



**Excerpt: Tapestry from Bat Monkey and Other Stories**

by **Aisha Phoenix**

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Loom followed Faith and Earnest through a long water trough into a room like nothing she had seen before. The walls, ceiling and floor were covered in bright intricate tapestries that seemed to be giving off light. Around the room, there were men working at looms. In the centre, was a chair that looked like a low-backed throne.

“Sit,” said Faith, pushing Loom into the chair.

“For we wel-come a daughter ...” the women sang.

A door at the back of the Tapestry opened and a short man with grey hair and a round stomach walked in. This had to be Pregnant Man. Loom and the other girls had heard about him. “Her new life is before her,” he said in a flat voice.

Loom sat in the chair. The man cast his eyes over the tapestries. He raised a hand abruptly and Faith handed him a stick with a metal hook. He jabbed it into the bright weaving in front of him. Faith rushed forward, took the stick and with some twisting and sharp yanks she pulled out strands of enchanted yarn from the wall. She untangled it from the stick then handed it to Earnest.

Pregnant Man looked down and grunted. Faith rushed to him with the stick. He thrust it into part of the tapestry on the floor and left her to pull the yarn out. He continued to do this for what felt like hours, with Faith retrieving the yarn, then handing it to Earnest, who hung it on different branches of the sculpted tree.

Then, without a word, the man walked towards the wall, reached into the tapestry, opened a door, and disappeared. The men who had been silently working at the looms, got up and followed him through the door.

“We’ll make it special for you,” Earnest said, unwrapping Loom’s hair. She put her fingers into Loom’s curls and pulled so hard that Loom sucked in her breath.

Loom watched the women picking up strands of yarn, whispering to each other and returning them to the tree. Whatever was in the yarn, she knew, would indicate her destiny. The Pregnant Man had decided it. Faith turned Loom’s head abruptly and the hair on her temples tightened painfully as the two women plaited scratchy lengths of yarn into it.

“She’ll marry a weaver,” Earnest whispered.

“Mmm ... they’ll have two children ... No, three,” Faith said.

“She a fisherwoman?” Earnest asked.

For a moment they let go of her head and rustled about behind her.

“No. She not like she mother.”

“She’s a farmer,” Faith said.

Loom closed her eyes. A farmer — with three children, married to a weaver, who would spend his weeks in the Tapestry, which she would never be allowed to set foot in again. A weaver like her father, whom she had hardly seen before he passed. She wanted to rip the plaits from her head and run.

Tears welled in her eyes.