Little Apple Red says you cannot control everything. Sometimes things just happen. Sometimes protecting someone is the same as wounding them.

Irae stood inbetween the two shrines. The thing that had set Irae alight from inside returned and she became angry and vengeful again.

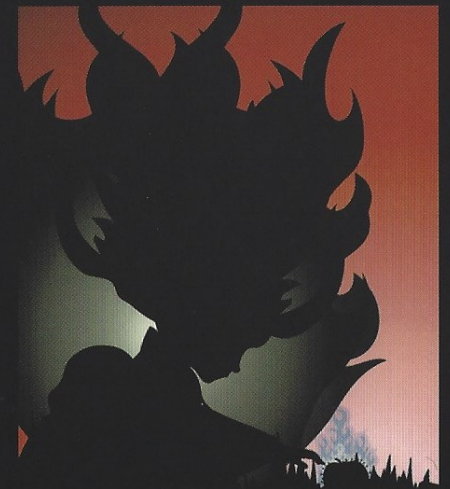




*This time black flames were her aura. Irae screamed her bitter deafening scream and shut her eyes tight. She fell to her knees wishing this feeling would go away. Her body was on fire. She was dying...or had died. She was sure because she could not feel anything at all. She began to cry.*

*"This place is enchanted, you know" said a voice from below. "Out there and in here. They were the same... are the same ... but not."*

*Irae opened her eyes. She was still without sight. She did not know that before her, amongst the dead leaves and flowers, was Little Apple Red. He says her journey into the world outside the garden had changed her, made her so bitter and angry that she had set herself alight. It had left her eyes hollow and black. Irae cried harder.*







"Who speaks? Who dares to speak to me? What is it you want from me? If you leave now, you will be spared!" Irae warned. "Pick me up and see what happens...do not worry you cannot hurt me... many have tried and failed...pick me up." Little Apple Red had done this many times before but Irae did not believe the strange fruit. She was ready to destroy him where he sat. She felt around for Little Apple Red and picked him up. And he seeing his chance, set to work. Irae felt a warmth surface.

Her black aura was now shades of blue and green. "Now stand up, walk around and see what happens." Irae, happy that this strange creature had cleaned her and made all of the dark feelings disappear, took three steps forward. In those steps grew azaleas and hollyhock.

Irae laughed crystals and floating paper boats and sweet milk and cotton clouds. "I guess you have nowhere to go now. Your new self won't quite fit out there. But there's a gathering not far from here, where you can show off this new self you wear so well." "Where?" Irae asked. "Inbetween here and there."

