

BACK TO ITHACA

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ABSTRACT

Back to Ithaca

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A modern novel based on the heroic journey from Greek mythology. The novel considers both the external journey and the internal and explores the growth necessary for the journey to succeed. It is preceded by a critical framework addressing why one hero fails in the myth of Orpheus but another is successful in his return home in *The Odyssey*. The framework discusses Jungian “anima” and “renovatio” as lenses to aid psychological understanding of the inner growth of the hero in parallel with Joseph Campbell’s “hero’s journey” which provides a structure for the exterior experiences.

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To those who walked the walk with me, you have my thanks. The journey was made mild by your company.

Preface

I heard once that, if you placed Othello in the play *Hamlet* and Hamlet in the play *Othello*, neither would be tragedies. What seem flaws or errors in one setting would actually benefit the character in the other setting. So I wondered if that was how one averts tragedy or how much the fault is in the self or in the stars. At the onset of this project I wanted to know what would happen if I could place Orpheus in the Odyssey or Odysseus in Orpheus' place.

I've been enamored with the journey myth for almost as long as I can remember, but during my studies sensed something meaningful within the structure was still eluding me. I wondered how much a hero's success depended on the individual person and how much depended on the events in the journey. For example, *the Epic of Gilgamesh* and *the Odyssey* are two journey myths that capture the hero's success. However, something like the Labors of Hercules or the story of Orpheus and Eurydice seemed to have many of the same journey elements but result in the hero's being unable to live an ultimately fruitful life at conclusion.

I owe a great deal of thanks to Joseph Campbell for getting me started on my road to understanding, as well as to Jung's theories for the terminology that allowed me to express to others what I instinctively felt about these myths. The work of Gregory Nagy, Robert Segal, Jasper Griffin, and Walter Strauss (among many others) has opened a series of windows looking out into the field where I have had the chance to play. And to the writers who have produced stories that were in their own rights epic journeys (the ones that ignited me as a child, sustained me through my growth, and continue to awe me today), I owe the greatest of thanks. Their words allowed me to see what I could explore myself.

The creative manuscript that follows this critical framework is essentially a modern version of *The Odyssey*. It attempts to present the experience in journey myth that leads to a positive outcome. It is about trying to find real identity, not in the coming of age tradition but in the tradition of the established hero, the adult already capable of living in the world until something blows that world away. It is about trying to find meaning in a world that, at times, may seem meaningless.

The project intends the following framework to expand on the academic foundation of the fictional exploration that I present.

**“Why Orpheus Fails but Odysseus Succeeds:
Jungian Dynamics in the Heroic Journey”**

INTRODUCTION

The following pages concentrate on the purpose and necessity of the journey myth in furthering our understanding of human existence. Using support from ancient and more recent source material, and referencing the work of scholars who have touched on parts of this exploration (including Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell), I discuss how the journey in myth teaches humanity about its place in the world.

Myth developed, in part, to help us understand incomprehensible elements of life. In particular, the journey myth clarifies mysteries we encounter as we live our common human experience. Jung's and Campbell's works discuss these universalities.

The Bildungsroman is a coming of age story, a story about finding out how to be capable without the protection of society, a becoming-a-hero tale. The other mythic journey¹ illustrates the series of steps necessary to become a fully integrated member of society.

This "other mythic journey" is about refining and consolidating the core heroic self. This project concerns itself with the experiences indispensable to the hero's return. The adventuring hero relies on his own vast abilities, but civilized society does not require monster slayers. So while an Iliadic warrior finds his role at war or in the wilderness, his personality is misplaced in society. For the mythic hero to reintegrate into society upon his return, he must develop another dimension.

¹ While the terminology "hero's journey" should be attached to Joseph Campbell's work in the specificity of a particular pattern, I will be using it more generally and interchangeably with "mythic journey" to mean simply the journey a hero or mythic character undergoes, not Campbell's specific pattern (unless otherwise noted).

The steps required in this development include a loss of the heroic self, since individual capabilities are no longer enough to navigate through new life challenges. With the failure of those pseudo-heroic strategies comes stripping of identity, reinvention of the self and reintegration into society, as a result of undertaking tasks that put the hero in touch with his anima. He must balance the concept of who he is and what makes him that way. This process appears through repeated failures of the previous self, trial and error of what might work in a new way, and finally understanding of who and how to trust (both the self and others). To do all that, the hero must essentially become new and recognize that new balance of identity, inner/outer, anima/persona, and self/other. Only after that recognition can his journey be successful. The Orphic cycle illustrates how and why a hero falls short while *the Odyssey* is a prime example of the successful journey.

Throughout journey myths, there is an underlying pattern. I use Campbell's and Carl Gustav Jung's works to identify meaning within these steps. The attempt to achieve this balance is what the journey myth demonstrates, as Joseph Campbell's *Power of Myth* argues: one of the purposes of myth is, "the pedagogical function of how to live a human lifetime under any circumstance" (39).

Campbell's explorations of similarities between the myths of various cultures (his pattern) are particularly helpful. Campbell proposes, "the standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation-initiation-return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth" (*Hero* 30). This "monomyth" traces a pattern seen in countless cultures. Campbell summarizes the process saying, the "hero ventures forth

from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (*Hero* 30). To Campbell, the origins of the hero are far less important than to Rank or Raglan. What matters is the journey itself,² and the point of that journey is to better the self and the world.

So the journey myth tasks the hero with saving society. Through his ordeal, we can learn how to avoid or lessen unnecessary pain, or even come to understand the place of hardships in life. I investigate what is central to the successful journey, what steps must be experienced along the way.

The steps, the stages of the pattern discussed earlier, help trace the differences between Odysseus' surmounting obstacles and Orpheus' failures and suggest possible causes. For instance, Odysseus learns to accept help from trustworthy others, while Orpheus relies too heavily on himself. The crux of Odysseus' torturous journey is developing a new identity which is not solely self-reliant and which he must accept through self-recognition. Then, and only then, will he have grown so that others can recognize him too, and he can make worthwhile and fruitful connections (or re-connections) with them as a newer, wiser being. Thus, Odysseus represents humanity. Orpheus also represents humanity, but only that part which is unwilling to or incapable of change.

² Campbell outlines the Hero's Journey in seventeen steps, divided into three main categories: Departure, Initiation, and Return. Departure consists of: The Call to Adventure, Refusal of the Call, Supernatural Aid, The Crossing of the First Threshold, and The Belly of the Whale. Initiation includes: The Road of Trials, The Meeting with the Goddess, Woman as the Temptress, Atonement with the Father, Apotheosis, and The Ultimate Boon. The Return concludes with: Refusal of the Return, The Magic Flight, Rescue from Without, The Crossing of the Return Threshold, Master of the Two Worlds, and Freedom to Live (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*).

To this end, the journey must be external and internal: the exterior physical, geographical journey and the interior, psychological journey. The outer journey creates a perceptible structure that mirrors the experiences of the inner journey to reflect psychological identity and enable taking one's place in society.

Carl Jung's works particularly exemplify the psychological aspects of the journey. By means of what Jung calls, "the outer attitude, the outward face, the persona; the inner attitude, the inward face, the anima," he isolates the parts of the self that are the same in myth as in our lives (*Essential* 100-101). Those outer and inner selves must balance for success. To achieve that balance, the hero must undergo an internal change and recognize his evolving self and new place in the world. This evolution is one the "psyche" as a collection of the conscious and the unconscious processes will undergo and will manifest through "the self, [which] is not only the centre but the whole circumference... of this totality" (Jung, *Essential* 422). This anima, or inward face is described by Jung as, "a clearly defined entity with a character that, very often, is autonomous and immutable... it is, by and large, complementary to the character of the persona. The anima usually contains all those common human qualities which the conscious attitude lacks (101). For the hero, the anima has the qualities his persona is missing. It could be that one contains the humility to help balance the other's pride.

The anima has its influence on the actions of the hero. Jung tells us that, "anyone who is himself his outward role will infallibly succumb to the inner processes... his life runs into one deadlock after another [and] the anima is inevitably

projected upon a real object” (103). A hero who is defined by his outer face and who has no connection with his inner workings is bound to face obstacles.

In addition, Jung’s concept of rebirth explains the transformed identity that comes from the successful journey. He suggests multiple types of rebirth including “metempsychosis or transmigration of souls, Reincarnation, Resurrection, and Rebirth (Renovatio)” (*Archetypes* 113). I focus on “Rebirth” or “Renovatio.” According to Jung, “rebirth may be renewal without any change of being in as much as the personality which is renewed is not changed in its essential nature, but only its functions, or parts of the personality are subjected to healing, strengthening, or improvement” (114). This description seems to be the closest to what the journey myth depicts in the growth of the individual. Jung says, “‘individuation’ is the process by which a person becomes a psychological individual, that is, a separate, indivisible unity or whole” (*Essential* 419). The growth over the course of the journey “does not shut one out from the world, but gathers the world to one’s self” (419). For example, by the end of the journey Odysseus is still the man of twists and turns, the hero of *metis* (cunning). But he is perhaps a more trusting hero, more in balance with his anima, whose “shadow” does not dominate every subsequent decision.

In the Orphic cycle and *the Odyssey* we see two journeys, one which fails while the other succeeds. In the successful one, the hero must recognize and realize something new about himself. His encounters spur growth and recognition that without those insights cannot occur. Both heroic myths involve aspects central to development and reflective of Campbell’s monomyth and Jung’s teachings on the

psyche. Both myths deal with death and rebirth, the transience of human existence, and the evidence of and impetus for change.

The journey (while it may be represented and achieved physically and geographically) is really a psychological one. It is a “transforming [of] consciousness,” according to John Tigue, who presents a description of “consciousness in myth” as a manner of confronting reality. Tigue says we do this, “by learning to recognize the projections of the unconscious and to complete the inner journey which is participated in outwardly. This recognition and participation takes place through clarification of emotional experiences and the situations in which they occur” (7). In losing a loved one, failing to achieve a goal, or facing a seemingly conspiratorial universe, we confront our real purpose. The journey promotes growth and demands balancing of the inner self with the outer, of identity and purpose. In the tradition these moments are categorized in the katabasis, the return, and the recognition of change. Jung’s and Campbell’s works illuminate how Orpheus fails in this process, but Odysseus succeeds.³

ORPHIC CYCLE

Orpheus and his quest to rescue his wife from the underworld illustrate a version of the journey myth. Orpheus, like Odysseus, is a greatly capable hero. Like Odysseus, he is motivated by the separation from his wife and undergoes a katabasis—a journey into the underworld. But unlike Odysseus, he has no successful return. There is no balance Orpheus comes to between his own confidence and

³ For textual reference, I primarily use Robert Fagles’ translation of the *Odyssey*. For the Orphic cycle, I use A.S. Kline’s translation of Virgil, as well as Michael Simpson’s translation of Ovid.

trusting others. Why? Orpheus does not experience the key moments necessary to develop that trust. The Orphic myth is one that demonstrates a failure to grow in terms of Jungian dynamics, a warning about what will happen if we fail in our return.

The Orphic myth seems comparable in many ways to *The Odyssey*. But Orpheus' quest shows how, for some, the journey can fail instead of succeed. Significantly, in *The Odyssey* the return is where the rebirth occurs and the reintegration into the world is made possible. But sometimes the journey provokes changes that prevent rejoining society, or they do not change enough to enable return, as I believe happens with Orpheus. The Orpheus myth can be discussed as an exterior expedition that informs the interior journey he undergoes. The external is a descent into the underworld to retrieve Eurydice. The internal is self-growth, a balancing, if successful.

Why doesn't Orpheus succeed? According to Strauss, "he lost Eurydice, the image of his world, because he did not have the patience to contemplate her before he reached the light of day" (139). The return of the hero in journey is predicated upon a change in identity, self-recognition of the new person he has become and acceptance of that self. If Orpheus has not acknowledged the anima for balance, then he will question whether Eurydice follows him and turn around. Jung tells us that when an individual has "no conscious relation to the unconscious processes," the subject often forms tragic ties with the object the anima is projected upon (*Essential* 103). The contemplation must be conscious to work towards balance.

Unlike Odysseus, who is capable of withholding his identity from Penelope (and most others) long enough to defeat the suitors and successfully return, Orpheus

is unable to wait the few moments more to exit the underworld and therefore fails in his task, a failure that has a great deal to do with a dearth of necessary steps along his journey. In *the Georgics*, Virgil tells us, “a sudden madness seized the incautious lover...he stopped, and forgetful, alas, on the edge of light, his will conquered, he looked back” (4.491-494). Orpheus has not learned to carefully judge and balance trust in self and others the way Odysseus does. His identity is immature.

The difference in the length of Odysseus’ journey and Orpheus’ is evident, but more important than time are the differences in challenges. Without serious obstacles, the hero does not develop spiritual or psychic muscle. Orpheus does not experience the types of mini-encounters Odysseus survives that present the limits of self-sufficiency, the war persona. Orpheus looks back out of a failure to trust others, be it Persephone’s deal, or even the love of Eurydice herself. This shortcoming can stem from a lack of balance, with the female characters representing elements of the anima. As a hero who has been solely reliant on his own magnificent gifts, Orpheus cannot transfer that self trust to a trust in others.

When a hero journeys, change comes from deep inside, surrendering to a reality that most prefer to avoid. He needs to persevere, to accept change, when others would just seek relief. The successful hero can then bring his new understanding back to society. As Strauss says regarding recent examinations of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, “the Orphic journey is a quest for the dark center of being followed by a return in which this dark center, once it is apprehended, absorbed, and transmuted, is made to shine forth in its own new and intense light” (49). However, while Orpheus does return from the underworld, he fails to retrieve

Eurydice. The necessary renewal for the successful journey, the transformed identity through rebirth, is not clearly seen. Instead, according to Virgil, Orpheus laments that there is nothing left to do, nowhere to turn. He weeps for seven months, is unmoved by love or song, wanders snowy lands, until he is dismembered by Ciconian women (Maenads) spurned by his devotion (4.510-520). He needs to continue his struggle and be willing to allow his outer self to balance with his inner.

In discussing versions of the myth, Charles Segal suggests Virgil focuses on the poet's fatal mistrust that causes the irrevocable loss of his beloved (*Orpheus* 29). Orpheus is a man who needs to learn to trust, but he fails. He needs to grow in identity. The way to that growth is complex and lengthy.

In the Orphic myth, Orpheus relies on his own abilities to travel down into Hades to charm the lords of death and regain his wife. His initial success sets him up for the eventual downfall, because he has been entirely self-reliant. His immaturity leads to being unable to succeed in his task. Frederick Greenhalph proposes this as an "assertion of human frailty—essentially that Orpheus' lack of faith, lack of discipline, or other second guessing lead to his wife's second death" (1). The lack of faith is a failure to trust that she is following him, a failure to accept things out of his control. But what matters even more is Orpheus' inability to wait. He is an impatient hero. Transformation can occur through the journey, but not without time. He has had no growth, no inner exploration of self and identity along his journey, and his own ego out of balance with the anima precipitates his failure.

While it may seem as if Orpheus must fail, otherwise the myth loses its meaning, sometimes what doesn't occur is just as important as what does. One could

look for examples in the paralysis of existence in Modernist literature, or the white space or negative space of Contemporary poetry. What doesn't happen means something. What isn't said, says something too. John Heath tells us that, "there is simply no 'unequivocal' evidence for anything but a tragic end to Orpheus' most famous adventure" (165). But if Orpheus had learned something along the way, there would have been an alternative. If, after being stripped of Eurydice a second time, he began to reform his identity (from the hero reliant upon his own gifts, to someone willing to trust others), Orpheus, through *renovatio*, could have been a successful journeyer. He returns from his exterior journey without Eurydice because he did not achieve balance in his inner journey. We must look to learn from this myth. Beyond mortality, living or dying, is the much more complex question: how then shall we live? We grow up.⁴

Characters in journey myth experience the trials we experience in our lives. Much as how Odysseus embodies the weary traveler, the "long suffering man," "Orpheus becomes the mythical figure who affirms death-within-life, being-within-becoming" (Strauss 17). Orpheus and Odysseus represent individuals in society, illustrating what to do and what not to do to survive, to thrive. We are the long suffering ones, we are the ones capable of returning home, becoming greater than ourselves, finding the balance necessary for growth. Charles Segal says, "his myth also conveys the belief that art can reveal to us the mysteries hidden in our mortality,

⁴ The myth shows us how Orpheus fails to grow and change from his journey, but we see in some more recent renditions of the myth, as Strauss points out, an adjustment of the fatalistic conclusion. Cocteau's or Camus' version provides pictures of, or at least the possibility of, success. Not necessarily success in regaining the lost Eurydice, but a successful change. As Strauss says, "In the orbit of modern Orpheus the themes of regeneration and reminiscence go hand in hand" (13). In looking back we are looking forward, and so many modern versions of the Orphic myth include some achievement of growth, even if only in death.

which, if understood, will deepen our version of existence” (*Orpheus* 197). Potential isn’t enough; choice and persistence make the possible actual. We have to be willing to transform, to embrace the uncomfortable. That understanding of “mysteries hidden in our mortality,” in Jungian terms, is the role of the anima in our lives. In Campbell’s structure it is what allows the hero to become “The Master of Two Worlds.” Orpheus cannot be reborn for, unlike Odysseus, Orpheus fails to learn the balance that allows change.

In the journey myth we take new knowledge into the world we came from and are returning to by changing ourselves, growing, coming to an understanding of newer identity. As Robert Segal says, “the ideal is a balance between consciousness of the external world and consciousness of the unconscious. The aim of the second half of life is to supplement, not abandon, the achievements of the first half” (*In Quest of* 18). The Iliadic Odysseus grows from his journey home. The Orpheus of *the Argonautica* should be enhanced by his quest for Eurydice. The balance Segal refers to can be equated to Jung’s outer and inner faces, the persona and anima. Rebirth is one process linked to that balance. The hero must encounter something like a metamorphosis of the old self in order to be reborn, to become a Master of Two Worlds, but that process must be in equilibrium lest it result in failure.

The journey to and from the realm of the dead is the fulcrum in both *the Odyssey* and the Orphic myth. The katabasis is the point between before and after, inner and outer growth. The travel from above ground to the underworld is a shift between exterior and interior and is representative of the change of the inner self as the hero journeys in an outer world. Charles Segal suggests “the journey corresponds

to the wisdom tradition in mythological descents to the underworld. This Orpheus, like Odysseus, experiences the emptiness of the dead” (*Orpheus* 162). The emptiness of the dead is symbolic for the shell of being that is created by the stripping of identity due to our own deaths, a preparation to ready us for our rebirths, an external description of internal mechanics.

Whereas Odysseus exits the underworld preparing to face the next dangers, encounters that will help him learn to weigh the self-reliance (that has been unable to get him home), with a trust in others (which he becomes capable of through inner growth and ending in a successful return), Orpheus fails to learn the same lessons. Stripped of Eurydice a second time, he is primed to recognize the need to balance his identity through further experiences. He should be ready for a combining of his own great trust in self (which backfires on him when he doesn’t trust others), with a learned trust in others (that a balance of persona and anima would enable). Instead Orpheus experiences no growth, and the anima remains a wild dangerous aspect, personified in the poem by the Maenads who eventually do away with him.

Orpheus has the ability to be successful, but, despite the enamored descriptions of some critics, we need to acknowledge Orpheus fails. The failure is not just the inability to rescue Eurydice, but his inability to change as a person. Orpheus does not actually grow. His conscious and unconscious are not balanced. He produces no results necessitated upon the trust of another, and therefore is unable to return successfully to the world. The very traits that make him so successful (like Odysseus in his own respective story) in facing down mortality, risking his life to enter the underworld and attempting to overcome the denizens of Hades, also prevent

him from succeeding. The talent that helps him be great, “disallows him to transform himself” (Segal *Orpheus* 118). The powers that allow Orpheus (or others like Hercules or Achilles) to be a great hero also prevent him from finding a place in the world to return to.

What we see in both the katabasis of the Orphic myth and *the Odyssey* is a pattern or tradition that symbolizes a journey of greater scope than one that physical geography can encompass. Every creator of journey myth sees the importance of this framework in understanding the purpose of the journey. Walter Strauss argues that, “each poet considered the event so crucial that he is prompted to reinterpret his existence with the beloved’s death at the center” (26). Or in Odysseus’ case, the loss of his wife due to their separation represents that death. Strauss continues to define the loss of the beloved as so central to understanding the myth, “that his own life history is thenceforth understood as a renewal (meeting with the beloved) that is followed by death (the axial event) and that leads to a regeneration (spiritual recovery of the beloved along with a new resolve to conceive all future activity in her image)” (26). While not every version of the journey myth fits Strauss’ pattern exactly, his pattern is accurate in the same way as Campbell’s perspective. There must be a death of the old self to allow for a rebirth: the “Renovatio” of Jung.

In some cases, when the hero experiences the right moments, as Odysseus does, he comes to a new understanding and can succeed. In other cases, as with Orpheus, he does not. The hero must change, and that change, as we see through studying Jung, should be a formation of balance between the inner and outer selves. It is difficult for anyone to subvert part of their personality and no less difficult for a

hero. In fact it may be that much more difficult for the hero figure, because he has relied on his own great skills for so many adventures. But the journey teaches us that we cannot be successful in our return, we cannot rejoin society, unless there is a death to self (the old one) to enable new life.

The step that is missing for Orpheus is that necessary coming to terms with the new self. In Odysseus' case we have a number of female figures representing a renewed broadened self: Circe, Scylla, Calypso, Nausicaa, Ino, Arete, Athena and finally Penelope serve to reflect the balance one must have between outer identity and inner. Odysseus must learn when to trust his own abilities and when to trust the help of others. He cannot simply overcome the anima or meet her in war (as he attempts with Scylla). Nor can one simply trust a balance has been reached, and that others will aid the hero no matter what.

In the Orphic cycle the anima can be represented by Eurydice, by Persephone, and by the Maenads. However, in his interactions with these representations, we see Orpheus unwilling or unable to come to the same balance Odysseus achieves in his return. When we look at the anima in the Orphic cycle, we start with Orpheus' beloved. C.M. Bowra presents the Ovidian perspective of Eurydice as someone who, "does not complain, since her only cause of complaint would be that she is loved too much" (114). He goes on to assert the myth as a whole is a, "poem on the failure of a love which seemed to be stronger than death" (114). The actual failure is not of love but of maturity. The very abilities that allow us to undertake the quest will end us.

We must remember that journey myth is about the individual growth in order to better the individual and society. A love that is stronger than death, but that leaves no room for anything else cannot be a successful trait if one is to return to civilization from the world of adventure. M. Owen Lee also suggests it is the abilities of the great individual (as mentioned above) which both allow him to undertake the adventure, and cause his failure if they cannot be balanced. In discussing Cocteau's take on the Orphic myth, he says, "because he is a poet, Orphée can contact the unknown regions beyond; these communicate with him in ways malevolent and benignant; they bring his destruction and his apotheosis" (309). However, the only way to return to the world after that apotheosis is if one is able to subvert enough of the previous self that enabled the great journey and replace that self-centeredness with the ability to put others' needs on par with—and sometimes ahead of ours. While Odysseus demonstrates this capability, Orpheus never does. That ability is enabled through a balancing of the anima.

We see yet another representation of the anima in Browning's Eurydice. Charles Segal presents her as, "a woman who does not want to let go of the physical warmth of life for the unknown aloneness of death. All her fear, need, and love are concentrated in the comfort of the backwards glance, which she wants and must have, regardless of the consequences" (*Orpheus* 176). This is an anima that is needy, deceitful, and journey-wrecking if unbalanced. It is and it does.

Like Segal's understanding of Browning's Eurydice, HD presents a confrontational, oppositional characterization. The blame of one part by the other is the externalizing of the inner struggle the journey taker undergoes. Or, like Orpheus,

his weakness will betray him and result in a failed quest. Eurydice blames him, but Orpheus chooses immediate gratification.

The mythic journey is not easy. Odysseus takes ten years to successfully return home, seven of which are an incubation period for his transformed identity. Orpheus is unsuccessful because of his lack of discipline. He is unwilling and unable to compel the formation of a newer identity. Strauss summarizes the Orphic myth in three parts: “(I) Orpheus as a singer prophet capable of establishing harmony in the cosmos, (II) the descent into Hades (katabasis): the loss of Eurydice and subsequent subterranean quest and the second loss, (III) the dismemberment theme” (6). In looking at Strauss’ description of Orpheus, capable of “establishing harmony in the cosmos,” we must realize the irony of someone so able to manipulate the exterior world, yet unable to harmonize himself. In many ways we see Odysseus overcome a similar situation. Odysseus is the master manipulator, the man of twists and turns, cunning, wise, god-like, but it is only after he equalizes his tendencies can he succeed.

The hero figure is capable of great things and represents great possibilities. The “harmony” Strauss talks about is the external manifestation of an inner growth the journey myth holds fundamentally at its core. The second part of Strauss’ pattern is the stripping of the status quo. However, Orpheus returns from the underworld unchanged and, therefore, cannot survive his ultimate fatal weakness. Instead he is destroyed. He doesn’t need the Maenads to tear him; he has torn his all-too-self-indulgent persona. The elements are metaphor. This very easily could have been the

result for Odysseus (death at the hands of the suitors) as well had he not cooperated in his own transformation. It all comes down to choice.

THE ODYSSEY

At the heart of every successful change is an understanding of the aspects of self, the persona and the anima, the ego and the shadow (Jung *Essential* 91). Without embracing a new identity and a willingness to see where one fits in the world one has returned to, the journey cannot be successful. This adaptation demands going beyond the former persona that relies on itself for success, the *kleos* (glory) driven warrior, and becoming a more balanced individual who trusts his own abilities and recognizes when to trust others to function in society. The mythic heroes who could not negotiate this fundamental change cannot operate fully in society. Only the hero who integrates his changes can flourish.

In looking at *the Odyssey* I focus on three distinct phases. At the beginning, Odysseus, an Iliadic hero, trusts greatly in his own abilities (similar to Orpheus) and mistrusts others, reinforcing his separation from society (the hero on one plane living isolated in his life, while the rest of society lives theirs). Then, I discuss stages that coincide with Odysseus' change in identity through death and rebirth as outlined by scholars like Jung, Campbell. Finally, I look at the adoption of Odysseus' new identity. As Douglas Stewart says, "he must be taught that to be human in the new era with its standards so different from the heroic, he must be generally open to the possibility of risk and defeat, as much as to victory and success, for otherwise he

simply will not be human” (131). The journey does this for Odysseus and can do it for all of us, teaching us how to be new in an ever-changing world.

Early Odysseus comes from the Trojan War accustomed to relying on himself (much as Orpheus does from his own early successes). The pride Odysseus demonstrates in his abilities marks *The Odyssey* as a tale of *hubris*. Only when he has learned from the women he encounters, managed to acknowledge his need for the gods, and learned humility can he return home. While on a shallow level this process seems proverbial, *The Odyssey* uses the hero’s hubris and the role of the gods as examples of balancing self-reliance and trusting in others.

For example, Odysseus’ encounter with the Cyclops Polyphemus illustrates an essential life experience. Relying on his own culture’s hospitality standard, Odysseus “trusts” that he and his men will receive a cordial welcome replete with gifts and food. Instead, they encounter a terrible creature that views them as food, and their blind trust and unexamined assumptions result in the loss of many men and threaten Odysseus himself. Similarly, Odysseus is faced with “trusting” Circe. He is wise not to trust her, and, having heeded the warning of Hermes, has prepared himself to resist her magic. He knows others need to earn his trust.

It takes Odysseus many years, obstacles, hardships, and losses to overcome his mistrust and recognize the aspects of himself that create it. Until he is able to do that, he fails. Erwin Cook reminds us of how Odysseus’ encounter with Scylla, “dramatizes the impotence of Iliadic heroism” (52), the self-sufficiency that the great Trojan War figures exhibited. The one-on-one battles, secret solo missions, and moments of individual heroism may have had a place in war but not in the world. As

Cook explains, “although he is forewarned by Circe not to oppose the daughter of *Kratais*, ineluctable force, Odysseus arms himself for combat, only to watch as six of his men are devoured by the monster” (52). At this point and for many years to come, Odysseus still trusts his own abilities too much, perhaps through hubristic overconfidence, but also his experiences. Four early encounters with the Cicones, the Lastragonians, the Lotus Eaters, and the Cyclops Polyphemus make Odysseus question his self-assurance and undermine his trust in others.

Jeffery Barnouw tells us how “a number of recent studies,” including work by Nagy, Segal, and Clay, “have seen Odysseus as a hero of *metis*” (21), indicating intellectual skill or cunning. Barnouw asserts that, “the emphasis on trickery works to obscure an essential aspect of the *metis* specific to Odysseus. His cleverness in *the Odyssey* is invariably in the service of a larger purpose. He plays no tricks for their own sake” (21). Odysseus’ *metis* does eventually serve a larger purpose, but all of Odysseus’ great successes have been based on his own *metis*; his cunning and skilled deception have saved him and his companions and won the Trojan War.

On his way home from a costly war, Odysseus and his men encounter cannibals, giants, and a society of idle wastrels in the Lotus Eaters. Each of these obstacles is twisted, dangerous. The consumption of ourselves by ourselves in cannibalism, the relinquishing of all drive and motivation in wasting away through idle, drug addled experiences, the distinct danger of foreign cultures striking out at those venturing into their territory, all push Odysseus further away from society. All that Odysseus encounters helps identify where he fits into the world. He is no longer at war, but he is not home either, nor will he truly be able to reach home until he has

changed. This change is the step Orpheus does not follow through. To continue his journey, Odysseus will be shown, “casting off the persona of Iliadic hero and moving towards a life and a different story” (Fletcher 67). We see this quite clearly in the previously mentioned encounter with the Cyclops Polyphemus, whose xenia-gone-bad contrasts directly with experiences with the Phaeacians later on Scheria. One is at the beginning of the journey, one at the end; they work as mirror images of the path towards identity, recognition and growth.

After his escape from the Cyclops, we ask who is Odysseus. Douglas Stewart reminds us that while Odysseus has given himself the name “nobody,” he does eventually reveal his true name. However, Odysseus does not use it deliberately again for ten years. Others identify him, but he doesn’t utter it himself. Stewart argues, “the poet does not want Odysseus to name himself for the simple reason that he is somehow not himself” (34). Odysseus is no longer Odysseus: a self-proclaimed nobody, he becomes a man who does not have a place in the world to which he attempts to return. The encounters with Aeolus, the Lastragonians and Circe and his subsequent choices end the initial phase of the journey. While his Iliadic identity cannot go home to return to the society he left, he now begins the *katabasis*, the death and rebirth necessary to become a new being. As G.E. Dinmock says, “to pass from the darkness of the cave into the light, to pass from being ‘nobody’ to having a name, is to be born” (56). This birth will require Odysseus to surmount a number of trials to earn it.

When he and his men arrive on Circe’s island, he sees what she does to men unprepared to face her as she turns them into swine, destroys their identities, reduces

them to animals. She represents what Jung refers to as the “anima.” Describing the anima “as a remarkably ambiguous figure,” Stephen Walker says, “the anima manifests both negative and positive qualities. She can be the delusion making and fatal factor in a man’s life, but she can also be a helpful figure, his companion in his exploration of the psyche” (Walker, *Jung and the Jungians* 49). This concept is present throughout *the Odyssey* as representative of the inner feminine side of the hero. The Iliadic Odysseus had little need to understand the anima, but the new Odysseus needs it to successfully negotiate his transformation and reconnect with his society: “For a man who is unaware of his feminine side, the anima can easily play the negative role of an archetypal temptress and deceiver, a Lorelei, a Belle Dame Sans Merci, a Calypso, subtly luring him into confusion and despair” (47). Circe seduces the men in Odysseus’ crew without much effort, and we find that without the aid of the gods, specifically Hermes and the “moly⁵,” Odysseus would also have succumbed, before completing his journey to rebirth.

Odysseus does not trust others, and he is therefore mistrustful of Circe. However, in order to overcome her powers, he needs protection. So, he takes the moly from Hermes because it comes from a male figure, which presents as less dangerous to the hero whose own anima is unfamiliar. Even so, he must be compelled to accept help and continue. According to Jasper Griffin, “Circe says to the hero, not that the magic herb has protected him, but ‘your mind is proof against enchantment’” (*Homer on Life and Death* 58). Odysseus counters Circe’s strength with his, and they become lovers, but he never really trusts her, so their relationship is

⁵ The magical herb Hermes gives to Odysseus in Book 10 to protect him from Circe’s magic.

unbalanced. We cannot advance in life, in figuring out who we are and why we are here, without connecting with others, without trusting in the other. Even Circe will never be able to grant Odysseus an understanding of new identity. She is not human enough represent the society he wishes to re-embrace, nor is he ready.

In the journey myth, the connection with self and others can be represented by an individual. For Odysseus, that figure must be human: his wife. Walker argues that, “only as a man becomes more mature psychologically does his image of the anima become represented by a single figure” (48). Circe starts Odysseus on the quest to balance his persona and anima. Later interactions with Calypso, Nausicaa, Athena, and on Ithaca depict this side of his personality, as he finally comes to balance.

Only after submitting to and integrating all these spirit-opening experiences can Odysseus go home to Penelope. Expanding on what was previously outlined regarding the anima, Jung explains that, “every mother and every beloved is forced to become the embodiment of this omnipresent and ageless image, which corresponds to the deepest reality in a man” (*Essential* 109). The anima influences the hero’s ability to trust and be inspired by others.ⁱ But there is of course, danger in trusting heedlessly. Odysseus must equalize his inner drives.

He had learned not to trust anyone but himself through disastrous encounters with the Lastragonians, the Lotus Eaters, and the Cyclops. Even the help he receives from Aeolus teaches him that he cannot or does not trust his crew, or himself. His own abilities are not only not enough, but society has no place for the totally self-reliant uber-warrior. There is a reason even contemporary action heroes live alone,

removed from society, separated from family. That persona is not open to the world. The conundrum of growth is to learn to balance interdependence and self-reliance with the skill to read and judge others without the necessity of conquering them.

For the great hero this need for change necessitates such a loss that he is forced to turn to others for help or admit failure. When he refuses to allow his crew to navigate home from Aeolus' island, Odysseus remains awake sailing the ship for nine days, never letting the bag of winds out of his reach, never relinquishing control or command, until finally his mortal body gives out and he falls asleep (10.37). He cannot even rely on himself. His crew, equally mistrustful, thinks he has squirreled away some plunder from the island and rip the bag open, so the mutual mistrust leads only to failure.

In order to grow, Odysseus must leave Circe's home and journey back to his. The only way to accomplish this is to die and be reborn. He follows Circe's advice and sets off for the underworld and Tiresias. This singular route offers the sole way for his old self to perish and his reborn one to emerge.

Tiresias' directions require the evolution of Odysseus' war persona, his passions and desires. Odysseus' discussion with Agamemnon's ghost shows the results of refusing that metamorphosis. Likewise, Achilles delivers the message that yes, Odysseus really should want to change, should do whatever it takes to reach home. That life is so much greater than death, even glorious death in war that Achilles asserts, he'd, "rather slave on earth for another man, some dirt-poor tenant farmer who scrapes to keep alive, than rule down here over all the breathless dead" (11.556-11.558).

Erwin Cook tells us that Tiresias' instructions to Odysseus suggest that his return to Ithaca depends on his capacity to restrain his own *thumos* ("spiritedness") and that of his companions when they reach Thrinkia (*The Odyssey in Athens* 60). This message is a directive to fundamentally change one's self. He must learn to value distrust from Agamemnon's failures, as well as to prize mindful life from Achilles' desires to still be alive, not only be great. We further know that Odysseus is in flux between identities when he asks Tiresias how he can get his mother to recognize him: "How lord, can I make her know me for the man I am?" (11.165). He seeks recognition from and interaction with his anima, an interaction with the internal.

The importance of the anima in his identity, in his journey, emerges through Odysseus' interaction with Agamemnon. On hearing Agamemnon's fate at the hands of Clytemnestra, Odysseus learns the dangers of not integrating with the anima: "So even your own wife—never indulge her too far. Never reveal the whole truth whatever you may know, just tell her a part of it, be sure to hide the rest" (11.500-501). This warning serves the dual purpose of demonstrating inward and outward movement. While one could take Agamemnon's words as a literal warning based on his own experience, it offers suggestions for balancing the sides of his identity to be successful in his return. Agamemnon did not achieve this balance. As an Iliadic character, he would not have thought it necessary, for he accomplished his goals (the defeat and sacking of Troy) within his war-identity. He did not face the defeats and failures of that persona that would spur growth. Tiresias directs a subjugation of

Odysseus' war-like persona; Agamemnon's fate demonstrates what happens when the anima remains repressed. Odysseus needs the mean between them.

In his communication with his mother we see Odysseus struggle. He tries three times to embrace her spirit: "I rushed toward her, desperate to hold her, three times she fluttered through my fingers, sifting away like a shadow, dissolving like a dream, and each time the grief cut to the heart, sharper" (11.235-11.238). He is not able to clinch her to him, but he does learn his wife still waits for him. Through his further experiences his growth persists as does the hope that he will come to balance his anima. His mother tells him, "Remember all these things so one day you can tell them to your wife" (11.255-11.256). In this statement lies hope for the fruition of the journey.

One of the most resonating underworld implications comes from Odysseus' discussion with Achilles. According to Gregory Nagy in *Best of the Achaeans*, "When Odysseus meets the shade of Achilles, he addresses Achilles as 'best of the Achaeans' but *The Odyssey* then has Achilles saying that he would rather be alive and the lowliest of serfs than to be dead and the kingliest of shades" (35). This reinforces the correctness of the hero's desire to grow, to change, in order to fit into the society to which he seeks to return. Nagy continues, "As Kalus Ruter sees it, Achilles seems ready to trade places with Odysseus... from the retrospective vantage point of *the Odyssey*, Achilles would trade his kleos for a nostos" (35). No matter what, the return journey matters. Odysseus' will be difficult.

There will be many more tests of his newly forming identity as he resists and slides backwards, and this frightens him. "At a moment Odysseus is sure that he will

perish in the stormy sea, he wishes he had died at Troy” (Nagy 35). But we must keep moving forward, keep trying to become better, fuller, balanced and understanding.

Odysseus demonstrates the heroic steps. Campbell outlines them in such terms as “Apotheosis,” “the Master of Two Worlds,” and “Freedom to Live.” Heinrich Zimmer explains how these levels are achieved.ⁱⁱ Whether one uses Campbell’s, Zimmer’s, or Jung’s terminology, one reaches the same conclusion. The truly successful journey returns a hero who is who he was before, but who is also more than who he was before, and the hero and the world are better for it.

At the center is Odysseus’ understanding of who he is, his self, and his trust in others. Once he has a firm understanding of these he will be ready to return. However, until then, any possibility for a successful return and reintegration into society is minimal at best. This possibility is further outlined by G.E. Dimmock in “The Name of Odysseus.”ⁱⁱⁱ Tiresias tells Odysseus that one cannot shy away from life. As Barbara Graziosi and Johannes Haubold say, “suffering and endurance distinguish human beings from the Gods” (147). Pain and perseverance make us who we are. And there can perhaps be no greater cause of suffering than loss.

Odysseus loses his home, his wife, his men, and his physical safety. In his inner world he loses himself, his identity and his psychological safety. Joseph Campbell says, “the main problem is changing the location of your mind. The town you come back to is the one you left, otherwise the journey is not complete” (*Reflections* 208). Odysseus must become a new man.

The Odysseus who returns from the meeting with Tiresias in the underworld is on the road to rebirth. Upon first returning to Aiaia from the underworld, he hears Circe warn of his next obstacles. In the encounter with the Sirens he acknowledges his anima but still considers himself as greater than other people. In telling his crew what Circe instructs, Odysseus says, “First she warns, we must steer clear of the Sirens, their enchanting song, their meadow starred with flowers. I alone was to hear their voices, so she said” (12. 172-174). This demonstrates how his war hero persona still dominates. However, his ability to hear and survive these representations shows some growth as he orders himself tied to the ship’s mast.

In his second encounter after the *katabasis* “descent to the underworld,” the Odysseus of old, the warlike Trojan hero still exists as the majority of Odysseus’ self. When faced with Scylla and Charybdis, he chooses to fight, because he believes he can fight Scylla off, saving his men. This is still a zero-sum Odysseus who believes his own ample skills can win the day. He has yet to understand that some battles cannot be won, because human existence imposes limits, which he will not acknowledge.

It is no accident that Scylla is female. Since the anima for men is the “personification of feminine nature of man’s unconscious” (Jung *Essential* 414), this sequence with Scylla shows what happens when man tries to violently confront and defeat a force beyond himself. The six-headed monster defeats him, so the interaction is a rout rather than a compromise. We see also Odysseus’ lack of trust in others continue as he refuses to warn, “for fear the men would panic, desert their oars” (12.248). It will be many years before Odysseus can rely on Philotius and

Eumaeus and their help. Certainly his mistrust of his men is healthy. We cannot simply trust others without consequence, nor should we. It would be odd, and against human experience, for Odysseus to have a magical epiphany after his talk with Tiresias and know exactly what must be done to finish his journey.

Calypso's island represents the final way station Odysseus must pass through before his new identity takes hold and he can return home. As Dinmock reflects, "Odysseus has realized the tired soldier's or sailor's dream, an immortality of comfort and physical satisfaction with no troubles. But Odysseus would rather die... such an existence has no meaning" (58). Odysseus realizes, as we should, that separation from the world, even if that separation includes comfort and satisfaction, cannot be fulfilling. So living with Calypso isn't really living; it is hiding from the world. But, in the seven years he spends on Ogygia, *renovatio* occurs. Odysseus' shift is like that of true recovery from addiction. Once it happens, demonstrated by his tears and determination to go, Calypso helps him. To move on, Odysseus must create a new identity, a new raft to sail back to life. The materials for the raft are on the island. They were always there; he needed to recognize them.

When Odysseus embarks from Ogygia, he has finally gained an understanding of the feminine side of his identity through Calypso, who provides the tools he uses to make his raft: the ax, the adze, the drills. She provides the cloth for sails and the nourishment for his journey. The timbers come from the island. Odysseus is capable of building the raft because of his past identity, knowledge and experiences (his self).^{iv} A significant understanding of the raft is as the metaphoric vehicle that

Odysseus needs to complete his return. The raft is made possible because he is new. It is also an open vessel, not closed like a warship.

Leaving Calypso behind, Odysseus is ready to test the balance between his persona and anima, recognize his new identity, and initiate his reintegration into society. In order to be known, Odysseus has to have self-knowledge, but that is not enough. He must also do something with that knowledge. Tragedy afflicts those who do not recognize themselves in time, do not learn or change from the journey, or do so too late.

The final steps in Odysseus' rebirth remain: to recognize his evolved identity, know himself, and then armed with that knowledge, know others, know who he can trust to accept and help him. The journey myth is about changing one's self. In the latter stages of *the Odyssey*, recognition scenes provide examples of how we can see change in identity, come to balance our persona and anima, and become both a new person and the one we had been before.

After leaving Ogygia and traveling for seventeen days at sea, Odysseus is stormwracked. In danger of drowning, he finds help in the sea nymph, Ino, who offers a protective scarf and insures his safety. His accepting this transports him beyond normal humans toward a new mortality. He has died and is being reborn: he cannot survive on his own no matter how great his gifts are. The only solution is to die or to trust, and he decides to trust. This is the moment. An earlier Odysseus might have accepted death out of some mistaken pride, or attempted to conquer Ino. We see him, at first, cling to the craft and even make an attempt to ride a single timber on the sea as the raft is blasted apart by Poseidon's wave, until deciding to

trust, Odysseus ties the scarf around his waist and swims for shore (5.398-412). Erwin Cook believes, “to create a heroic Odysseus equal or superior to Achilles requires a careful selection from the traditional material and even the self-conscious suppression of parts of that tradition” (*The Odyssey in Athens* 22). For a moment Odysseus does flash back to his earlier identity, wishing he had died at Troy (5.341), but, after hesitating, his new identity wins out and he accepts Ino’s scarf and, essentially, rebirth. On Scheria, he must balance war hero with the man who can find a place.

In finding his new place he accepts help again, but now it comes from humans, demonstrating the Jungian balance of the anima within the self that the journey illustrates how to manage. This is also what allows for what Campbell refers to as “the Return.” Those he trusts are women, representatives of the anima through which he begins to function. His encounters with Nausicaa, Arete, and Athena and his return to Ithaca reveal the shifts in his identity.

The transformed identity appears in the first events on Scheria. The early Odysseus would not have been ready to share his story with the Phaeacians without conquering them in some manner. He has grown as a person, and instead of seeing another Laestrygonians or Lotus Eaters, he can judge people’s intentions more truthfully.

Odysseus’ modified identity belongs back in society, but his willingness to trust is tested among the Phaeacians. Ahl and Roisman suggest that upon meeting Nausicaa on the beach, “one moment Odysseus defensively and coyly emerges from the bushes carrying a branch to protect rather than conceal his private parts; the next

he is a threatening aggressive male lion trusting his strength, not fearing for his masculinity” (51). These two sides of Odysseus’ should be construed as the warlike aggressive persona that viewed danger as a thing to be overcome and females as conquerable, and the newer “warrior” who struggled with his anima and can see in Nausicaa a form of aid and the steps towards home being interwoven. Both parts of his personality work to help him.

Odysseus’ rebirth must advance the purpose of the journey. He must become productive and, through the Phaeacians, in a position to practice his matured identity with a group of people who want nothing from him and represent the altruistic society that Odysseus would have found foreign in his previous experiences, he demonstrates his competence. As war hero and civilized man, adventurer and societal member, persona and anima allow him to successfully move forward. Now is the moment to see if Odysseus’ journey can succeed.

After Scheria, Odysseus will have the opportunity to truly test himself among those less altruistic back home on Ithaca. On Scheria we see the balance play out between interaction with Arete and her warning, his reactions to Laodamas and Broadsea and their invitations or challenges, and the acknowledgement of Nausicaa’s role in saving his life. The male interactions demonstrate that parts of the old heroic Odysseus remain. The incidents with the female characters distinguish the anima’s role in his newer identity.

He listens to Nausicaa and her instructions, “grasp my mother’s knees- if you want to see the day of your return, rejoicing, soon, even if your home’s a world away. If only the queen will take you to her heart” (6.340-343). Odysseus trusts the girl, an

element of anima, and it will result in a positive movement forward, but as Ahl and Roisman indicate, trusting Arete is not without its possible negative repercussions.^v The perils Arete insinuates represent the internal psychological struggle with trust rather than the external.

This doubt is an outer reflection of the inner difficulties Odysseus must manage to be the new man, so Arete is raising the challenge. She resembles the anima like so many other females in *The Odyssey*, that allow Odysseus to arrive in this palace. “She’d spotted the cape and shirt Odysseus wore, fine clothes she’d made herself with all her women, so now her words flew brusquely, sharply: ‘Stranger, I’ll be first to question you-myself. Who are you?’” (7.270-274). His outer identity literally wears the influence of the anima. The question of identity is put to him by an aspect of his very self.

Yet the anima is not the sole source of that self, since much of the old Odysseus, who trusts in his own abilities, remains. In the day of contests, Odysseus is provoked to demonstrate his war hero persona, and we see how the two parts mesh. Ahl and Roisman say, “Laodamas praises the strong shape of Odysseus’ body and invites him to join in the competition, ‘for there is no greater fame for a man so long as he lives than what he achieves by his own hand and feet, his own.’ Men must prove themselves. Reliance on reports is not sufficient” (77). Ahl and Roisman make a good point, especially in regards to recognition of one’s identity based on action, so this sequence demonstrates his identity to himself and others, as well as to the audience, as an instruction book, as Odysseus himself models increased dimensionality.

Sheila Murnaghan realizes the implications of Odysseus' identity. She believes, "Nausicaa's hospitality thus sets in motion the typical events of a recognition scene, but one that occurs without the disguised person actually identifying himself and without any previous relationship to be recovered" (93). We learn who we are through our experiences. This reference to Scheria shows it as the place of Odysseus' rebirth. He is not yet a new Odysseus, but he is not the old one either: he is on the verge of recognizing how he has changed.

If the hero cannot recognize himself, he will fail. If he cannot change, he will fail. And if the recognition or change comes too late, as it does in tragedy, he will fail. On Scheria we see the psychological and sociological aspects of journey myth come to fruition. Reborn Odysseus must now come to try on his transformed identity. As he recognizes it, so do we. Murnaghan's *Disguise and Recognition in the Odyssey* contemplates the next steps further.^{vi} Once home, his responses will show how his journey has been successful, how he has become Campbell's "Master of Two Worlds."

As represented through characters like Ino and Nausicaa, the anima enables his success. As he tells us himself, his trust in someone else allows his survival. Nausicaa reminds him, "Mainly to me you owe the gift of life" (8.520). Odysseus acknowledges her as the representation of all those who have helped him, in particular the life-giving aid of the anima of which he is now more in harmony. He replies, "You saved my life, dear girl" (8.526). And he means it.

The beauty of *the Odyssey* is in the multi-leveled journey described here. Odysseus journeys physically but also psychologically. It is a story about an ancient

Greek hero, and about any of us in the world. Douglas Stewart says, “One may view Scheria as largely a therapeutic way-station to allow Odysseus to begin reacquiring the skills of social plausibility before he reenters the actual world of Ithaca” (62). There Odysseus begins to trust, and balance his own abilities with that trust before reaching home. Stewart suggests that, “the second half of the poem, then, really becomes the story of a man devising a new personality because he has lost his old identity and is forced to think of who he now is” (34). The journey allows Odysseus to “search out and embrace a new personality, new in the sense of being a complex of both the old Odysseus... plus a new person who can think, confide, and exchange truths in a new world” (87). Since new patterns take time to develop, he needs a Scheria to practice his newly balanced identity before truly returning home.

He must transition from being the solitary hero to being a man who fits into society. To do this, he must know who he is, and must learn to know others, sometimes within a moment. Jeffery Barnouw believes, “the return to Ithaca confronts Odysseus with the task of ambushing the suitors, which means concealing his identity and then revealing it to allies only after testing them... the return also requires that he establish his identity in the rich sense of showing that he is still Odysseus” (259). These final stages show how well the new identity cleaves to him.

When Odysseus awakes on Ithaca after the Phaeacians ferry him home, he is faces the test of his anima. In the old world it is dangerous and deceptive, but in the new can be helpful and inspiring. Athena cloaks the island in mist and appears disguised to him, making him struggle to read his situation and, while remaining skeptical, asking for help. He says, “Greetings friend! Since you are the first I’ve

come on in this harbor, treat me kindly, no cruelty please. Save these treasures, save me too. I pray to you like a god” (13. 259-262). No conqueror now, he does not trust his new location or his companion. So, when he introduces himself, he uses the Cretean disguise. He reads the situation as more complicated than it appears on the surface.

Odysseus admits he does not know where he is. The Odysseus from the beginning of the journey home and the one who arrives on Ithaca are different men, but he is still Odysseus. What we see in the interactions on Ithaca is that Odysseus has changed, but is still the very dangerous hero of metis.

After his match with Athena, the next application of his new ability appears in his interaction with Eumaeus, his own swineherd and still loyal servant. Ahl and Roisman suggest Odysseus is, “wise not to reveal any information that might lead to a formal recognition by Eumaeus. Eumaeus already has enough information to identify his visitor, should he so desire” (184). To avoid Agamemnon’s fate, “Odysseus maintains a necessary balance of uncertainties, keeping Eumaeus poised between recognition and denial, but continuing his alternating teasing self-revelation and explicit denial” (184). Odysseus now shows his mastery of the ability to trust others and to do it the right way. The long dance of truth tests their mutual commitments.

Barnouw relates the interaction with Eumaeus as an example of what Odysseus has learned to do from his journey. He says, “this is an intelligence that knows how to go about getting what is needed, sometimes by misdirecting others. Odysseus is getting to know one of his allies in the process of revealing himself,

gradually and indirectly, to that ally” (260). We see the mastery of balance between self-trust and trusting others here in Odysseus.

Further, Charles Segal reminds us that, “Odysseus of the second half of the poem, defending his house on Ithaca, is surer of divine help” (*Divine* 492). Hardship of all kinds forces realization of the need for natural and beyond natural help that Odysseus now knows how to accept. This change is indicative of the Apotheosis (in Campbell’s terms) that Odysseus himself has experienced.

The connection between recognition and trust is further exemplified during Odysseus’ stay as the disguised guest in his own home. In the scene where Eurycleia (another feminine) bathes him, his request is a hint towards his real identity being acknowledged by certain loyal subjects. Ahl and Roisman expand upon this idea.^{vii} Odysseus wants to be able to detect which servants he can trust. He is careful because he has learned his lessons along the way, but he must also reveal something of himself to people like Eurycleia, if he wishes to find his place in his kingdom again. He has changed. Unlike earlier in his journey when Odysseus could not embrace the shade of his mother, the transformed Odysseus is able to hug Eurycleia, a mother surrogate (19.544).

A scar is an appropriate marker to represent a lesson learned. It is the physical and visible reminder of what enables Odysseus to be successful. While he may have earned it hunting boar, its purpose is demonstrated in the interaction with others. To the point of the journey, Charles Segal suggests that the description of the boar’s thicket and the trees where Odysseus encounters Nausicaa are almost the same (*Classics* 13).^{viii} This mirroring Segal implies can be reflective of the “there and back

again” aspects of the journey. One must go into the underworld and return changed and yet the same. Without the others he trusts, he would not have a home. For that matter, he would not even reach it.

Quite possibly, the most complex of recognitions and questions of trust come in his interactions with his wife, who presents inspiration but also danger. Penelope can be the instrument that has kept his will strong, the “ultimate boon,” but can also be the danger that brings it all down, as Clytemnestra does on Agamemnon. Many critics give a great deal of weight to the interaction between Odysseus and Penelope and the question of when she knows who he is.

I believe Penelope knows he is Odysseus right away, but there is the question of how much each has changed and how much husband and wife can trust each other after twenty years of separation. In Book Nineteen, Odysseus hints, “how should he return, after all the years away, to his own beloved Ithaca, openly, or in secret?” (19.342-344). Penelope already knows who he is, even before his hints. She says that she pays no heed to strangers at her door, and yet she invites Odysseus in as an honored guest (19.149). She suggests that he might be a man of legend (19.184). She says he will be her special friend (19.290), and suggests he sit beside Telemachus (19.369) or her (19.663). I think she knows from the first moment she sees him but plays ignorant because he is in disguise, because there is danger all around, and because she is uncertain who to trust in the household or even how much to trust him. She shares the dream of the eagle killing the geese (19.603-620), and Odysseus’ certainty in response implies a knowledge that a mere stranger would not possess. Penelope intimates her acknowledgement of Odysseus’ identity when she commands

Eurycleia to bathe him; “come and wash your master’s... equal in years. Odysseus must have feet and hands like his by now—” (19.407-408). Enough of Odysseus’ original identity remains in the new man he has become, as we see in his accepting Broadsea’s challenge and the defeat of Irus.

One of the last steps Odysseus takes appears in the test of the bow. Considering this test, Stewart says, “it is the last psychological opportunity he will have to rescue his old personality from oblivion” (121). However, a better understanding would be as illustration that though he is a new man, his old self, and power, still exists. This event shows his growth.

Becoming a new man is a constant battle between the old and the new. We see his literal quaking the night before his revenge upon the suitors. He recalls the defeat of the Cyclops saying to himself, “nobody but your cunning pulled you through the monster’s cave you thought would be your death” (20.23-24). He talks to himself in the second person as if he were two different people, and right he is. He is the old adventurer, who did save himself from the Cyclops, who had no others to trust, and he is the new man who has died and been reborn and whom Athena chastises; “‘Impossible man!’ Athena bantered, the goddess’ eyes ablaze. ‘Others care quick to trust a weaker comrade, some poor mortal, far less cunning than I’” (20.46-49). Odysseus has learned how to trust in the right person. Ahl and Roisman argue that, “It is only when Athena takes him to task for his unwillingness to trust her and urges him to succumb to sleep that he eventually complies. Even the ultimately distrustful skeptic must take some things on faith” (240). This careful hesitant acceptance shows Odysseus’ maturity.

When Penelope sees him after the deaths of the suitors, she, too, sees multiple sides of his identity. “One moment he seemed... Odysseus, to the life—the next, no, he was not the man she knew” (23.108-109). Homer is careful to present this observation as evidence of the change in Odysseus.

As Odysseus has learned to trust discerningly those who can aid him, his wife demonstrates a similar skill. She says, “if he is truly Odysseus, home at last, make no mistake: we two will know each other, even better—we two have secret signs, known to us both but hidden from the world” (23.121-125). Penelope’s response summarizes the couple’s metamorphosis. They are different people yet still the same.

Stewart believes, “to the deviously logical mind, there can be no such thing as absolute proof of the loyalty and fidelity of another human being” (126). He questions whether Odysseus and Penelope’s relationship can be successfully reconstituted. Yet, Odysseus has learned how to take some things on faith. What kind of a return will he experience if it is all for nothing? Stewart continues, “It was all very well to enter Circe’s palace armed with science, tricks, and a sword. Circe understood and required that sort of approach, being a goddess. It will not work here. No one can fully protect himself from betrayal and less when dealing with mere human beings and still expect to engage in significant and adult emotional relationships with them” (126). But he is still in many ways the same man. He loves his wife, and she loves him. Murnaghan promotes this concept as *homophrosyne*, “likeness of mind.”^{xix}

Penelope wants this man to be Odysseus. From her questioning of the stranger on news of her husband to the description of her dream in Book Nineteen, it

is clear she hopes for his return. However, she is unwilling to simply accept him without question. Just as Odysseus' transformation is one of balance, so we see in the test of the bed Penelope's change involves the same. Murnaghan says of the bed, "it is literally immobile because it is rooted in the ground, and the thought that it might be moved is unacceptable to both Odysseus and Penelope. Its inalienable quality is essential to its use as a token of Odysseus' identity to Penelope and as a sign of Penelope's fidelity to Odysseus" (116). While the journey illustrates the steps we follow to grow, there are some things that do not change, no matter what.

We see at the conclusion of *the Odyssey* what can happen if the great (self-reliant) hero, on a highly motivated journey to reunite with the woman he loves, is able to experience all the necessary steps for a journey to be successful. Unlike with Orpheus, we can learn how one grows and learns from the search through the successful example of Odysseus.

CONCLUSION

The stories of Orpheus and Odysseus are excellent examples of how humans can succeed or fail. We can't all know how to grow instinctively, especially not in a world complicated by relationships, dangers, mortality, wants, and needs. But the journey myth does provide examples that we can learn from or follow. It shows how our old selves can be augmented with new, how we choose life. According to Joseph Campbell, "only birth can conquer death—the birth not of the old thing again, but of something new. Within the soul, with the body social, there must be—if we are to experience long survival—a continuous 'recurrence of birth'" (*Hero* 16). Odysseus

experiences death, in the loss of companions, of his ability to overcome obstacles alone, of the ordinary light as he descends to Hades, and he experiences rebirth, return, purgation of past accouterments—skin raw, clothing gone—to be born into a new self and return to society.

However, this experience fails to provide growth for Orpheus. He too experiences death, stripped of Eurydice. But he is not stripped of form and function by the purifying waters of storm and struggle. He, too, journeys to Hades, but still the same self upon the return, he is not reborn as something new. He does not lose his self. He fails to change. He still sings as he always has, to great acclaim, when he returns from the journey. Odysseus' success is meaningful because he reaches his goal. The sadness of Orpheus on one level is that everything he does, his journey to death and back, his great ability, is all for naught. He does not make the choice to change. There is no impetus for Orpheus to find a newer place in the world, for his identity is not new.

In his myth, Orpheus experiences his world being destroyed and journeys into the underworld. Likewise, in *the Odyssey* we see the series of missteps, Odysseus' goal being wrenched away from him, until he must undergo a death and return to be reborn. Choice matters. Orpheus' identity is unaltered, but Odysseus chooses to transform. These are the necessary steps that help the hero begin anew. Heroes must be reborn. To be successful, this rebirth must combine enough of who they were to be recognizable but also change them enough to be ready to return. Myth demonstrates how it can be done, so we can do it for ourselves.

Notes

ⁱ Jung says, it belongs to him, this perilous image of Woman; she stands for the loyalty which in the interests of life he must sometimes forgo; she is the much needed compensation for the risks, struggles, sacrifices that all end in disappointment; she is the solace for all the bitterness of life. And at the same time she is the great illusionist, the seductress, who draws him into life... its frightful paradoxes and ambivalences where good and evil, success and ruin, hope and despair, counterbalance one another. Because she is his greatest danger, she demands from a man his greatest, and if he has it in him, she will receive it. (*Essential* 109-110)

ⁱⁱ Heinrich Zimmer, in *The King and the Corpse*, explains that with the formerly dormant divine essence within him, thus being quickened, he acquires a dual character and is made an inhabitant of the two spheres, the mortal and the divine. Such two fold character and double citizenship conferred on the perfected initiate by the ultimate sacrament of Assumption, or Transfiguration, which both symbolizes and brings to pass the Apotheosis of Man. (48)

ⁱⁱⁱ G.E. Dinmock tells us that for Odysseus to choose to pursue the path of his painful identity as he did on Circe's beach is to win power over and recognition from the ambiguous daughter of the sun, the life-giver, and Ocean the all-engulfing. It is also to accept pain as the only real basis of meaning in this life or the next. This is the secret of Tiresias. To achieve the goal of recognition and identity and to learn the secrets of the abyss, are equally to row upon the sea of trouble. (61)

^{iv} Carl Dougherty, in *The Raft of Odysseus*, says, "in building the raft, Odysseus proves that he has the necessary skills of a professional shipbuilder or poet, but also and somewhat surprisingly, this hastily cobbled together raft is said to have the capacity to carry substantial cargo" (38).

^v Ahl and Roisman, in *The Odyssey Reformed*, say that, "Although Alcinoos indicates that the journey home will involve no perils for Odysseus, Arete indicates the opposite, even though earlier suggestions from both Nausicaa and Athena suggest she was the right person for Odysseus to approach if he wanted to secure his return to Ithaca" (64-65).

^{vi} Odysseus has given the Phaeacians a true picture of himself as someone well spoken, diplomatic, and appreciative of the orderly values of peacetime society. But this is only one side of his character. There is another harsher side belonging to his years as a wanderer and an adventurer. And while that may be associated exclusively with the past (in this episode he seems to put it behind him and to be reborn as someone well adapted to the peacetime world in which he now finds himself), it is, nonetheless, part of his identity and will reappear when he returns to Ithaca and finds a social situation with which he cannot be at peace. (Murnaghan 101)

^{vii} "Odysseus is oddly asking for someone who might identify him, as one of the younger girls could not... it is by a scar on his leg that he will be recognized. Even before Eurycleia washes Odysseus' feet, she observes that she has, 'never yet seen anyone that so resembled Odysseus as you resemble him in form, voice, and feet'" (Ahl and Roisman 232).

^{viii} According to Segal, there are important links between the scar and Odysseus' real and metaphysical journeys earlier into and out of his past. In particular, the thicket where lurks the boar that inflicted the scar is described in almost the same verses that describe the thicket of the two olive trees at the end of Book Five. That is the moment when Odysseus has escaped from Poseidon's angry sea and has crossed from the dangerous fairy-world of his adventures to civilized life among the Phaeacians. The

repetition helps link together the three trials of this exemplary hero in his passage through life.
(*Classics* 13)

^{ix} The notion of mental kinship is expressed in the idea of *homophrosyne*, “likeness of mind,” which is identified by Odysseus in his speech to Nausicaa as the central quality of a successful marriage. Because the form of kinship represented by marriage in this way is entirely voluntary, its recognition—expressed in this poem by Penelope’s recognition of Odysseus as her husband and by Odysseus recognition of Penelope as his wife—signals not the effects of heredity but the virtue of marital fidelity. (Murnaghan 43)

Back to Ithaca

Prologue

This is a story about knowing what you should do and knowing what you want to do. It's about making choices. It's about right and wrong, not in a moral or ethical sense, but in the way of truth and fiction, nightmare and fairytale. As a storyteller, you can deceive yourself or you can deceive another. You can tell a truth that people will understand, even if it's not true. But the real trick is creating a lie so true, you believe it yourself.

* * *

At the bottom of a wide marble staircase there was a short hall that ended at the entrance to a vault. Two figures, a man and a woman, stood outside the great bronze vault door lit by the lanterns each held. They stood in flame-light reflected off burnished metal, two shadows in an oval of light: the man, tall, thin but with broad shoulders, the woman, wiry, angular. On the door was engraved a riddle... *One will find the truth or death Two the truth or die. Separately may stay a life But in believing miss the lie.*

'I wonder what it means,' said the woman.

'We'll find out,' the man said and began to turn the great wheel that formed the door's lock and handle.

It spun until they heard a click, and as they tugged, it swung open with just the faintest whisper of a squeak. Behind the door was another short hallway, the same walls of marble, the same floor, also ending at a bronze door identical to the one outside except for the inscription. This inner door held no engraving.

They walked cautiously across the polished stones to the inner door.

‘Well, it’s what we came here for,’ he said and began to turn the inner door’s wheel.

‘Wait!’ She cried out, grabbing his arm. ‘When you turn the wheel, the outer door begins to close.’ She pointed towards the entrance.

They examined the inside of the outer door. It was smooth, handle-less, without markings of any kind.

‘If we’re both in here when I open the inner door, we’ll be trapped,’ the man said. ‘That’s what the inscription means, ‘Separately may stay a life.’ We have to split up, one on the outside, one in.’

‘You’re right. I’ll stay outside when you open the inner door; then I can open the outer one to let you out again.’

They agreed this was the safest course. The woman stood outside the vault and watched as the man spun the inner door’s wheel, outer one closing, with every revolution, until it clicked shut. The woman waited the agreed upon count of sixty and then began to spin the wheel to reopen the outer door. When the wheel clicked, she pulled the vault door open to find an empty room inside. The man was gone, the inner door sealed.

He had agreed to be back in the hallway between doors after the count of sixty, but the room was empty.

The woman thought maybe something had happened to him on the other side; maybe he was hurt and couldn’t return in time. She began spinning the wheel on the inner door, watching over her shoulder as the outer one swung slowly shut.

When the inner door clicked, she tugged it open to find the man waiting in still another empty hallway ending in a third bronze vault door.

He hugged her.

‘How did you find help so quickly?’ he asked.

The woman pulled away to look him in the eyes but still grasped his arms. ‘Why weren’t you back in the room?’ she asked. ‘Did you lose count? You said sixty seconds!’

‘I’m sorry. I couldn’t help myself. And it was fantastic! You have to see what’s inside the third door. But we’ll need more people to do it safely; one to stay outside each door while we go in.’

He led the woman by the hand back towards the smoothed interior side of the outer door.

‘Who did you get to open the door for us?’

The woman stopped walking and let her hand drop. He turned to face her, realization dawning.

‘You didn’t. You came in alone? Why? Now we’re both trapped!’

The woman stood very still, her gaze directed at the floor.

‘When I thought you were lost to me, I was lost without you,’ she said.

* * *

There are many endings to this story. One says the couple waited in the outer chamber until the next morning when the woman’s father showed up and opened the outer door, rescuing the lost lovers. Another says it was the man’s mother. Still another says it was both sets of parents, the man’s and the woman’s, with the local constable, the vicar of the church, and a dozen villagers, and the couple was married on the spot upon being rescued. Another ending says the vault lay undisturbed for a hundred and fifty

years until some children playing in the ruins of a castle crawled through a collapsed staircase and opened a series of giant bronze vaults to discover, in the final vault, two skeletons, bedecked in gold jewelry, and entwined amongst treasure enough to make a dragon jealous.

But the version I prefer says, almost a year later, the vaults were opened and the first two found empty, as they were for the man and the woman. Inside the third vault they found no man, no woman, no gold; instead they found a room, empty except for an infant wrapped in silk, sleeping peacefully on the floor.

Chapter I

Floor tiles chill my soul as I move past empty stainless steel tables towards a wall of drawers on the far side of the room, as if there are many choices. There is only one.

When something is taken from you, when you lose somebody you can't live without, you go find it. You go get her back. Or you die trying. Because without her, you're already dead.

The fixtures above the drawers, six lanterns of impossibility, light one side of the path, pouring down unpolished steel. These and the illumination that spills in from the hallway create a pair of beacons. Like light on the coastline for storm swept sailors, like the shine of hunting lodge porch lights in the night blizzard, like the second pulsar to the right of Kilimanjaro in the morning, or like that handwritten scrawl on the antique map, 'here there be monsters,' one summons me back to a world I know, the other to a place out of whose bourn few have returned.

I have two choices: the doorway back to the hall in the hospital and deafening grief, or the music I hope the drawer in front of me holds.

I know people who have heard music as they died: Ludwig, Sydney, Jalfred, my grandfather. I need it: the melody, the song, the verses, something more human than the hum of machinery and current through wires.

The room smells of old bath houses, ice skating, and copper pipes. I think that can't be what death smells like. I'm right. And I'm wrong. My hand trembles as I reach for the one-armed bandit lever, the handle to the drawer. I gamble. There is no choice in the matter; I was always going to follow her, from the moment I heard the first note.

I grip cold metal like the hilt of some forgotten sword from a legacy unknown until now.

* * *

Any day has more life, more meaning, with her than without. I'll tell you about my faith. With her, I'm alive. Without her, I have life, but I'm not living.

I'm on the scaffold painting the ceiling while Jane plays.

She's embraced by the wind and sunlight through the lost windows of the St. Michael's chapel. She's papyrus still on the banks of the river, dancing grasses ready to record operas, masques, requiems, and ballets, breathe movements into life, life into time.

Plastic sheets flap where stained glass once shone. Soot darkens the area above the nave where the fire broke out. The chapel smells like wood smoke and freshly cut lawns. And what she plays is fire and sunlight, wind and sky; it is church and earth and body and song. Notes arise from her violin and become the light of stellar storms. I absorb the pitch and timbre between bridge and nut, frequencies, Helmholtz resonances, the stick-slip of rosined hair bow swipes, vibrations invoking *voce di strega*, the witch's voice, to sound over the orchestra, over the earth.

* * *

'But what about your life before you met her?'

'It's like there is no before her.'

* * *

I ask her not to go, but she has a lesson to get to. And I do not understand.

She's already on her way. We all are. We just have to hope we're going the same way for a while. And when we're lucky, we go together.

Jane begins to put her violin in the battered case on the steps behind her. Her hair falls over her face as she crouches down, shielding her eyes from my view. She fumbles with the latches.

Then, she pulls her hair back out of her face with one hand and looks up toward the arching ceiling.

‘We should get married here,’ she says.

‘Again?’ I ask. ‘That’ll be the ninth time.’

Jane climbs the scaffold, just enough to peek over the edge where I’m kneeling.

‘Ten,’ she says. ‘You always forget the aquarium.’

I never forget the aquarium.

I lean close to her and kiss her goodbye.

I don’t know what that kiss means. Time is still a second thought. The temporal manipulating our lives is outside my ken. I think it’s there for us. Time. I’m wrong. We serve like her, like Death at her leisure. And, I learn, she is fickle.

Jane hops down and scoops up her violin case, hair and hips swinging to the music we both still hear as she moves to a blown out window in the side of the chapel. She pauses at the sill, the hand with the case already brushing back the plastic sheeting.

‘See you at home,’ I say.

She slips out the window, stepping to the ground below. Her silhouette pauses against the white plastic, then disappears in bent fabric and light as the wind ripples the sheet and sunlight gleams through the opening of the ruined window.

Now I know. I know about time. And now, Jane is not at home. There is no where to go see her. And I see her everywhere.

* * *

Father Moe is a massive hulk of a man. I wonder if he wears robes because it's too hard to find clothes that fit. He spills over the arms of the chair in the restaurant, and I wonder if the legs will hold up.

He asks me to meet him for lunch. I arrive early and sit outside, on the terrace of Raphael's. He pulls up in a long black town car and wrests his bulk from its leather and steel grip. I signal him with a glass of club soda as he makes his way towards the entrance.

The maitre'd knows him and has a sturdier chair slid under our table, for 'Padre Elmo,' replacing the folding bistro seat.

We chat about the flooding in the Midwest and baseball. Over his second entree, Father Moe tells me why he's asked me to lunch.

'The church has purchased some property from the Presbyterians,' he says, wiping sweat from his brow as he devours a chicken leg in two bites. 'There's an old chapel on the land that caught fire a few years back. The Presbyterians built a new church on the west side of town after the fire and moved their congregation there. The chapel's been abandoned ever since.'

He fixes me with a steely gaze as if he's trying to impart a message without saying it out loud.

'You need an estimate,' I guess. 'How much it will cost to renovate the building versus tearing it down and starting new.'

'I don't care how much it costs,' he says. 'I want you to restore it.'

* * *

There's no complacency in me. Every time I see her, she sets me on fire.

The morning I begin refinishing the sacristy, the chapel door opens. Light in the doorway frames her, a brighter point in the morning sun, a celestial fragment backlit by quasars, suspended in the center of a solenoid, coiled, humming, summoning me to a wakefulness I've since lost.

Jane steps through the doorway and stumbles, her violin case skidding across the floor as she drops it to catch herself on the door frame.

As I reach her she is plucking a splinter from her palm, a shallow wound, but enough of a cut that I should be warned. I should know. I don't realize how much a point of blood matters.

I hold Jane's hand as we navigate piles of lumber, cans of paint, plaster and tools. She doesn't need guidance; her grip is still firm.

'This place is a death trap,' she says, in mock criticism. 'Someone should really fix it up.'

I grin at her jab.

'That's what they hired me for. But these old places take time,' I say.

We reach the violin case at the same time and both crouch down to pick it up. The exterior of the case is scratched and scarred; in places it looks like a tool has gouged it. In others, it's still tacky with glue leftover from peeled away Sex Pistols and Nine Inch Nails stickers. It has been with her all along.

My hand lingers over a deep starfish shaped scratch in the case and I can almost feel her fingers brush mine.

* * *

She carved it as a teenager, when she decided to be a marine biologist.

One night in the aquarium Jane tells me how starfish regenerate lost limbs.

‘And if you cut one in half, you get two new starfish,’ she says.

‘Are they the same starfish, or two different ones?’ I ask.

‘They’re the same and different,’ she says. ‘They’re linked by the same genetics, the same composition, yet what each one does is its own choice. Like children and parents, like twins, like you and me.’

‘Are you saying we’re related?’ I ask. I smile at the absurdity. ‘Cause I think that’s illegal in most states.’

‘No. I mean we’re two but one.’

* * *

I paint and Jane plays.

I wonder if paired starfish feel loss when their twins are gone. I wish I had asked her if, when two starfish are grown from one whole and one dies, the other knows, if starfish grieve, if there is a graveyard in the sea.

I’ve read it’s merciless, grinding and consuming anything lost within. Hughes says it gnaws everything digestible, unwilling to release its hold, until all that remains is the dead echo of existence. The fossil buried in sediment or spat out on the strand.

But I wonder then about the shoes of the souls of the Titanic, scattered on the ocean floor like epitaphs surrounding the rusty shell, or about Grecian urns encrusted on the Aegean’s subdermis, or cannons heaped together among Caribbean coral.

I wish I could ask her.

* * *

Her hair is like wild grasses in autumn, kissed by months of summer sun, bundled, braided in a single long length, thick strands styled by ripples of wind across fields, embodying the tangle and silk of brier and blossom, bluejoint cyclones bound preparing to burst, hanging like a pendulum between shoulder blades making her own time, usurping universal laws resetting them to form. Lithe angles play in outstretched arms and lean along the ley lines of a slender neck.

The day I ask her to marry me, dark shadows radiate from desert dyed features from behind stray wisps fought free from the braid framing her face. In the dry sands of skin burn lush irises sending a single rivulet slipping, Niling her cheek.

‘We’re already married,’ she says, smiling.

‘So I guess you said yes.’

‘Yes,’ she says. ‘Yes. Yes.’

* * *

Later her hair is shorn, dark, brief fuzz on a peach left too long in the depths of refrigeration, gone darker with sickness, like disease has crept into every fiber, replaying cells with symptoms. The golden sands of her face have lost their hue, bleached, a shore of ash and snow that had been dunes and desert. My fingers navigate ridges and valleys of vertebrae as they trace a line down her neck. Suffering the absence of love, rivers wither and beds crack.

‘I have to go. I can’t hold on any longer,’ she says. ‘It’s too hard.’ Her voice whispers shaded and dry.

‘No,’ I say. ‘No. No.’

* * *

We summer in the chapel.

Jane's music is laughter, and she joins me in painting ceilings, arches, columns, plinths, and capitals. I plaster walls of the choir as she plays, electroplating cornices, repairing pockmarked stone, compounded, sanded, smooth. With her music, her trills, bowing *sul ponticello*, she's a siren drawing me toward being, writing harmonically in the air, the structure of St. Michael's *coll'arco*, our notes, our love.

* * *

I don't know how to live without her. Instead of her body, I cradle an empty bottle. Sand melted down, shaped, rounded, smoothed. The glass shines the world. Sidewalk and telephone pole become less firm, my foothold on the world softer, gravity more buoying. I wonder about writing a message, sending my cry for help out on the currents.

I'm submerged, like a child in the pool in my grandmother's yard, testing myself, seeing how long I can hold my breath. Parents' voices dulled, slowed, I hear barbeque recipes shared, who brought potato salad, extra buns and ice cream in the freezer, but at a distance, through thick slop of liquid. I can see, but only so far, and everything is plush, blurred.

* * *

Her drawer is empty. Snowflakes drift out into the morgue as I peer into the square of semi-darkness. Robbed again, I let the bandit's limb slip from my grasp and I wonder how many times the stone can be rolled away. My heart in my ears, drowning my mind, I cannot hear the steel door swing shut, latching magnetic, sealing memories in lifeless tombs, freezing time.

My faith lost, I doubt. Ludwig was deaf but could hear. Jalfred thought the singing wasn't meant for him but heard it.

In the sub-basement of West Valley Memorial, I hear one chord strum need over and over again. A snowflake drifts into the darkness, sublimates. I'm lost unless I find her; lost until I bring her back.

Before the closed drawer, again shivering I do the only thing left to get her back. I open the drawer, climb into the cold dark and overlay myself where she should be.

Some think you can't merge two beings, or you certainly can't if one isn't present. I think about starfish, binary systems, quantum entanglement. I think you can if the two already connect.

The door swings shut. I, living, lie with the dead, wishing I could wrap myself in her shroud. But even that is gone. The world is backwards.

Chapter II

There's a fairy tale about justice, part of the German tradition of the depiction of Justitia. Most think Gieng's *Gerechtigkeitsbrunnen* drew its inspiration from the Romans. That might be partially true. But they don't know about the tinker and his son.

* * *

The tinker attempted to explain the difference between justice and fairness to his son.

Justice, he said, relies on an understanding of right and wrong, moral and lawful.

Fairness ensures simple equality, producing same treatment for the same action. While justice attempts to re-balance the imbalance, fairness prevents the imbalance altogether.

He constructed a beautiful set of scales about a foot high and placed on each plate seven figures of men, cast in gold, encrusted in gems, of equal value and equal weight.

He then sealed the scale inside a glass case where it could be seen but not be tampered with.

The scale was perfectly balanced. This was fair.

One day, when the tinker was away from the shop working on a job for the Prince, the tinker's son opened the case to play with the jeweled men. They were like no toy he had ever seen. The light glinted off them from every angle, their gemstone eyes seeming to look right at him.

When the son grew tired of playing he tried to return the men to their plates, but the scales would not balance. One of the men had lost a gem.

The tinker returned to his shop and saw what his son had done. With measured motions he latched the doors and shuttered the windows. Dim afternoon light crept through cracks in the walls.

He exacted justice and rebalanced the scales, replacing the missing eye with the iris from his son's.

Four days later, the tinker found the missing gem. He had it reset in a ring.

The case has never been opened since. The scale has remained balanced.

* * *

You don't find heaven in the freezer of the hospital morgue.

On the slab where her body should be, in the darkness, my grief echoes in breath, in pulse, in the emptiness of a vacant drawer. Alive in the darkness, I feel a draft, the exhalation of the dead, like the edge of winter wind muted by a window, a door, sneaking around the frame, over the sill. I imagine it's Jane, breathing in my ear as she whispers like the first flakes falling in the December evening.

I curl up in the black and sleep for the first time in three days.

Why didn't I die? Some say I did. It depends on how many times you can die.

When I wake, I find the pathway out. But even that waking is conditional. Just because I dream doesn't mean I'm not awake. And just because I'm awake doesn't mean I can't be in a dream.

I open my eyes from death's echo to find the darkness of the freezer tempered by thin blue light. Edges of cerulean fire trace a square at the end of the drawer, where the sides should meet the back wall. The panel glows like another door inside this repository. I push and it swings open into a frost-rimed crawlway.

I slide forward out of the morgue drawer and into the winter passage. My fingers sting from the coating of frozen crystals that form the surface. My breath is visible in the air.

The passage becomes large enough to move on my hands and knees. I see the thin paper sheet that covered Jane's body discarded along the path that curves into the underground winter.

* * *

This cold way-point is deeper than I'd imagined and grows brighter as I inch my way forward. I move the sheet aside as bits of snow melt on my face and see an upside-down flatworm patterned with numbers like slithering declarations on his belly.

I creep closer and he hisses.

'She left. She untied me and went on. She should be here, not you. Everything is backwards.' He undulates like water in a wave pool, amplitude measuring the peaks and troughs of loss.

'She needs to come back to me,' I say.

'She's dead.'

Everything is backwards. Winter path. Where is she? Night trail. Why did she go?

'She needs to come back to me to be reborn.'

His rasping taunts spray. 'Who will be born you daft wolf? You're like a mad dog.'

He's right. I am mad. 'Is it your rebirth or hers you desire?' this Gateot asks.

'Do you want to bring back the dead for your sake or for hers?'

What happens to us when we die should be two questions. What happens to the one who dies, and what happens to the one who lives. Some people believe in heaven or hell, an afterlife, an eternal soul. Others: reincarnation, a conservation of energy, Noetics, a measuring of our spirits that leave after we pass. Or nothing. If cryogenics can't preserve the dead, can't hold on until we find a way to hew death from our bloodstream, clone replacement organs, or upload our consciousness to another vessel, we're done. We die and we're gone.

At one point I thought we don't come back. The dead don't come back. Now I think I can't speak for the dead. But for the one who lives, nothing is not enough.

Gateot squirms trying to right himself. 'Everything is backwards,' he hisses again.

My ache wells like a reservoir ready to burst its dam.

'You should howl.' He chuckles, like the ticking of the second hand on an analog watch. 'You cannot stop the moon. You have no ration'

He hisses and I clench my fists, I want to, but cannot crush the worm. He was tied to her, like a memory string now released, this mean Gateot, printed with more of her than I expected, touched by pens and hands of coroners. I scoop him up and right him, take him with me, this remnant of Jane's body, thin matter like paper citing who he is, who she is, who I am.

I place him in my shirt pocket, but he climbs out and scales my shoulder like a caterpillar.

'Why did you do that?' he asks. His head tilts to me, strings bobbing like antennae from his head.

‘You would die there, if I left you.’ I peer down at this tiny memento mori.

‘Wouldn't you?’

‘Yes,’ he says, hissing again. He sounds surprised.

‘I'm not rational,’ I say. ‘I've got nobody to lose.’

* * *

The ceiling of the passage continues to rise until it's high enough to stand in.

With the Gateot on my shoulder, I make my way slowly following indentations in the snowy path that, if I were somewhere other than a secret underground ice cave connected via ventilation shaft-like crawlway to the back of a morgue freezer drawer in the basement of a hospital, could be mistaken for footprints.

I think they are footprints.

* * *

It's four in the morning late in the fall, and Jane wants to skip rocks. She is wearing a pink knit hat and mittens and a green ski jacket. She kneels on the bed, shaking the car keys in her cupped hands, like a maraca, until I start getting dressed.

We park at the edge of the lake where the college crew team trains. It's cold and clear. I shut off the car and we walk in starlight towards the water. Our boot steps crunch atop loose beach pebbles and river stones.

‘My dad taught me the stars,’ Jane says, looking at the clear night sky. ‘He wanted to be sure I could navigate by them.’

‘Well, on a lake, it would be hard to get lost.’

‘You'd be surprised,’ she says.

Everything you think has an edge to it doesn't always have an edge. And sometimes when it does, and you think you've reached it, you find the edge is much further away than you believed. But that's better than finding out the edge is much closer than you thought.

'The 'W' will always be clearest in the North this time of year.' She points at the sky, then at the still glass surface of the lake.

'This is a pretty good one,' I say, taking off my glove, picking up a smooth puck sized disc.

'I don't want to skip rocks,' she says and sits in the night on smooth stones, legs curled up to her chest, wrapped in her arms, staring at the mirror image of fate in the surface of the lake.

The edge isn't always the end. It's like the end, but it's easier to hang onto, to skirt along, to tiptoe and stay in bounds.

Eight more weeks of chemotherapy. Another CT scan. Radiation. Surgery. Unlikely but possible outcomes.

I stand next to her until the sky begins to brighten, the stars disappear, and we can hear the team carrying their skulls down from the boatshed. I take her mittened hand in my bare one and help her up. We drive home looking for waffles.

* * *

The footprints lead into a snow-gorged passageway with an atrium ceiling of ice-like blue glass and what seems to be the source of the underground winter.

Made from snow, she shifts light in a white dress, her bright reflection too candescent for the cobalt filtered cave's ice. Impossible, this snow girl like the bushes in

my backyard come alive after a winter storm. Nearly swallowed in drifts, she brushes back frozen branches from eyes with icicle fingers. This forsythia-made child, birthed in blizzards, brought to me in the cold depository by death, need, and desire. Shining black pools stare at me from behind ice slicked tendrils, and a crevice in the smooth snow of her face cracks open to whisper, warning, whisper.

'I know who you are,' she says. Her hair branches click and rustle. 'She is not here. You cannot,' she says and looks briefly to the side. 'Cannot find her. Save yourself the pain and lie in the soft blankets down.'

Snow swirls and draws me in as she floats closer on frozen waves.

'I need someone to secret. Lie down, let me whisper in you,' she says. Her finger branches gesture me towards her. 'I'll hide you under tears like misplaced garden tools and unclaimed phone books. We can spend the season beneath cold powder drifts.'

She is close now, her structure like ice from a frozen pond, haunts me, summons me.

She tips her head to the side in suggestion.

'No one needs to know,' she says.

Flakes crystallize on her face and float off. She touches the back of my hand with icy nails... gently. My skin begins to melt.

'Forget,' she says.

But I know the snow child from winter stars in Cayuga, from Jane tracing letters in the lake.

When you know someone's name, you hold part of their soul in your power.
 When you have a picture of them, a totem, hair or nail clipping, that's another part. But
 their heart, their heart is the biggest part you can hold.

'I know you,' I say. 'I know your name. Cassie.' I sigh. 'I cannot.'

Upon speaking her talisman, the snow child relents. She slides back a few feet
 and the danger of her discourse dissolves.

'Take my hand,' she says, unhappy I've rejected her beauty for another's. 'I'll
 lead you, to see what she has become.'

Ice coated hand grips mine. I follow, slowly freezing around her fingers.

* * *

The passage wends through snow tunnels and worm holes. Like a planisphere,
 Cassie pivots, proceeding deeper into the underworld, her precession directing slowly on,
 determining destiny under ice-rivers emptied of water. The tunnel dims as we descend
 until the only spots of light come from the celestial patterns in the ice over our heads and
 the faint reflection of their glow from Cassie's skin.

I'd need an astrolabe and alidade measuring angles to the plane to fix the
 declination; I swallow at the tilt, throat raw, tough to choke down the lot.

Hearing me cough, Cassie asks, 'Do you thirst?' Her narcissism ebbed but not
 fully abated, she says, 'I can quench your thirst. I am all the moisture here.'

But she cannot be. I thirst, but I will not drink her.

Cassie's snow banks surround me as the passage widens into a gallery where the
 ceiling and floor end and open into space. The ceiling stars wink out, all but seven.

'Choose one,' Cassie says.

I choose the seventh and it grows bright. It separates itself from the ceiling and glides to the end of the loggia.

My chosen star dangles like a shelf of ice at the edge of a chasm, elongates, distends, and juts into darkness. It transforms into solid ground, a platform just before the precipice where the floor drops away into dreams of Nyx. I stand at a cliff, Cassie's fingers gripped in mine. On the star-made ledge I see Jane for the first time since she was taken from me.

* * *

She is a figurine, skin smoothed into crystal polished by the darkness beneath the ground, ground to a sheen on sand, a brook pebble in this underworld river of snow and dearth. Carved out of rock, out of silica and frozen fire, Jane is all volcano glass and sea darkness and dusk, wiped down with damask, with pearls, with steel.

Her body has become glass, like a window opening into a blizzard of stars. I reach for her and her voice is chimes.

'You're hot, like cinnamon pepper. You'll melt me,' she says, flinching as my fingers near.

'It's me, Jane,' I say. 'I found you. I'm here to bring you home.'

She holds her body still, staring at my hand with monochromatic eyes as I approach again.

As I move to touch her once more, a spark, like static, leaps between my finger and her arm. She screams like a thousand champagne flutes clinking in unison as I brush her shoulder, and her body bursts. She billows into snowflakes flashing like star-beings, each shouting a memory as they scatter in the wind drawn from the edge of the cliff.

Her seventh birthday, a cake shaped like a sunflower. Winning the sailing race from The Point to Captain's Island the summer before high school. Climbing Bald Mountain in blue Converse high tops during a lightning storm. Her Australian Terrier, Roscoe, panting in the sun. Her first kiss: Nelson Riggs standing on a diving board wearing a Speedo. Running out of gas on the highway at eighty miles per hour and coasting down the exit ramp into the gas station in neutral. Her cousin Nacho learning to play American football while visiting from Italy. The first fig from the tree the summer we find Giraldi's garden. Sitting in an abandoned truck in a field at ten, pretending she can drive, and finding a Dodge key ring with twenty-three keys on it in the glove box. Christmas dinner, Aunt Mildred declaring she can do whatever she wants because she was the oldest one there. Being stopped by State Police three miles from the Canadian Border. Kissing me on the dock at Kinisee Harbor.

I lunge for her fragments, but Cassie's fingers of ice hold me back. Watching snowflakes flit into darkness it's like I am disappearing, not Jane, like I splinter, like I fracture into shards of silica, aragonite, chert. Tossed by the wind, by the waves of loss, I drift in the worldsea, unbound in an empty frame.

* * *

In a bookstore I find a blank card with a picture of an empty street on the front.

The worn cobblestones retreat into the center of the image. A crossroads intersects, backed by a four story brick building that reminds me of Brussels. The street cants downward, twisting between buildings on an angle that could only have been created by centuries of settling foundations, dirt and fill.

Café tables occupied by tourists could border the paved stones. A fishmonger could be laying out the catch of the day in an ice filled cart next to the entrance to Chez Leon.

I'm surprised by the fresh flowers outside the door. It's cold enough that the ice for the fish would be decorative.

I have a feeling it is no warmer inside the brick walls, with their drafts through mortar, thin-paned glass, ill-fitting additions, and heatless balconies. It matters like the curb of the narrow street, the thin sidewalks, the blind turn at the corner: not at all.

You can find peace on an empty street only if the rest of your life isn't empty as well.

For me the empty street card is an empty street. My life aesthetically. I buy the card.

'Oh, I love that picture,' the girl at the register says, when I place the card on the counter. She is pale with dark hair cut short to curl out at her ears. Cat eye glasses sit below her bangs and above full cheeks. She smiles.

I purse my lips. 'It's nice,' I say. It's sad, I think.

I write a note to Albert in the card and leave it under his door.

It says I'm going to find her. Going to bring her back.

* * *

Icicles scribe my arm.

'I told you she does not want your love.'

Stricken, I turn my gaze to Cassie's remorseless eyes of coal. My legs noodle, and I pirouette despair, trying to spin back to Jane, trying still to look over the ledge.

‘You don’t understand,’ Cassie says.

I relent against Cassie’s unyielding hold. I lean back and let the snows pillow me.

‘What don’t I understand?’ I ask.

‘Everything.’ Cassie smiles. ‘She’s part of the world now. You’re outside of it. You know less than a mote of salt. In its structure it’s connected. You, you are alone.’

Her words sound sense, strange, unwanted but true, like statistics on deaths, on violence, on divorce. She speaks confident of what she knows. I listen like I cannot believe.

What do you do when love dies twice?

I picture the crystalline structure of salt, the molecular bonds tying each element to the other, squaring itself in crystal. I bang on the walls of a cubic prison shouting, ‘Give her back!’ until my fists are bruised, throat parched, unable to cough another curse. I kick and claw and chip away until the bonds break and I fall, grains of salt falling with me, seasoning my flesh, swelling my tongue until I am ready to bite my own wrist to slake my thirst, to bleed to death in my desire. Below the earth, I know what you do.

‘I will find her,’ I say.

I sit up and brush snow from my shirt. Gateot has inched back inside. I face the snow child.

Cassie looks back at me. With a twig and icicle hand she brushes hair branches from her face.

‘She is in her true form,’ she says. ‘Star stuff, more than chalk and fire. You are human. You will die.’

Cassie's fingers faintly touch my cheek burning tiny points in my skin. The twin pools of night that are her eyes widen beneath snow-packed wild branches, and she sees in my countenance irrational hope, denial, will. I must go on.

'Very well,' she says. 'You must learn for yourself.'

Ice swirls around me and I am buoyed by wind. A cyclone of snow lifts me off my feet and thrusts me into the darkness beyond the precipice. Cassie's voice whispers reassurance.

'There is one below who steers travelers in the dark, conducts souls to their stations. He will know where she goes and where you must go to win her back. He is my father.'

I blindly descend, settling in clouds of snow.

Chapter III

I dream I'm standing behind Jane's grave. In midnight stone polished to reflection, I see memorial grounds, new cemeteries, weeds and bushes cleared away, cultivated, raised, razed, marker cleaned, footed, placed.

There is a family quiet by a white marble monument just behind our plot. Two children with marigolds and baby blue eyes wait in buttoned wool coats and scarves.

From the top of the hill the park is like a Lionel display, rows of reminders, the family models, preserved, protected from fading memory, always mourning.

* * *

I fall slow, held by wings of winter winds, along the cliff of ice, the darkness gradually receding to a stage between dusk and night. At the base of the glacier a concourse sprawls, extending towards archways, platforms, tunnels, and halls. I settle into this Grand Central Station reclaimed by nature, roof ripped off, exposed to the polar night in these twilight depths. Cassie's gift, the snowy cloud, billows me towards an immense figure of ice and debris directing shadows into the dark.

They move like commuters rushing for trains, these shadows, quickly but purposefully with direction received from the authority at the center of the floor.

I approach his bulk as figures flit past, seemingly unconcerned or unaware of my presence.

'You chase her echo,' he says. 'Seeking arpeggios, after something that no longer exists in your world. I hear your tremolo in the spaces between her forms.'

He is a landfill of cast-off waste, wrappers, stale ends, crusts, coffee grinds, fruit cores and skins and broken shells coated with frost. He examines me through a broken monocle edged with stems and seeds from peppers. The glass shows me on both sides of the mirror, alone: Jane nowhere in the scene.

‘I have to find her.’

‘You can no longer see her.’

He spins the arc of glass closer to his eye. Like a coin of crystal, bisected. He holds only a half, but when the half spins, I see the image of the whole, the sphere. It remains empty.

‘Please,’ I say, remembering her transparency, thinking how like her body is his sliver of glass. ‘I cannot accept my lack.’

‘You think you still hear the note.’

‘Hear it?’ My face flushes; I clench my teeth, my fists. I keen for it.

What love doesn’t alter the vibrations of our bodies? And what loss doesn’t still echo in the sounding board of the soul? The melody and disharmony of the world: it’s torture. Like holding your breath for four-and-a-half minutes, wondering why the pianist sitting at the keys refuses to play, knowing there is more to life than crickets and throat clearing, or the creaks of shifting weight on chairs, begging for the love cant.

He knows this and sees that I know as well. He rattles shells, sheds rose dust and icy soil from his permafrost bulk. Bits fall like debris roused from an awakened colossus.

‘The Seer subsists below. He sorts reality and delusion in his abode.’

‘She is not glass, not wind and snowflakes and memories and lost,’ I say.

‘She is, and she is not. But her true body, her *sothliche*, will not be easy to find’

Snowdrifts and garbage shift around his feet. Blocks of ice spin and slide. They stack igloo-like to reveal an iron gate in the floor beneath insect casings and torpid inhalations crust. He reaches down with claw-like pincers of pineapple and artichoke leaves and raises the gate.

‘Find the Seer to be shown the truth.’

I climb into the crevasse as he holds the gate open above me. Surrounded by glittering segments, I grasp hand holds on a serac and lower myself, like through a polar manhole, into the labyrinth. I invade the ant hill of ice beneath shadows, trains, and clouds to find Jane.

* * *

Tunnels shift in the snow-light as I round corners, playing with directions, with sense of depth. In the maze there is only one path. I must find her, I must bring her back.

When you’re in love, there is only one choice to make. It is a weakness, and a strength, and what sets man and hero apart.

Given the choice to save the world or the woman I love is no choice. The world can burn.

Gateot hisses in my ear. ‘You cannot find the true body.’ He has inched onto my shoulder again. ‘Even if you do find her, it will only be a shell.’

‘I know her true body,’ I say. I know her *sothliche*. I will find her. ‘I will bring her back.’

* * *

Jane and I live downtown lofted above streets. She plays for the philharmonic and teaches. I work in buildings buried among old newspapers, rags of good will and yesterdays left behind.

New life rises out of the murk of boiler rooms latent with unused steam pipes and the confines of warehouse-hidden cavities cluttered with decaying cushion foam from Salvation Army rejected couches. Each room I finish is brushed with lights in eyes, the hints of memories warm curled in soundings from the cradle of her arm, her fingers on strings, and slightly parted lips. This is what she does to me. Her music becomes part of everything I touch.

We watch squirrels build a nest, stuffing cheeks with leaves, stuffing furious, burying stores of food to survive off of in months to come. They climb the pole at the street corner and tightrope to their home.

If you do not watch, you will never see the way, the entry, the portal to home.

I watch her grow fatter and thin with the cold. I know her body in all forms, vibrating with the pitch, bloated with chemicals, drawn lean with death and hollowed by scavengers of the ocean, turned to glass, mirror of my life, empty shell, sands emptied out.

* * *

I trace letters on the wall, 'Sooth.'

Frost peels away like her skin in my hand, away from eyes across brow. Too early I think. Cheekbones and jaw mock me, machining, tell me again how we met.

'I know. I know. You no know.' Gateot gurgles. 'I know her *sothliche*,' he mimics me, mocking.

I stifle him with my hand, but I do not discard him. He is the last one to touch Jane. I stuff him in a pocket. Throttled, he crumples up like a pill bug.

The truth is south.

The honeycomb corridors of ice and earth lead into stone, into melt carved canyons of the underworld. I wind with the thin stream of liquid that trickles beneath my feet like venom from a sting. The diffuse blue light warms and the temperature rises with every turn, until I can no longer see my breath in the air, until the threat of chilblains is replaced with sweat.

At a change in the warren, edges of walls carved by erosion meld with brickwork arches. Aged lamps strung on wire hang from the ceiling. Mold and mildew spread along the passageways. This maze becomes brickwork ancient sewers, and abandoned subway tunnels spiral descents.

I am surprised to find more life lower than up above, more filth. Monstrous putrid fronds reach from cracks and crevices towards the dirty light bulbs dangling sustenance. Like a jungle has tried to take root behind the walls. Lizards, dragonflies flit in the warming air. The sewers sprout roots, mushrooms, pipes, passages, ladders and grates, spatter waste sputters decay of dirt. Its smell is familiarity of the world. I seek on, looking for the man who projects scenes from his eyes, who sees everyone's truth when they show each other lies.

Nearby I hear the rushing of liquid, like blood to the head. Alternating reflections of light off water glitter the ceiling and walls of the tunnel.

I come to an intersection of passages too wide to leap. Rushing liquid bisects the tunnel, a six foot obstruction. But across from me, the light in the passageway is

different, darker. It beckons like obscurity. Every stone block in the intersection drips with moisture. The water, if it is water, runs green from twin tunnels large enough to stand in, that conjoin like valves in a miswrought heart pumping poison from one arterial line to another. The toxic river eddies and splashes a few feet below me as it makes its way into darkness.

I traverse the lethal stream. Green water up to my chest, I wade through the unctuous fluid. Gateot climbs out of my pocket, scaling my body to avoid getting wet. He makes a hissing choking sound that reminds me of laughter, or hysteria. His head bobs up and down like he's searching for frequencies in the air.

'You're going to die,' he says. 'Gegag. Gahgahgi.' I wonder if that's him giggling.

'I know.'

But I don't. I don't really know.

At the other side, the entrance to the passage is two feet above my head. Gripping the bottom lip of the pipe, I pull myself from the toxic spillway, rise, dripping poison, and continue towards the source of the dark glow.

* * *

Soft echoes scrape the ends of the tunnel, skirt the edges of the brick pipe where it adjoins a large square room. In this junction box where four tunnels meet, an old Ford Taurus, impossibly washed down storm drains during a flood, grows lichen that bathes the room with black light. A wiry man with green scales for skin crawls along the roof of the car in his lab coat, carving symbols in the paint.

I watch him skitter across the top of the car, hop down to the hood. He leans on the windshield, pressing his body to the glass, his face to marred steel of the roof.

His eyes narrow as he sees me in the dark mouth of the tunnel. He digs his claws into the roof's edge.

'Mine,' he says. His voice sibilant, it whispers hypnotizing like quiet static after the signal has gone off the air.

'Yours,' I say. I think it wise to agree with the lizard man.

'Talk to him. Ask him.' Gateot hisses from my shoulder. 'He will help you find the way.'

Maybe it's the air, the memory of humid dank earthy smells of the Everglades as a child and window frogs crawling over our glass door at midnight that does it. I am not afraid.

'Which way to the Seer?' I ask.

'You don't belong here. Why Gregor help?' He responds. He twists his neck trying to peer at me from a better angle.

I hop down from the tunnel mouth onto the car's hood.

'Mine!' Gregor bares sharpened teeth at me, and a forked tongue flicks in the air.

'Yours.' I agree again, stepping to the floor, my feet leaving pink imprints in the lichen of the hood.

'Gregor will crack the formula. Gregor will open her shell.'

The lizard man glances at the glowing symbols he has scrawled in the paint.

'I can help you with that if you tell me where the Seer is.' I offer. I move towards the passenger side door.

Gregor is small, like a child, and thin. He is dressed in tattered scrubs beneath his coat. I imagine him as a dermatologist writing a prescription for eczema ointment with his scaly leather hand and the terrified look of the hair stylist, staring at his thin snake lips, as she takes the prescription from him.

‘Help Gregor?’ He asks. He bares his teeth again and shifts like he is getting ready to pounce as I reach for the passenger side door handle.

I open the door and the room explodes in a cacophony of lights and sounds.

‘The gods are angry!’ Gregor screams and leaps from the roof to the wall of the room and down to the floor. A lipless smile, like a rictus is plastered on his face. He dances from foot to foot, then scrambles into the car, delighted as the car’s alarm continues to blare.

‘The Seer! I need to find the Seer!’ I shout over the alarm.

Gregor’s nails play along the vinyl dashboard, poking at gauges in the instrument cluster. He yanks the shift knob off and clambers out of the car.

‘We must go,’ he says. His eyes dance wildly trying to look at me, at the lights diving across the walls of the room as headlights and hazards flash.

Gregor crab-steps towards a tunnel mouth, smiling, the shift knob clutched in front of him like a freshly caught prize. There is a moment when he pauses at the threshold of the room lit intermittently by flashing lights of the activated car alarm. I see him in the jungles of Vietnam, mines and grenades going off amid tracer rounds, in the villages of Iraq behind anti-aircraft guns, RPGs and small arms fire, in the riots of LA, burning buildings, looting shops, in the midst of teargas and pepper spray. I see him in the strobing LEDs, explosive base and pyrotechnics of midnight warehouse raves.

‘Come,’ he says. He holds the shift knob close to his chest in his right hand. With his left he gestures from the mouth of the tunnel. ‘I will show you the way.’

* * *

The brickwork gives way to tiled walls, slick with moisture. The scent of the passage changes as well, becoming sharper, less natural. It reminds me of walking from untempered woods onto someone’s dark manicured lawn. The elements are the same but their function is different, tamed.

‘We walk many steps below the surface,’ Gregor says.

‘I know.’ I answer quietly.

Below the surface there is always something to suspect, and something to be surprised by. The difference between knowing someone and knowing who someone is, is made up of those surprises.

We come to a depression in the passage where water drips in puddles on the floor. Gregor splashes with both feet. The fading violet glow from the lichen room is replaced by a dim light from up ahead, barely bright enough to make out shapes. I follow the lizard man in doctor’s garb through the bowels of a climate ravaged undercity. Not once does it occur to me that this might be a bad idea. To get Jane back, I follow.

The inky corridor opens into an abandoned subway station, darkness interspersed with bare bulbs dangling among roots and moss, illuminating terrazzo dappled with fungus, slime and pools of decay beneath our feet.

‘The Seer lives here,’ Gregor says. ‘He is afraid to go far, blind from visions, from his curse.’

We move towards something shuffling at the far end of the station.

‘Once he had a boy who was his guide. Now he is alone.’

I wonder if somehow Gregor was that boy. I wonder if he was born with scales for skin and left in the sewers to die with the homeless alligators and turtles of pet shop misjudgments. I wonder if I would bring him home if I found him. I know Jane would.

* * *

Jane finds a baby bird fallen from its nest, or cast out or overcome by a greedier sibling. She brings him home and nurses him with an eyedropper, sugar water and almond paste.

I don’t know if that’s what you feed a bird with, but her starling grows.

She keeps him in an old wooden bowl lined with fragments of a Christmas wreath. The dried needles nestle the bird as his feathers grow in. Jane shreds the ribbon and adds it to the bowl, weaving thin strips of red satin into the circle.

‘For color,’ she says.

For weeks our apartment is filled with the sounds of a growing child. Chirps and coos and chuckles. We catch minutes of sleep when we can, as night or day he seems to need us to awake. We try to shade the nest with a tea towel, to trick him into rest. It doesn’t help.

One day I come home and find Jane sitting on the floor under the window, tears in her eyes.

‘He’s flying,’ she says, before I can ask anything. Tears are in her eyes, but she smiles and points out the open window as I come near.

I kneel next to her and look out the window.

‘Lord Starling,’ she says and points to a black dart swooping over rooftops.

‘Lord Starling?’ I ask.

‘I gave him lands and a title, so he will never be without a home again.’ Jane stares out the window.

I love the world she sees. I need to get her back.

* * *

What I hear shuffling at the far end of the room, we approach. I stay behind support columns like trees in a forest until closer, I can make him out.

Between pools of light, he moves, a spindly old man in rags, bearded, with sheep dog hair and welder’s goggles. He scrapes his way along, his moves cautious, bulb to bulb, fixture to fixture, as if their light confines the breadth of life

I step from behind a pillar and stand under the warmth of an incandescent bulb. He stops as if hearing my movements, he can see me. He faces me with blind stare and loose open jaw.

‘I’m searching for my wife.’

‘You are early,’ he says.

If I believe a lizard, a snow angel, a trash heap, and a worm, this man knows how I find Jane. He knows where I go to bring her back.

I believe.

Chapter IV

In every world beneath the world there is one like the Seer, hoping for recognition of his charge, relief from his vision, sanity granted to one who cannot see himself, only the paths of everyone else.

‘Why should I help you?’ he asks.

His challenge whispers through thin lips beneath the unstable lights of the abandoned subway station.

‘Once you had a boy who was your guide,’ I say.

‘So what?’

‘You are alone. I am alone too.’ I’m afraid it will not work.

‘The boy’s gone,’ he says. ‘Fled, or died, or went away repulsed by my vision, by what I let him see.’ He tilts his head down, goggles pointed at the ground as if to see something in the patterns of the floor, or maybe to tilt his ear in my direction.

‘My wife left. I need to find her, need to bring her back. Maybe I can help you too.’

The difference between leaving and being taken is that the first is usually one’s own choice, the second involves someone else. If the note reads, ‘I left for the coast today.’ It means one thing. If it says, ‘I was taken to the ocean.’ It means something different. Unless one wants to be a passenger in someone else’s action, or is incapable of moving on one’s own, being taken is not a popular choice.

The difference between helping yourself and helping others isn’t much. Both are selfish. One can be solely selfish and the other a selfishness of the soul.

I'm desperate. I volunteer to help, but I'm really just out for myself.

'You can't even help yourself.' He scoffs. 'You can't bring back the dead.'

'I have to try.'

'Why?' The Seer points his stick at me. 'What do you want from her?'

'I want her warmth, her love.'

'She's dead,' he says. 'Cold. She is darkness. Once she might have loved. Now, she is the winter.'

He shuffles out of the circle of light.

'Wait!' I say. 'I know the darkness. I know its hand. I know the fear, like the snuffing of a final flame.'

The sounds of the Seer's movements stop.

'With Jane I could see,' I say.

At night, in the darkness, I could see. The glow from sodium-vapor, or passing headlights, gas fluoresced, the lunar diffusion, starfires, hearth embers, or sulfur strike.

'Now, she's gone, and I can't adjust.'

I strain my eyes, trying to stare into the darkness where the Seer hides.

It's like what Albert always says, you're a hypocrite if you ask for something and do not like what you receive. I ask for it anyway.

'Help me find her. Help me so I can bring her back.'

* * *

He slides to the edge of the incandescent glow, an outline of something half in the world and half in the mind.

‘The problem with the world is luminosity,’ he says. ‘They all live in the semi-darkness, the twilight that allows them to see what they want and ignore or pretend to miss in the shadows everything they cannot accept: the homeless, the poor, the angry, the hurt, the persecuted, the oppressed in need of help. They avoid the tyrants, the abusers, the despots, the violent, the criminals, the bullies, the liars, the cheats. The world can pretend none of them exist, they can act like they can’t see them in the fading dusk.’

‘I don’t care about any of that,’ I say. ‘I only want to see her. I need to see her.’

‘Then you’re like the rest. You only see what you want to see.’

‘No,’ I say. ‘I can’t see what I want, because she is gone. I can’t see her anymore.’

He comes back from the shadows, pulls at the empty bandoleer strapped across his chest.

‘Once I saw too much and the gods took my vision. They thought to undo the knot, not seeing what the strands wound about, that how what it bound is in no one, is Gordian, is penultimate and perpetuity.’

‘Please,’ I say. My knees are weak and I can no longer feel my feet.

He sniffs the air.

‘You starve like me,’ he says.

‘I starve.’

He pauses and then says, ‘they gave me a choice: I could see what everyone else saw and be part of the world, or I could be special and see that which only I could see. I chose to be exceptional. And in return, they blinded me. What I see isn’t just that which

no one else can. It is what no one else wants to see. It's there; you just can't make yourself look. I see it always. I can't help but look.'

'Show me. I'll see.'

'You won't like it. You never do. You all live in a world where you deceive yourselves. Refusing to acknowledge what is real. Refusing to turn the light upon yourself for fear you will be destroyed.'

'I am destroyed,' I say. 'I'm here, and she's not. I know she is gone. I know my pain is real.'

'Watch then,' he says. 'Watch the hunger artist be lobster replaced. Watch that straw.'

He takes off welder's goggles and light floods the room.

Past feed sprockets, dowsers, shutters and apertures, projections unreel past the flicker fusion threshold, across ceiling, floor, across my body, fingers, on columns and doors.

* * *

In the Seer's images, I drain a fifth of vodka, another empty to litter the streets with. My cups fall, spilling contents, puddling floors, breaking kiln fired clay, poured glass, lead panes. I can't say if I break them or if something else does. Maybe without Jane's smile to sharpen, her eyes to dilate, they lose their purpose, their form. Maybe they give up.

I find myself among soggy cardboard, milk cartons, broken glass and foil labels from beers. I see bits of brickwork and cement fragments piled near the wall. I'm

pillowed by black trash bags, melting snow, and a featherbed torn and scattered from thieves searching mattresses.

I yearn for Jane. Now one face shields them all, and through the bottle I see the specter again and again.

The world smells like ethanol and lemon. I wander through bars in the Seer's vision, ghost companions hum on the outskirts of perception, rubbing corneas, irritating my eyes like a sty, like glands of Moll inflamed by my presence.

The second chair cellist blinks pizzicato at her score. Tears form; her instrument cries prelude and we yearn for the unplayed note. I know it. Jane tells me about it, about creating the void.

* * *

We stop for coffee on a date. Sitting on a bench, under a street light, Jane and I watch cars drive by.

‘When did you know music was your passion? When did you think you could do that for a career?’ I ask.

She takes a sip of coffee and looks up towards the night sky.

‘I had played since I was a little girl. My parents wanted me to, and I liked it, but there was one night I knew it was for me. I went by myself to a concert in the park; my parents didn't know where I was; I hadn't told any of my friends. I just wanted to go do something on my own. It was a warm night. I sat by a tree. They played Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake. It was lovely, but what made the difference was when they finished, what came next.

‘When the orchestra stopped, I heard something. It was the saddest and strangest and most beautiful sound I’ve ever heard. It was pure. It was melancholy. No one else seemed to hear it. They were clapping and cheering. I wanted to shout, ‘I hear you!’ but I couldn’t find my voice. That’s when I really got serious about playing, after that concert. I wanted to hear that note again.’

* * *

In Seer’s projections, in the central scene, the white clown sights his Dragunov on the head of Colonel Bresnehov; a grieving woman stirring soup mumbles about the waste, the violence of journalists, about Savitsky.

I find myself tracing maps, tracing rhumb lines throughout the room, over wave and drift, Mercator projections, Gemini rue, and the floor beneath the sea.

On multiple screens, the path to the presidency, with town hall backdrops, cheering constituents, placards, the people loving the promise of the drug dealer dressed as a Jesuit, the campaign hardened Green Beret, branded Boy Scout by puppet masters, and alligators casting votes.

In the village in Costa Rica I see magicians levitate, resurrect. Hope, taxi-fendered, on a city street shadowed by twin skyscrapers, among horns and brake lights, drives by. An imprint beneath shirts lassos faith and justifies belief by the masses. But I see myself asking in what kind of world is a man buried five days under ice raised as a rat? And then I am the man, the rat, the ice.

‘Walk through walls all you want,’ a woman’s voice says in the vision. ‘But if magic is real, rule the world.’ She sounds like danger, like the house at the Wynn, like she doesn’t often lose.

The Seer says, 'Death made the world believe she does not exist.'

I see mass graves in Rwanda, images from Auschwitz of grieving chimneys standing remembering, bodies strewn about in the mud outside Cambodian huts, the afterimages of Hiroshima, plague victims piled in carts.

'The world is wrong.'

The pictures combine into one moving image taking up every inch of floor, ceiling, wall. I tremble and sink to the floor, kneeling as the light and shadow wash over me, the silhouette of a woman, but curvier than Jane, a figure more hourglass, more timeless, more near.

'It's an illusion,' I whisper.

'Is it?' The shadow asks.

* * *

We slide into seats on the left side of the almost empty Amtrak car. The train rumbles forward and I lean my head back against the glass. Jane's nails bore into my arm even through the mittens she wears and my fleece. Her breath is quick, hissed. It's pain, I know, but she blinks back tears and fibs.

'I'm just cold,' she says.

I smile at the lie. Her breathing relaxes as the fit passes. Jane leans closer to me, places her head on my shoulder, secure.

The top of her pink knit cap rests just below my chin. Through the windows of the car, I watch dim orange sky hug the horizon behind the leafless trees and multi-family homes that line the tracks like construction paper cut-outs. The rest of the sky, blanketed by black clouds, hangs over us like the top edge of a shadow box.

We stutter to a stop and a man with a bad toupee grabs his trench coat and briefcase in one hand and gets out, leaving us alone in the car. Jane keeps one arm around my neck for leverage and leans back so she can see my face. With her free hand she begins playing with the floppy dark locks that frame my forehead.

‘You won’t ever get a toupee, will you?’

‘No,’ I say. ‘No toupees for me.’

‘Good,’ She runs her fingers over her ear, making sure no stray wisps of hair have escaped from under her hat and lowers her eyes from my gaze.

We sit, Jane with her head on my chest until our stop.

* * *

At home Jane leans against the counter in jeans, a tee shirt, and her pink knit hat, engrossed in a letter from the March of Dimes. She wants breakfast for dinner, our mimicry of morning at midnight, coffee, mimosas, and mines.

Tears brim in Jane’s eyes.

‘I want to take folic acid,’ she says, crying, clutching the letter.

‘Jane, what are you doing? That’s junk mail.’

‘I don’t want to be Paclitaxel, Cyclophosphamide and Cisplatin!’ She knocks the bag with her prescriptions to the floor. ‘I want to be saucy and sun-freckles and beach burned gold again, not wigs and make-up and sunglasses and scarves. She pulls off her hat and runs her hand over short-cropped patchy brown hair. She thrusts her palm, filled with wispy strands, towards me.

‘I want to be a mom, Steve,’ she says. Accusations swim in teary eyes made dark by winter, dark by pain.

‘Jane.’

I move to hold her but she pushes my arms aside and looks away as she retreats to our bedroom, one hand holding the hat to her face, muffling her sobs, the other balled in a fist clutched to her chest.

* * *

I cook bacon over an outdoor fire, flares of grease sparking and jumping. In the embers, wisps of women dance, darkness and red and orange and gold. I want to reach out to them, to be warm, to burn, to feel something.

* * *

I wake to find Jane standing in the window just before sunrise. She says she’s waiting for the dazzle but she’s afraid the darkness will break into dawn or eulogy into song. She trembles in a long, thin flannel top. I’m left with no way of concealing what I know.

‘I see you buying new drums,’ she says. ‘Turning on the radio, taking my tapestry down. Is it wrong that I’m jealous of that? You getting to move on?’

She’s wrong. She’s the one who has moved on. Following her own faint drum beats. The frayed weaving hangs, proof of my fidelity.

* * *

In a room lined with taupe tiles and cheaply framed still life pictures, Jane is tiny in the hospital bed, half-hidden as if she is slowly being absorbed.

Beneath the projections moisture creeps down the wall like slime or gelatin slapped up against the concrete exterior of a publishing house only to slowly peel off, slide down, trickle to the ground leaving its lemon lime trail for passersby to glance at

and wonder what kind of snail crawls down the sides of buildings and smells like hospital food.

Jane whispers to me from beneath tubes and wires, from beneath hums and clicks of machinery limiting her existence to existence, but allowing her to remain here at least for as little here as remains.

‘Is it wrong that I think of those days in the church? To wonder if I’ll burn like the pages of prayer books after I’m gone? Or freeze like the holy water in the font in winter?’

I have to lean close to her mouth to hear her. Her teeth protrude from thinned withdrawn lips and cheeks. Her acrid breath, like bile and alcohol, is hot on my face.

Her eyes close. She coughs weakly, like burbled breaths beneath icecaps, like her lungs are trying to reweave splayed silk that once covered well-curbs.

‘It’s so hard to hear the song,’ she says. The dove laments. The room is filled with opera, from Cage and Lennon, with noise, with nothing as important as her sound.

Machines amplify the music her body barely plays. Stabbing *b b b*. Her sonata’s become a single note. I think of the composer compressing sound in his hands, singing to it until it sings back. I think of a century old novel that describes the savage who catches death in his arms, dances with it and returns it to life. I think it’s too late to find them.

The music slows, diminishes, like she’s a music box winding down, holding on, but soon to be beyond her body, beyond the identification band wrapped around her wrist.

Her breathing is lateral, irregular. Silence stings more than the singular note, muted music more than machined recitals. Without the song, the hunger artist starves.

* * *

Albert meets me at the hospital. I tell him. I don't have to tell him, he knows.
But I tell him.

He tells me he can't explain the reason, but meteors streak across the night, brilliant, beautiful, before they're gone. And we're happy to be witnesses, even if for a moment. He says everything dies. But, that Bruce told him, if you live long enough, you learn that everything that dies someday comes back.

'When I was younger,' Albert says, 'still living on the reservation, I went out one night with friends to see Halley's Comet. We sat on blankets on a hillside and talked about the reflection of the sun off the ocean, the universe inside an atom in my finger, raw asparagus and green peppers. I didn't know at the time, but I want to live to see Halley's Comet again.'

'When is that going to be?' I ask.

'When I'm ninety-two.'

'How exactly is that supposed to make me feel better?'

'I don't know. Maybe if you stick around long enough, you'll see the comet again too.'

I'm not patient enough. The next day I sneak back in.

* * *

I see the gate, the fences, the alleys and homes. I see her tuning the orchestra for the summer concert series in the park. I see the late afternoon storm rippling the surface of the pond with drops the size of nickels. I see the fall. I see myself taking the picture of Jane at the Lincoln Memorial from my wallet and pinning it to the cork board at the

entrance to the harbor yard. Immolating memory, like some butane Iphigenia sacrifice.
I see myself lying in the snow, fighting to angel. I see the lintel of death's doorstep
temporary. I see where the Queen of Shades reigns, where it rains ice melt and
limestone; where the dead go, we follow.

Chapter V

I dream of Jane again tonight. It is dark, night in the woods.

She hands me something. A ribbon? I try to hold onto it, onto her fingers, but she pulls away and skips out of reach.

‘Love’s a Mobius strip,’ she says. ‘There are two sides, but one path. A half-twist makes an infinite loop.’

I follow the blurry silhouette I believe is her.

Branches slide by my face, my arms. I hear other voices telling me to end this mad pursuit, that I’ll never catch her, never be satisfied. I follow her through the forest, looking for an answer. The trees open up.

Jane is standing at the base of a precipice, holding the dark twisted ribbon.

‘What is it?’ I ask again, looking at her face.

‘It’s all you need to know.’

* * *

The Seer puts his glasses on and the room goes black. My breath huffs angry. My blood pounds in my ears as I try to see silhouettes in the darkness. He is a dark spot in darkness, moving away.

‘Wait! That’s wasn’t enough.’ I gasp, trying to slow my breathing. ‘I need to know where to go to find her.’

‘You know where to go from the vision.’ I hear the Seer’s voice, faint, giving me instructions to continue on the path. ‘Descend to the west, to the Queen of Shades,’ he says and shuffles away.

The bulbs of the station remain dark, their incandescence consumed in the slide, the show of life the Seer projects. I stand still, eyes growing accustomed to the underground once more.

* * *

I slip into the bathroom to brush my teeth, Jane still in bed. The grey hairs in the mirror are starting to make inroads against the black. There's one in my left eyebrow that I think about plucking. I leave it. Jane slips in beside me and turns on the water to the shower.

'You know what today is?' she asks, smirking as she nudges me over with her hip to gain space at the sink.

'What?' I cautiously grunt.

'February 13th! Pitchers and catchers report today!' She says, speaking through a smile and the toothbrush protruding from her mouth.

Jane tosses her toothbrush back in the cup next to the sink and scoops a handful of water to rinse her mouth.

The steam from the shower is starting to fog the mirror.

She shrugs out of her shirt and steps into the shower. 'You want to join me?' Jane asks, looking over her shoulder at me with a half smile and raised eyebrow as she pulls the curtain shut.

I can't see my reflection anymore. But behind the mirror, the medicine gives her away.

* * *

A weak red glow outlines archways in the western wall of the station. A road flare on the other side of a roman aqueduct. It never appears to be a warning to me. More like a beacon directing the only way I can still go.

I hesitate in moving towards the light, shuffling my feet like the Seer, trying to feel my way forward in the dim.

At the archways, a form from the shadows springs at me.

‘I showed you the Seer, now begone! Begone!’ It cries.

It is Gregor; he beats at my chest. I grapple with the lizard child trying to secure his arms by the wrists. He hisses, snapping at my face, his breath like dandelion grass. I push him back, scrambling to arm’s length in the dim light. He is outlined in red like a fading neon sign by the light from beyond the archways.

‘We are close to her throne. You must turn back; you cannot, cannot disturb her,’ he says.

Gregor pulls at his clothes.

‘I will go on,’ I say.

Gregor hisses. ‘You don’t belong here,’ he says. He flees through the western arches.

Following Gregor’s path leads me down a curved ramp into a cavern lit by fires. It extends beyond their light. At the center of the nearest edge there is a rise like a tor, on it a dais, and a throne.

* * *

Hair like a bouffant of raven feathers floats around her head as if ready to take flight to decapitate itself for speedier travel. Her laugh lilts and brilliant alpine peaks

glint behind blood wet lips. Her irises are diamonds. She looks at refractions of me and purrs.

‘I replaced them years ago. I thought these were much prettier. You’re pretty too, would you care to be my eyes?’

Made from parts of those who have come before, she surrounds herself with abyssinians, sevals, iguanas, insects, and bones, the departed, doomed, the too troubled to move on away. In her mechanisms, her collected parts, Kate has the fractures of life *oh* an echo they still cling to.

‘I see you’ve met Gregor already,’ she says. She rubs the scales between his ears, as he squirms among the cats nestled around her and leans into her leg.

The lizards rustle. ‘You are not dead,’ they seem to say. ‘Why are you here? How did you find us?’

Their displeasure clicks and whirs like a mechanical construct caught in the act of exceeding its programming for a directive it knows should take precedence.

Gregor lowers his head.

Behind her throne, the room stretches to a sea of night, to the ships of souls. In this cavern beneath the world, her dais hovers a step off the ground, drifting with tides with the varieties of cats. Kate laughs and strokes a curved feline spine.

‘The world is concentric circles and I am the deepest,’ Kate says. ‘Very few stay here. Most go back.’

I know she is lying. Not about the circles. About the depth.

* * *

The Queen of Shades governs Gregor and cats, curses the Seer to do her bidding, lizards to her trysts. She is the stewardess of waypoints in sewers and caves, in decay and corruption between banshees and bliss. On torch-lit Arabian carpets spirits scuttle dancing in the dark world, chameleons, beetles, cats humming in the circle. Undulating with her threads Kate cackles, the mirror ball spins hidden messages flashing code; she knows where Jane is, she knows all the dead, she pulls me in.

‘Don’t you know, I’ve eaten them all, tasted the flesh, the salt, the blood of any who thought they could excise finality, overcome the dead, reduce the seductress to trials and will. My visitors become my followers and followers my slaves. They beg me before they’re through to transmute them to elements held together by lust like sycophantic worshippers forgetting self-purpose, exhorting me to rid them of their pain. To rid them of that without which not. To free them.’

Gregor shakes. ‘He doesn’t belong here. He is intact, a man. He is backwards,’ he says.

‘Yes, but he will stay.’ Kate’s command is a purr. ‘He has pain; he has purpose I can drink.’

‘He doesn’t belong here,’ Gregor says again, but withdraws with the lizards and insects from the light.

‘Their hearts beat cold,’ she says. ‘But they’re my children, and my children’s children. Their young gestate externally, and compassion doesn’t come naturally to them. Some kill and eat their mates. Well, some of us do too.’

The room rasps and scratches its accord. I see undulating shadows at the edges of the light as the creatures in the room bob and crawl. The throbbing sound tickles the bottoms of my feet.

‘I know why you’re here,’ Kate says. ‘But do you ever wonder what will happen when you find her?’ She asks. She slides towards me across impeccable fibers woven from loss.

Kate’s lashes whisking in my face, I am afraid. What if she won’t come back?

‘What if love can’t bring someone back?’ Kate asks. ‘What if it can only make you want to try? It can make you go after her, but only to fail.’ She taps a fingernail on my forehead as I stand frozen by her voice, frozen by the implications of her words.

‘Think of what happened to all the ones who tried to bring love back, Imhotep, Frankenstein, Orpheus, Hammond, all disasters, twisted monsters, beheadings, fire, doom. You don’t want to fail,’ she says.

I want Jane.

‘You don’t have to keep looking. You can stay here.’ Kate’s voice slides across my mind. ‘You can save yourself another loss.’

I don’t think I can survive another loss.

‘What do you expect of her anyway?’ Kate continues. ‘What if she does not want to return? I can reduce your pain. I can shrink it to a star you wear in your ear like a pendulum or tattoo under skin. I can cast it into the heavens as a spark circling the sun, to return only once every twelve years. Would you like that?’

* * *

Maybe I died too, tips of bone, vertebrae, split ends. It is possible to keep living as organs ossify, but it is not really living. It is the flesh made stone of the gorgon's gaze. It is the hardening heart no arterial blockage, plaque buildup, or cholesterol can cause, the mass production of ceramic idols by automatons on assembly lines in Xiaping Province.

* * *

Standing in front of the throne of the Queen of Shades, face to face with the mistress of death, I see her beauty. And I doubt.

'You're made from stars but they govern you not. The sways and whims of celestial mechanics hold nary an influence on the will of man. It's all a convenient excuse to avoid the truth. Your choices are your own.'

I think of event horizons, ascension and declination, Schwarzschild radii, and velocity dispersion, the chances of succeeding at a Sisyphean task.

'Then how do you explain disease, death? I didn't choose cancer.'

'But you can choose death. If you want to be with her so badly,' she asks, 'why don't you just kill yourself?'

Kate's question tempts me. She offers me a knife. There's a curve to the blade, like the talon of a hawk. The handle looks like bone, crisscrossed by leather and wire.

I pause in taking the blade. It's a trick, I think. If I kill myself, I may never find Jane. If I kill Kate, I'll never find out where to go.

I take the knife and hold it to Kate's neck, grasping her hair to still her. I see my reflection in the facets of her eyes, wild, lost, jealous, and in the pulse in the tilt of her neck.

She breathes in sharply, tenses; then she smiles. 'For a moment you surprised me.'

She pulls my face close. Her kiss is like fire at a distance. I feel its warmth but it does not warm me.

'You think there is still a chance. Foolish, foolish man.'

She lets me go and stares past the dead parts of my soul. I keep the knife at her throat. Kate traces a *W* in the five burn marks on my cheek.

'You wear your woe like oilskin,' she says. 'It's weatherproof yet flammable.' She turns aside and looks down the hill beyond the dais at the long flat barge floating on the cavern tarn. 'There is one place left for you to try, but it will cost you.'

The trick to every trick is that it is a trick. The trick to every deal is that it is a deal.

I release her and lower the knife. I am willing to pay anything and smile in thanks. Little do I know.

'What are you willing to trade?' she asks, her whisper like the combination of the hiss of a snake and the purr of a cat, vibratory yet airy.

'I'll give you whatever you want to help me get her back.'

'I want what's most important to you. I want the thing you value most,' she says.

I smell burning charcoal and hot asphalt after a summer shower.

'I can't give you that. That's my love for her.'

'Then give me one year of your love for her,' she says. 'And I will help you win her back.' Kate turns away and looks up into the darkness above the dais. 'You will be

my companion. I will have your devotion the way she would, and, after a year, I will tell you how to get her back. Succumb to me. In return, I will tell you where to go.'

'No,' I say.

I will not tarnish my love for Jane.

Kate snaps her fingers. The lizard men swarm.

* * *

I'm placed below deck in a barred room, a brig on the barge beneath the world. My hands and arms are covered with scratches from the lizard men's nails. A day passes. I study the black shellacked wood of my cage in near darkness. Kate brings me steamed fish and lemons sliced and arranged on a plate in six wedges.

'We always carry citrus on the water,' she says. 'Some sailors did it because they thought it warded off scurvy. We know better. We carry them as tokens for the dead.'

I realize how hungry I am and begin to eat. Kate leaves me with the plate.

For three days this goes on. Each day Kate brings me food and again presents the deal.

'A year with me and you can go to get her back,' she says. 'You've already wasted three days. You can hold out as long as you like, but the deal will still be one year for me. Whether you agree today or nine months from now, it will still be one year for me.'

Kate places my plate of fish and lemon wedges on the floor just outside the bars.

'And you will agree,' she says. 'At some point you will see this is the only way.'

I've studied the cage, the strength of the bars. I know Kate's right. I know.

* * *

On the fourth day I ask, ‘What guarantee do I have that you will keep your promise, that in giving up a year of my love I’m not giving it up entirely?’

‘None. That’s the crux,’ she says. ‘But would it be so bad if I do renege on the deal? Wouldn’t it be nice to give up the pain and loss that comes with your love for her? You could be with me and love again without that weight. Ask yourself, truly, what you want. Do you want her back, or do you want to be free of your pain? Do you really want to get her back only to risk losing her again?’

I’m tired. Afraid. Hungry as if the fish and lemons are carving my insides out.

Her killer, her consort, her slave; if I can have Jane back, it’s worth it.

I know what I want. I take the deal. I let myself be given up to her.

‘The price is a year of your life,’ she says, ‘a year of your love. When the year is up, if you still desire, I will free you and tell you where to go.’

* * *

Kate removes my hair, shaves my face, my body, my head. She washes me in wine dark waters from the cavern beyond her throne. She hums, haunting as she bathes me in a burnished copper tub. Barnacle lizards drift around us beneath stalactites rooting for nourishment. Somehow in the warmth of this netherworld, a snowflake drifts between rhizomes, tumbling amongst dendrites. I reach up but cannot touch.

Kate stops my hand, pulls it to her chest. ‘You can’t see her yet. But it won’t be too long, once I’ve had my year,’ she says, releasing my hand and undoing straps at her shoulders. Her dress drops to the deck and she climbs into the basin. Kate christens me, smiling glory, drawing me in.

‘She’s gone to a world all souls go to before they die.’

‘She’s not dead.’ I state it, but come closer to a question than I’ve ever allowed myself before.

‘No, she’s not. But she’s not alive either.’

Kate runs water over my head, down my face. I let the dark squeeze my eyes and think, if I find her fractals, incision of chest, shards planted to flush her cheeks, unwrap Jane from shadow, I can make flesh from glass, refund body and soul.

* * *

I live with Kate. I live my end of the deal. She initiates me to the living death. To what is beneath.

‘Watch,’ she says and points to the surface of the dark water.

I see ripples form a few feet out from shore.

‘Cave guppies,’ she says. ‘They taste like primary colors. Catch me one.’

She hands me a thin spear, pointed with three sharp barbs.

I learn to hunt in the underworld, spear ghostly fish, gather mushrooms and fissure peppers. I learn to swim in night water with Gregor and other lizard men. We pursue cave guppies and blue crabs. I spear dinner and learn to cast the black nets woven from sinuous threads Kate spins out of cave moss.

In the shallow inlets Kate’s cats perch amid low lying rocks, tails twitching as their stares penetrate the dark water. They scoop minnows from the lapping liquid and luxuriate in the meal.

Time runs untracked in the underdark. Days pass into weeks. My muscles grow strong from swimming, from hunting, from legioning for Kate.

She bathes me every chance she gets, keeps my face, my scalp, my body shorn of hair. My skin stays wet. And in the torches of the ship, the braziers on deck, it shines bronze, made metal, plated in the land under the earth.

* * *

In the center of one of the caverns is a small island of stalagmites, fallen stone, lichen and moss. The largest rock sprouts a bronze statue of a hunter, spear in hand, bag slung across his back. His bronze is older than mine, but like me, reflects firelight and shadows.

I look at the streaks and swirls in the statue's bronze. Amidst the aged green patina, they wend like dark veins and arteries in the metal skin. Mostly red but others brown or even purples in hue, these imperfections in the metal permeate every surface. The legs, torso, arms, and face of the hunter contain these images of something just beneath the surface, something the sculptor let into the mix and couldn't remove, some impurity in the molten bronze.

‘Benvenuto Cellini sculpted it for the Duke of Milan.’

‘How did it get here?’ I ask.

‘Given enough time, everything ends up here,’ Kate responds.

I glance at her. She is staring at the sculpture. I look back at the metal form as she continues.

‘You noticed the reddish streaks?’ Kate asks. ‘You know there’s a story behind them.’

Kate pulls her feathered hair to one side and runs a single manicured nail from her earlobe down her neck to play slowly up and down on her sternum.

‘They say Cellini had taken a mistress around the time he was commissioned to produce the hunter. They say he worked like a madman and neither his mistress nor his wife was allowed in the workshop. They say the women became jealous, not of each other, but of the work. And they say to enact revenge upon the man for making them jealous of his art, they conspired to end his life.

‘On the day the great mold was set and the bronze was to be poured (one single pour for the entire statue, that was the way Cellini worked), they say the master took his first rest in five days, a nap for a few hours as the last of the bronze was melted and readied. But when the time came for the pour, Cellini could not be found. His assistant, worried the bronze would harden, attempted the pour without the master.

‘As the molten metal was released from the furnace and slid into the immense clay mold in the pit dug outside the shop, steam and fire and smoke rose from the ground with a sound like a great human scream. After the bronze cooled and the mold stripped, the streaks were seen and blamed on the inadequacies of the assistant. Cellini never surfaced. In fact, he was never seen again. Some say he was ashamed that his great work had been ruined by his human frailty and need for rest.

‘But for years afterwards, two women, Cellini’s wife and mistress, would come see the statue where it was displayed in Plaza di Fiori. Sometimes together and sometimes alone, the two women looked at the statue for hours. They sometimes ran their fingers along the dark red streaks in the metal. And they smiled. They always smiled.’

Kate kisses the back of my neck as we drift past the island leaving the statue in the darkness of the cavern behind us.

* * *

We travel the rivers of Kate's domain. In the drip of moisture from stalactites, the splash of oars, the whisper of breath, I hear over and over,

'Jane's gone.'

And I wonder how much longer until the year is up.

We float in the center of a dark underground tributary. Some of the lizard men have gone to the shore with nets and spears. Kate points at one who is stalking slowly from eddy pool to eddy pool.

'The hunter tracks his prey for the future of his family; without flesh they will not live. What do you pursue for?'

'I need to bring her back.'

'Are you sure she'll come with you? She isn't a puppet, she's a woman. Women can prove to be fickle.' Kate laughs and straightens a lock of her hair.

'That's why I choose my followers carefully,' she says. 'They believe I know what's best.'

'And me?' I ask.

'You're not a follower. You're my consort.' She smiles with her lips together and runs one fingernail across my skin, from the hollow of my throat down my chest.

'Remember? We have a deal.'

I watch the lizard man search the shallows for sustenance.

Kate says if you convince them you're here to help, they'll follow you into a burning building like it was good for them, like children.

* * *

It's a bad week, but Jane and I attend a concert at Belle Sherman Elementary against her doctor's orders. One of her students has a solo and she says she promised him she would go.

We sit in the back row of folding chairs set up in the school gymnasium. Exercise mats have been rolled up and shoved to the side to make room for the orchestra.

'Look. There he is,' Jane says, and points to a bespectacled, blonde shaggy-haired boy of maybe eight.

When the concert begins, the boy plays sixteen bars of the Chorale before the remainder of the orchestra joins in. He wedges the chinrest of his half-scale violin up against his neck. A sponge rubber-banded to it pads his clavicle. He stares with intensity at his fingers plying the strings. He doesn't miss a note.

After the concert, his parents bring the little boy over to where Jane and I sit. He is still carrying his violin, as if afraid to let it go.

'You were wonderful, Timothy,' Jane says.

'Thank Miss Jane for helping teach you,' the boy's mother says.

'Thank you Miss Jane,' Timothy says and buries his face in her shoulder in an awkward hug, his violin bumping against her knees.

* * *

'There's a reason we light candles for the dead,' Kate says. 'The fire can purge our pain, incinerate the nerves. But it can't happen all at once.'

She lifts a candle from the candelabra near the stairs leading below deck and tilts it to drip wax on the back of her hand. She inhales sharply and smiles.

‘It takes sacrifice and time to learn to navigate your woe. How much nourishment and how much we can stand. Souls require blood.’

I have images in my head of melting clocks and compasses, floating in a crimson sea.

‘If you can come back from the fire, you can be reborn.’

She never says anything about Jane’s rebirth and I don’t dare ask.

* * *

Kate knows I worry hours; I worry days. I ask again and again. She knows I can’t tell. I’m afraid I’ve lost track. She knows how it nags at the back of my mind like a fly caught between window and blinds. It cannot escape, cannot be free.

She gives me a watch, dark metal and a face the deep burgundy of wine embedded with two tiny diamonds. Kate tells me they’re fragments of her eyes, so she can always see me and see what I see, even when we’re apart.

‘Tomorrow is the day,’ she says. ‘This is to remember, to record, to know and not forget.’

There is an inscription on the back. ‘Unus Annus,’ it says. ‘One year.’

I wear the black band covering the scar on my wrist.

* * *

I awake on the barge, skating the flat black waters in the cavern beneath the land.

Kate reclines on a divan beside me. She wears silk, strapless, a black and white gown Jane wanted while window shopping at Saks.

‘You could stay,’ she says. ‘I could suckle rubies from your neck, share the heart of the pomegranate. You could wear a crown of fire, king anointed in the Tenebrous Sea.’

Lying beside me, Kate tooth my lip and licks my blood.

‘No,’ I say. I lean back out of reach of her mouth. ‘I have to get Jane back.’

‘Have you thought how you will win her back again from the crystal?’ Kate asks. ‘With what will you pay? Here you will not want for anything.’

‘I want for her,’ I say. ‘You told me the price was a year. I’ve given it to you. Haven’t I?’ I rise and walk to the side of the ship.

Kate gives me what I pay for. ‘Then go. Find your woe,’ she says after me. ‘Then you might get what you deserve.’ She leaves me alone at the edge of the rail.

We float on slick dark glass, following the channel, the underground reeds and sea-grass below the surface. Hours pass until we approach a gate blocking the starboard branch of the cavern, like a castle door, barred by three gigantic spears.

From her divan Kate explains the locks.

‘The first is lightning,’ she says. ‘Captured, strung into a rod, cylindrical hollow shaft bursting with violence. Tesla towered to shockwrap the near into darkness after the spark and scent of acrid metal.’

‘The second is from the heart of an oak, warm, whorled with rings of age, centuries of sentry over the fool in social rounds, roundels, limpid and eternal without end. It makes one wish for edging, barbs, something to pierce flesh and push at nerves unaffected by the smooth length melding to body after ending its flight.’

‘The last bar is cold, frozen steel, a spear that forces its way through air, through water, through soul and muscle and blood to seek the source of life and loss and fear and love. It is the tooth of the sky.’

‘Any of the three can kill you. Are you sure you want to leave?’

‘You’ve gotten your time. Open the door,’ I say.

The barge docks at the small jetty and Kate’s reptilian crew unbars the portal. First heart, then lightning, then sky. The bars are my future reconditioned into flanges; latch keys, amortized, deforested shadows blessed, sequenced, sharpened and spun. The door swings open just enough to allow me to slip through. I depart the ship to return to the world.

As I step off the gangplank I hear Kate say, ‘Wait.’ I turn to look at her.

Her eyes flash a thousand fires. She grips the rail of the barge, her knuckles white, nails burning into the black rail, watching me step through the breach. She calls from the ship.

‘I want another year.’

I’m in the darkness, past the portal when I hear it, and a chill runs down my spine. She doesn’t say which year.

Chapter VI

I dream of Jane, as she was before, as she is now.

‘You can’t bring me back you know,’ she says. She’s magnificent. Alive, blithe, vibrant.

I shake my head. I know and I don’t know. Can you really know something if you refuse to admit it? I act as if, by refusing to acknowledge her death, it won’t be true.

‘Most people never think they’re going to die.’

‘You knew,’ I say.

‘Yeah, I knew.’

She hangs her head. Her hair, her glorious thick autumn silk dangles in front of her eyes. I swear I see a faint smile.

‘You lose them, the ones you love, in an instant. It doesn’t take time, it isn’t bit by bit, no matter how long they’re sick. One day they’re here, and the next you lose everything, instantly.’

‘Like I lost you.’

‘Let me fall, Steve.’

She pulls her hair back like a veil with one hand, as she raises her head. She locks my eyes, resolute.

‘It’s funny,’ I say. ‘I only want you to come back. And you don’t seem to want to.’

Her pale skin is blemishless as if painted on the glass shell that her body's become. But her eyes, her eyes ripple like twin ponds shaken by volcanism deep beneath the earth.

'You always get what you want,' I say.

The dead can't come back, no matter how much you want it.

* * *

I come out of the underworld into forest night. One culvert leads to another until I emerge from a storm drain on the edge of an abandoned railway station carved into the side of a sheer rock wall. I see lights of the bridges in the distance, like runways beckoning a return approach. I follow the tracks towards the city.

The moon is down. I imagine no trains use this spur as I walk alongside old steel. Each step on weathered oak ties brings me closer to life and the conundrum of decision. I've gone into the darkness and I've come back. Without her.

I return to the city lost. Who's to blame? You? Me? Kate? I flirt with the idea of visiting other gates, Xibalba or Lough Derg. I convince myself that people ask these questions all the time, that tourism isn't just the realm of the idle curious.

* * *

I search anchialine caves in an underworld below Belize, struggling in my wine dark to see. Following the strands of gold lines, I traverse haloclines, searching for a way back in. My plans, my contracts, everything is a struggle up the hill, everything just out of reach, painted with fog. Ariadne's threads undone, there's no other chance.

I wish someone could send me to the underworld to seek guidance from the prophet, but I've already placed my bet. I've already been there. I have to ride out the hand. Faced with sacrifice and risking everything, I take the risk. It's rhetoric.

'You can't bring back the dead,' Albert says.

'Why not?'

'It's bad mojo. If you could bring back the dead, any dead could come back. Not just her.'

'It's worth the risk,' I say.

'You don't know what you're talking about.'

Voices like angels playing angles should know better than to try scripture. I've been sewn together by mystics and the weather: dried out, reconstituted, cursed, ruminating about escape, realizing the roulette wheel reminds me of a whirlpool.

* * *

I go back to the cliffs, to the hell mouth that spat me out, to try and find Kate. I wander a set of storm drains that lead nowhere, that dead end in dried concrete culverts. No vault door, no lizards or sewer cats. I keep telling myself Kate never said which year.

Part of me knows Jane is not alive. But part of me isn't certain. I imagine Russell's teapot, *reductio ad absurdum*, and electric blankets of doom.¹ I don't care if it is a logical fallacy. No one can prove a negative, and if nothing is certain, there's still a chance.

¹ Hales, Stephen. "You CAN Prove a Negative." *Think*. Vol. 10, pp. 109-112 Summer 2005.

Kate and the stars get away with the greatest tricks. But where Kate makes the world think she doesn't exist, stars make us believe they do, long after they're gone.

* * *

It's night and Jane and I sit in lawn chairs on the roof sipping hot sake, a gift from her cousin who works in Japan.

'You see that one?' she says. She points at a bright red star almost directly overhead.

'Which, the red one?'

'Yeah.' She puts her hand down, but continues to stare upwards. 'It's supposed to go supernova. Some think maybe it already has. Something that massive, that old, I think it's spectacular that it gets to die in the most amazing way possible. It doesn't fade away. It explodes. It goes out in a flash that could last for months. Blazing, *here I am boys, here I am!*'

'And who are these *boys* this star is trying to get to notice her?' I ask, emphasizing the plural.

Jane leans over the arms of the chairs and embraces me with both arms, spilling her sake as her chair tips up on one side. 'All of them,' she says, smiling.

A star six hundred light years away could have died five hundred years ago, and we will not know for another hundred years. To us, it's still alive, because we can see it. But we're wrong. It's like the ones we love.

Maybe it's better to think of them like stars replacing the sands in a great hourglass. Eternal but burning out, all the stars of old loves fall from the sky to the bottom of the glass, and when they finish spiraling down, you turn the hourglass over.

Space above mirrors the depths below. Maybe love is never really gone, it just becomes a new part of the cycle... unless someone breaks the glass.

* * *

The season comes back to me, hours in the day, night, dinners, dates, bedding, ending, like a faulty amygdala stirring repressed memories.

It's the first time I've let myself think it. I could really lose her.

I sit in the hospital cafeteria with Albert, swirling cold coffee in a Styrofoam cup, while he devours a Caesar salad.

'I'm not sure what I would do without her,' I say.

'You'd do what any of us do,' he says. 'You'd keep on.' He looks at the grimace on my face. 'Or, you won't.'

'What does that mean?' I ask.

'You can't think you're the first guy who might lose his wife. It happens. It's life.' Albert puts his fork down in the remains of romaine and salad dressing and carefully wipes the wisps of mustache growing at the corners of his mouth.

'I've always been straight with you,' he says. 'You've known for a year that she's had only six months left to live. You got half a year more than you knew you should.'

'I want more.'

'Be strong for her. Imagine how hard it is for her.'

I feel tears forming and it angers me.

'Go home. Get cleaned up. If you want, I'll stay with her for a few hours until you're back,' Albert says.

I see a transplant courier, carrying a small red and white cooler, hurry past the cafeteria doors. The heart, liver, lung inside is someone's life. Two lives, one giving away to the other. I think of the donor list as zero sum. One needs to lose so someone else can live. It shouldn't have to be that way.

But then we lie down and dream. Rub. Remember. Because of the chocolate.

I accept Albert's offer and go home for an hour.

* * *

Dust covers the rough floorboards of the loft, exposing memories in footprints. Sheets drape over furniture, white linen softened and thinned by years of wash. Bare brick and plaster walls silently watch solitary movement from doorway to kitchen tile. Empty LED displays haunt me, vacant eye sockets in ghoulish appliances that no longer hum.

A tinny whisper follows me down the hall to our bedroom as brisk winds shiver the lead paned factory glass of our windows.

Behind slightly parted rice paper doors, our bedroom beckons. I slip through the split. The golden-green coverlet peeks out from the corner of its dust cover. Dim reaches of sky over dark clouds peers through the windows at the head of the bed. I set the little red cooler I'm carrying down in the center of the bed and curl up beside it, enfolding it.

* * *

Albert runs his hand over his head, broad forehead to the back, coaxing tenuous strands to stay in place. The edges of his eyes crinkle like plastic in the oven as he speaks, deepening lines etched by sun and age into his face.

I sit with him one night, after Jane, on the roof of my building. He doesn't belong downtown he says. He needs his lawn, his backyard by the river. He says he'll buy me a car one day, when he is rich. Then he's going to the reservation, to become king.

I tell him I don't think it's going to happen, at least not by playing scratch-offs.

* * *

'I have a dream of you,' Albert says.

He says he sees us in a desert, in a heat storm. He says we're surrounded by sand and suffering from thirst.

'We follow mudflats caked dry over months of drought, sibilant trails winding among Joshua trees and prickly pears. Squamatas flee before us, red racers, whiptails, chuckwallas clicking and piping their displeasure, scorpions poised, signaling strife.

'You think you see water to the East, an oasis, radiant pools and streams of gold relieving the blight. You can't drink a mirage.

'And then we're in Trader Joe's buying carrot juice, firewater, and forbidden rice for a barbeque. We arrive at a house where a former Hooter's girl grills tilapia in the backyard. Next to the hot tub, a puppy named Thai plays tug of war with a bandana. The fence around the yard shifts densities and dissolves and we're in the desert again with a little dog, a girl, and nothing to drink.

'I keep seeing you in this desert. Sand doesn't slake,' Albert says. 'I think it means you should move to the sea.'

Albert's dream claws at my mind.

'Did you see it too?' He asks. 'You should tell me your dreams.'

'I don't dream,' I say.

I lie.

‘There are stages of grief,’ Albert says. ‘Denial is the first one.’

I do not tell him what I intend. I do not tell him where I am going.

* * *

I pack what I need and leave the rest. I don’t hear music as I paint, don’t see the corners and trim as I take Gateot in his little aquarium, a bag of clothes, my tools, and the jar of water from the back of the refrigerator labeled, ‘do not drink.’

I have one stop to make on my way out of town.

* * *

It doesn’t take much. Too many exposed beams, partially burnt offerings leaning against each other’s strength like matchsticks. They just need to be struck.

It starts small, a kneeler I never rebuilt, a shattered pew, but soon framework and columns, baseboards and crown moulding, the garnish for the beast. I watch flames scale walls like spiders; the pores of her plaster ripple, steam and snap.

He is ravenous, the beast. He feeds an emptiness as large as the one inside me.

I sit in the center of the chapel as it burns around me and wait.

No one comes.

Surrounded by flames, I hear the hiss of desire, water escaping from untreated lumber. Plastic sheeting releases from its hold over gateways and portals, melting, restructuring into kites and heavenly manta rays.

From the outside I imagine it looks like a cage of flames, like the ones that took Joan of Arc and Giordano Bruno. I wonder if voices that impassioned have turned to bring me to the death of a witch or false prophet. I wonder if I should be imprisoned in

an iron mask to prevent me from inciting others in Campo de Fiori with my claims. I want to sit inside, baking and broiling, but I don't deserve to be there. I'm the fool who lit the fire, not one whose actions scared the world.

I walk away from the heat, from the firelight, into the night. Still no one comes.

Chapter VII

I dream a tree outside our loft splits in the storm. Three branches lie in the street below, then our loft is Kate's barge and the street is the dark river of the underworld.

Kate tells me she is the mistress of the dead. I think if the dead are freed, Jane can come back to me.

'Are you what prevents the dead from returning to life?' I ask.

'You wouldn't want the dead to return to life,' she says. 'Haven't you heard of zombies?'

I ignore her and press my point. 'But if you were dead, would the others be able to come back?'

'Maybe,' she says. 'But I can guarantee that if you kill me the world will be destroyed. Death is necessary. It creates a balance. If all the departed returned, they'd overwhelm the world.'

I lean into Kate as if I can see the way out. Foreheads touching, I stare into the prisms of her eyes.

'You want to kill me. If you kill me, everyone dies,' she whispers.

I have a knife in my hand. It is the one she uses to shave my hair.

'Yeah?' I whisper back. 'Then why are you afraid?'

* * *

Shore Points is a little town on the water, a few hours to the south. I hear there is money and privacy for the rich. I see about a job.

It's easy to find seasonal work among the slips, cleaning boats, harbor maintenance, enough to rent a room over a paint store within sight of the harbor. I search. I near my woe.

I listen to the old men at the pier, fishermen, harbor bar regulars, Jules Verne, grey beard loons, the usual sources of wisdom. Some say the instance before the sun dips below the horizon there is a flash of green light. One guy from Chicago says it's rarer than an eclipse, rarer than a shooting star.

'It's every bit a dream,' he says.

'So you've seen it?' I ask.

'Nah.'

'But you believe it's real?'

'Not anymore.'

Chicago doesn't, but Jules Verne believes in the green flash at sunset, the twilight wedge of shadow cast upon the sky by the setting sun. He also believes women will take everything you have and when you've got nothing left make you feel like it's your fault you don't have more to give. He says, that's when if you're lucky they leave you. If not, he says, best find something that gets you out of the house.

As the fall begins, I find out that Jules Verne is the harbor-master, and his real name is Dugan, or at least that's the name he goes by at the docks.

* * *

In a shack on the pier, cards fall on the raw plywood table. Three men sit on milk crates, caressing the edges of hearts and clubs with rough calloused thumbs. I buy my way in. I lose. It's the best hand I play in months.

Dugan is a burly red-bearded Santa Claus of a man. We trade drinks. I funnel bottles of whiskey from my clients to him. He checks registered vessels for me and finds one named the Acheron. The owner's mooring buoy is empty, but that's not surprising this time of year Dugan tells me.

'Lots of these people go south in this weather,' he says.

I don't blame them. November is hard. The cold hits me in the face like a spade fresh with earth from the grave, wet with salt from the sea. But for Dugan needles poke every joint, paralyzing muscles until he can't walk, can't move.

We patrol the channel and Dugan lets me read box scores to him when I have no work. There's an art to reading box scores. It's almost lost. He says they're like charts, you have to read them right. I think he hears contests on diamonds from the past in yesterday's games. Dugan turns the wheel a few degrees starboard, navigating more by memory than by sight. He removes his hat and runs his hand through thinning red hair, fading with time.

I ask him once why he doesn't move somewhere warmer like Florida.

'Why don't you get off my boat and then you can move to Florida?' he asks in response.

I understand. There are some things you just don't do. And some things you just don't ask about.

* * *

Floating out with the tide is a lobster boat that has torn free from its mooring. We sidle up beside it and Dugan has me jump aboard to tie it to our stern. There is a moment suspended in the air between Dugan's boat and the runaway when I imagine the view

from a snowflake spinning above the water, above the deck. When I land, the vision leaves me, but the feeling lingers, necrotic.

We tow the escapee back through the mouth of the harbor to be made fast. After we dock, I convince Dugan to come out for a drink. There's a Red Sox game on the television over the bar. Dugan holds two fingers of scotch between beefy hands, turning the tumbler slightly clockwise staring into the past.

'There was a time I kept an autographed bat behind the seat in my truck,' he says. 'Dewey Evans.'

'What happened to it?' I ask.

'Wife got it in the divorce,' he says and drains his glass. 'She said she wanted it for the money, but she won't sell it. Just to spite me. Cause she knows I'd buy it back.'

Dugan leaves me at the bar. He prefers solitude with his bottle he says. I don't tell him what's eating my heart. It's the anniversary of Jane's death.

A woman who smells like winter sunrise takes his abandoned seat next to me. She is with the group of bankers from across the bar. She buys me a drink. I am so thirsty.

* * *

I tell the woman I'm from north of the city, but I didn't grow up there, that I grew up near the shore. I tell her my parents are dead, I have no siblings; I work as a contractor and live near the harbor. I tell her nothing. She buys us another drink.

She tells me she's from San Clemente, her parents divorced, she came east with her mom and never went back. She tells me she works for US Trust; she lives two towns

over; she commutes to the city. She tells me her name is Aurora. She tells me nothing. The bartender pours us another round.

Aurora takes pictures of us as we walk down the street in front of the bar. We pose in front of memorial statues and under street lamps, their orange glow softening further already blurring edges of the night. It's like the sun is rising all around us, but without warmth, without life.

We walk back to where her car is parked. Valets throw dice in the alley behind a reception hall. Aurora wants to play. I tell her I have nothing to bet. She takes my lapels in her hands and pulls herself up on her toes. Inches from my face, she whispers to me.

‘If I win, you come back with me to my place.’

‘And if I win?’

‘I go back to yours.’

She kisses me and casts the bones. I'm reminded of a nightmare. My blood thickens in the cold light like life in death.

Dawn wins me in a game of dice.

* * *

It's almost light out when we get back to her place. Clothes fall off as we stumble through her door, down the hall, to her bed.

My life becomes a jib sheet worked loose from cleating, belaying lines. Maybe because I have not learned the Seer's lesson, I do not notice the shudder along the leading edge.

Aurora becomes the porous filter, the igneous rash on my hands, hypabyssal to the dermis. I sniff the abyss. Barreling light through tunnels and air routed paths, clean through like steam, thermostatic, dying in sailcloth, hair and whitecaps, she molds me.

With everything I touch heat pops gaffs, hooks, gaff hooks, cleats, sheets, lines, linens, stays and masts, stains and mass. It's so easy to give up to her warmth.

She is sun momentarily blocking every shadow, every memory. I surrender to the drought painted on the sea, the dressed slack and unfurled, captaining everything except everything. No more running under spinnaker, no more jibes and tacks. Spirits cling to waves like mist until the fire burns them away.

Ignited amid shrinking boards, shriveling in the light, suffocating beneath the weight of heavens, I skin my knuckles on a loose piece of teak. Aurora kisses my wound; blood from flesh the price to pay as day after day I ignore the skeleton sailing out of the East ghosting us despite no wind, no sails, and no crew.

* * *

Lying in bed, sunlight and white sheets wrap us in each other.

'You know you have a stripper name,' I say.

'What's that supposed to mean?'

'I mean your name sounds like a stripper's. And up next on stage number two, put your hands together for Aurora.'

'Oh, you know this from all the time you spent in strip clubs?'

'Yeah,' I say. 'I'm surprised I never saw you there.'

'I was too busy getting my MBA.'

'Hey, no one said strippers couldn't go to grad school.'

Aurora shoves me, playfully, but hard enough that I get the message. Neither of us say anything for a few moments. Looking out the window she says, quietly, ‘You know my name means the dawn, right? The goddess of the dawn.’

I wonder if it is real or a false dawn. I picture the triangular zodiacal light brightening the sky just before sunrise, that light on her body, that light from her body. My desire for Aurora heats my chest, but it is desire, not need. She is more *gengenschein* than dawn. Her touch and face, her voice and smile are interplanetary dust reflecting sunlight. I’m still in the dark.

* * *

Dugan and I storm-proof the harbor. Prepare for the hurricane.

We board up the windows of the boat shed with plywood and salvaged planks. Dugan stores batteries, a propane camp stove, MREs, and a dozen gallons of water in his office. He sees the look on my face as I carry the fifth and sixth jugs up the stairs.

‘You can never have too much water,’ he says.

He doesn’t have to tell me. I know the yearning for a single sip.

We help Dugan’s friend Ed strap canvas over his bowrider. We check the moorings on the outskirts of the harbor. We secure bumpers on the sides of every slip. By the time we finish, the voice of Gloria can be heard singing along the shore, shaking sea grass, and stirring surface waves into suggestive crests and valleys.

Gloria is just the harbinger of destruction. The real storm is still on its way.

* * *

As we ready to ride out the storm Dugan tells me it’s better not to tempt nature, especially when she’s riled up.

‘There’s a spirit behind her capriciousness,’ he says, taking a swig of tepid coffee and letting it float around his gums. He continues after swallowing the dark liquid.

‘She’s got a sense of humor. But she’s got a meanstreak too. It’s like she can’t hold back the outbursts even though she should be better than acting out her frustrations towards us.

‘I’ve had a lightning bolt tickle my toe, striking the ground right between me and the entrance to Pizza Hut. Don’t tell me lightning always seeks the highest point. Her bolt was gunning for my foot.

‘I’ve had a tree branch fall and crush the truck I was working on just when I went back inside because I had grabbed the wrong wrench.’

‘Those are just coincidences,’ I say. But I know better.

‘You know better,’ he says.

‘I know.’

‘I know you know.’ He pauses. Then he says, ‘so don’t tempt her.’

Too late, I think. It’s too late.

* * *

After a hurricane we come across a wrecked daysailer. Dugan tells me it looks salvageable but will probably be left to rot.

The hull is black, staved in at the starboard bow. The section collapsed like a sinkhole in her sleek outer surface.

‘Too much effort, be easier for some of these folk just to buy a new one.’ He pops another Halls and takes a sip of coffee, turns the heading upwind. As we pass the stern of the wrecked sailboat, Dugan laughs.

‘You know, you’ve had me looking for the Acheron for months now. I thought maybe it’s not out here.’

No, it’s inside, I think. It’s inside.

‘And there she is,’ he says.

He points to the gold letters carefully stenciled on the black wood of the rear of the wreck.

Dugan contacts the owner and negotiates a deal for me. A week later he helps me retrieve the boat and tow it to the garage behind my apartment. I don’t know at the time, but it is the day before he dies.

* * *

The survival rate is not good.

‘There’s about a one in six chance, the doctor said.’

That’s the problem with trying to live life by whole truths. If you live by integrals, you miss the fractions, or misperceive them.

Jane is kneeling at the window, her cheek flush with the sill, forehead against glass.

‘I don’t want to be rounded off,’ she says.

She continues to stare at the city through the rain-streaked pane.

‘What happens if I die before I’m ready?’

‘I won’t let that happen.’

‘You’re being irrational,’ she says.

‘I know.’

I kneel beside her, trying to see what she sees, watching our breath fog the cold wet glass. Hers comes too quickly. I trace the square root of two with my fingertip in the moisture.

Jane pulls her head away from the glass and looks at it, and looks at me.

‘I’m glad I found you,’ she says, and kisses me.

* * *

At Dugan’s funeral I see Ed, a few others from the docks, and a heavy-set woman whose red hair is starting to grey. Dugan’s sister, I assume.

A white haired man named ‘Boots’ tells a story about stealing gas from boats at the marina to fill his outboard when he was a kid.

‘Dugan caught me one morning just before sunrise,’ he says. His face is all wrinkles, and teeth, and earlobes. ‘He had just started working the harbor and was only a couple of years older than me, but he had that beard even back then, and I swear, I thought he was some Viking captain about to kill me.’

Boots takes off his glasses and cleans them on his tie, and I wonder just how old Dugan was.

‘He didn’t file a report,’ Boots says, continuing the story. ‘But he did make me apologize to every boat owner I stole from and offer to pay them for the gas. I was scared and embarrassed, but more afraid of what Dugan would do if I didn’t do what he said. The funny thing is, no one was angry, in fact, one guy even offered me a job working as his yacht tender. And part of the deal,’ Boots says with a dry chuckle, like a hyena’s cough, ‘part of the deal was he paid for the gas for my outboard. I worked for

him every summer through college and didn't pay a cent on gas for my boat for those four years.'

I turn away from Boots as he laughs with Ed and find myself face to face with the woman I think is Dugan's sister.

I tell her I'm sorry for her loss.

'You were his friend,' she says.

'We were getting there.'

'You were his friend,' she says. 'I'm sorry for your loss.'

I feel almost human.

* * *

Aurora and I lie in bed together, her arm outstretched, skin sun-kissed against white sheets, directional contrast, needle of the compass face and longing. She sits up clothed in sheets and cascading black hair. Birds whisper spring sunset outside the window. For a moment I let myself be fooled. I want her to say you don't have to go.

She looks back at me, lying there beside her and says, 'How are you not married?'

I could say anything. That's how I know I don't love her.

When you're in love, there's only one thing to say. Sometimes we say it, sometimes we don't, but there is only that one thing. When you're not in love you're free to say anything, and it's almost always a lie.

I say I haven't found the right woman yet.

And in the quiet wind whispers, flap of wings, and shift of window blinds I hear, 'Liar.'

* * *

I meet Albert at a little bar on South 3rd Street, the Mad Elf.

‘You’re not going to like what I have to say about it,’ he says.

‘Why not?’

He fiddles with his coaster, turning it so the letters are upside down.

The bar is quiet, long, thin, like the bartender. He writes the daily specials on a chalkboard placard to stand outside the door. Every inch of the wall behind the bar is covered with beer labels, and every inch of the wall behind me with pictures of patrons drinking from over the last century.

‘One thing we know how to do,’ Albert says. ‘Sell people a dream.’

‘I have a dream,’ I say. ‘What do I do to get rid of it?’

‘I thought you said you didn’t dream. Remember? When I told you to tell me you dreams.’

‘I lied. I do dream. I just wish I didn’t.’ I pause and stare at my fingers, rub calluses with my thumb. ‘So what do I do to get rid of it?’

‘You tell someone your dream, and if you tell it good enough, you can give it to them.’

‘But I don’t want to give it to them. No one should dream this dream.’

‘All dreams need a dreamer.’ Albert finishes his beer, put the glass down back on the coaster. ‘Just tell it to me,’ he says.

The hard wooden barstool, the hammered copper surface of the bar, the reflections from the glass of each frame on the wall push at me, backing me into this corner where I’m supposed to share my dream.

I turn my pint of beer on its coaster and tell Albert my dream.

‘I dream I’m on a gymnastics mat in the center of the room used for floor routines.’

Albert sits silently, listening.

‘Jane lies on her back, feet on the floor, knees bent, legs spread as if she’s about to give birth, but she’s not pregnant. Instead, there’s a nineteen quart pot filled with water between her legs. I sit upright opposite her, my legs flat on the mat, straddling hers, straddling the pot.’

The bartender pours another pint. Albert holds his to his lips. Mine stays on the bar.

‘The pot is filled with water, but in it, beneath the water is a child, unlike any I’ve ever seen. The child’s head and face are too round and porcine, as if someone tried to compress his face into a smaller space. His nose is pug-like and his lips stick out in a permanent puss. His arms and legs are like spindles radiating out of a disproportionately large torso.

‘Something has him caught beneath the surface. He can’t get any air. He can’t breathe. Jane cries for me to help him, to pull, as she too seems caught, flat on her back, writhing but unable to sit up.

‘I reach into the pot to try and pull the child free. I can’t reach deep enough to get under his arms, and his shoulders provide no grip. My hands slip off his body like it’s greased.

‘Jane lashes her head from side to side, her face covered in sweat, sweat soaking through her shirt staining the tight grey cotton dark at her armpits, her breastbone, her neck.

‘Please Steve,’ she cries, gritting her teeth.

‘I settle my hands around the head of the child, my fingers under his jaw, my thumbs at the back of his skull, and I lean back, pulling as Jane cries. My arms strain, water splashes over my shoulders, my legs, onto the floor. I lever my body backwards, looking up at the iron beam overhead. Jane cries, ‘Pull Steve!’ And I pull. I arch my back, shoulders straining and I pull. And then, with a pop, I fall back holding the decapitated head of the child in my hands, still looking at the world through his squinting eyes, with his puffy cheeks and big pursed lips frozen in time. Jane screams. And I cry. I cry like I haven’t since I was a kid. And then I wake up.’

Albert’s glass is empty again. The bartender pours us two shots of Jameson’s. Albert looks at me and downs his whiskey. He puts his shot glass down, picks up mine and swallows that too. He puts the second shot glass down next to the first. The lines on his knuckles are deep, wizened, like the lines around his eyes and across his forehead.

‘From now on, I tell you my dreams,’ he says. ‘You tell yours to somebody else.’

* * *

My landlord lets me keep the sloop in the garage behind the store. I work on it in the evenings.

On blocks in the shed I let her dry for seven days. I clean from keel to waterline to deck. I hone and shape cypress planks to patch her wound. My plane shaves thin curls of tinder from boards, filling the floor of the garage like flammable twists fallen from carpenters’ clouds.

Wood glue and marine varnish scent my skin, provide olfactory memories of coffins, crosses, and the sea.

In the desert of Giza, millennia ago, Ptahotep used an adze to shape cypress from an ancestor of my planks into sarcophaguses.

I finish for the night, placing my tools carefully back in my work bag. The bag is waxed canvas, strong but thin. The thing we carry the things we carry in. In mine, a hammer, plaster knives, wrenches, screwdrivers, and a level. Everything I can't leave behind. I think.

It's morning and the sky bleeds red. I fail to heed the warning

Chapter VIII

I dream a blind baby mountain lion is caught in a steel trap. The jaws of the trap bite into its leg. Blood mats the fur around the wound and the baby's muzzle where he tried to gnaw his way free.

His mewling sounds like a broken tricycle trying to roll, or a rusty weathervane hanging by its last nail, oscillating in the wind.

I try to free him, grip the jaws of the trap in my hands to force them apart. As they inch open the mother lion attacks me from behind.

She pounces on my back, her teeth and claws ripping at my neck and sides. She should kill me, disembowel me with claws from her rear legs that wrap around my sides like she is part of some violent piggyback ride. But then, in a second, she relents.

I'm barely scratched, superficial gouges only. The mother lion turns to her freed cub, huge tongue licking away the pain of his ordeal. They walk off into the brush without looking back at me, a long guttural growl the final warning.

* * *

I've been seeing Aurora for months, but lately she's been busy with a new client, and I've spent my time working on the Acheron. It's finished. I ask her over to see it.

I make dinner for us, grilled steak, some arugula and tomatoes. Simple. We sit at the rough wooden table in my apartment and sip wine.

'I'm putting the boat in the water tomorrow. Probably take her out for the day,' I say.

I know why I tell her. I know why, but I don't know what I expect.

She puts her fork down and sips her wine. She looks at me through the glass.

‘If everything works out, I want to sail to the Cape,’ I say. ‘My parents used to take me on vacation there when I was young.’

She takes another sip of wine.

‘When do you leave?’ Aurora asks.

‘Around noon. I need to wait for the tide.’

‘Oh.’ Aurora stares at her half-empty plate.

I pause, about to finish my steak.

‘You okay? I know it might—’ I shake my head. ‘I just thought I should tell you. I’m sorry.’

‘No,’ she says. ‘I’m just not very hungry.’

Aurora looks up at me and smirks.

‘I’m glad you told me,’ she says.

‘Okay, good.’

I take the dishes to the kitchen. Aurora calls from the other room.

‘You probably have to get started early tomorrow.’

‘It shouldn’t be too early,’ I say as I am rinsing the dishes. ‘The tide doesn’t turn until eleven. But if you want to sleep in, you could just lock everything up when you leave.’

I come back from the kitchen and Aurora has her bag and is standing by the door.

‘You’re leaving?’

‘It wouldn’t be good for me to stay.’ She puts her hand on the doorknob. ‘Do you want me to stay?’ she asks.

‘Of course I want you to stay. What’s going on?’

She looks at my chest. I can’t see her face, only the top of her slightly bowed head. It’s the first time since we met that she seems vulnerable.

‘Why are you leaving?’

‘Tomorrow? It’s just for a couple of hours. Do you want to come with me? You can come with me.’

It’s a bad idea the moment I say it. It’s a bad idea even before I say it, because we’re not talking about tomorrow. No one can come with me, not where I’m going, not really, not after where I’ve been. There’s a difference between traveling the same direction as someone, even the same route at the same time, and traveling with someone. You can’t join someone in their woe. She knows it. I’m pretty sure.

She opens the door to leave.

‘Do you want to come with me tomorrow?’ I ask again.

‘I don’t know,’ she says, walking away without looking at my face.

* * *

‘These are the last of the grapes.’

Aurora comes up from the cabin with a bowl in her hand, her long dark hair wild in the sun. She puts down the bowl to gather her hair against the wind.

‘I think we’ll survive. We’ll be back to the harbor in a couple of hours.’

‘It’s too bad. It’s beautiful out here.’

Aurora bites into one of the grapes, her white teeth cleanly severing the green fruit in two. She smiles, her full lips closed as she manipulates the fruit inside her mouth.

‘You know, we’re almost out of water as well. You didn’t stock this boat very well.’

‘I didn’t realize there’d be two on this trip,’ I say.

‘Well, you should plan for surprises. There’s only one bottle of spring water left, and that jar that says ‘do not open.’’

My hands tighten on the wheel.

‘The little pickling jar with the label,’ she says.

‘Well, it shouldn’t come to that.’

She looks at me for a moment then walks toward me. With one hand she places the bowl of grapes on the seat behind me, with the other, cups my chin and kisses me on the cheek.

‘I’m going to go lie out for a bit.’

She allows her hand to linger on my shirt then moves toward the bow of the boat.

* * *

The day of the trip, I load my gear and am about to cast off, when I look up. Aurora is standing at the slip, wearing white shorts and a navy polo. She is carrying a pair of sandals in one hand and a small canvas duffel in the other. She looks at me and steps aboard. She doesn’t say anything.

* * *

Aurora lies on foredeck in a blue bikini. The sun directly overhead beats down, and in the haze I can just make out land on the horizon, like a smoky cloud low on the water.

I ease the boat a few more degrees leeward, make the wheel fast and duck into the cabin. Sheets on the bed are still rumpled from earlier in the day. I open the cooler and see the two bottles of water and, behind them, the jar. I let myself look at the jar, its gold metal lid, the masking tape label with 'do not open' written in dark pencil. The clear liquid inside lines up perfectly with the middle of the masking tape. It hasn't been opened.

I tell myself nothing's lost. I wonder how long I can lie to myself.

* * *

I bring Aurora a water. The wind shifts. The mainsail starts to luff.

'Don't you just want to stay like this forever? The water, the sun,' Aurora says.

She sits up, taking a sip from the bottle.

'It's so quiet, so peaceful. There's nothing to interrupt us, nothing to bother us, no one to call or demand or tell us what to do.'

The sail has gone completely slack. The telltales hang lifeless from the shrouds.

'It's like we're at this perfect balance between heaven and earth, sailing on water as blue as the sky.'

But we're not sailing anywhere.

'The wind's died,' I say, moving back towards the wheel and the GPS.

'What do you mean?' she pulls on her shirt and follows me.

'There's no wind. We're drifting with the current.'

The horizon smooths in all directions. The hazy outline of shore is gone. There are a few low lying clouds, gathering in the west, but otherwise only empty water.

‘So let’s drift,’ she says, putting her arms around me and pressing up against my back as I stare at the GPS.

‘We don’t want to do that,’ I straighten up. ‘Remember, we’re down to our last water.’

Aurora’s arms around me relax as I turned to face her, but she remains close, her hands on my shoulders, looking at me.

‘Then if we run out, we’ll have to drink what’s in the jar.’

I try not to react. But she has to be able to tell. My jaw tightens, and rushing blood strangles my ears.

Her hands slide down my arms and grab mine. ‘Things can be so perfect. They’re already so close. Just tell me something real, something true, some part of you: a secret. What’s with the jar?’

I stand there surrounded by a calm sparkling ocean, under an intense midday sun. There is no wind. Small waves gently plop against the hull.

She holds my hands, searching for an answer in my face. If I tell her, it’s another step, another trap to extricate myself from.

‘I can’t tell you. Not yet.’ The boiling behind my eyes peters off; the back of my jaw relaxes. A waft of air, the sail begins to fill. She lets me go. I exhale.

* * *

We return to the harbor. The Acheron is seaworthy, but we’re taking on water. We pull into the slip and I jump to the dock and secure us to a cleat. Behind me, Aurora stands in the boat not yet ready to debark.

She holds the Mason jar in her hand. Sunlight plays through untinted glass, rides the water that half-fills it. Her manicured nails, points of blood, ring its clarity. Her fingers do not belong below its crown, the gold metal lid and screw band. The note left on its side, aged masking tape label, inscribed with dark heavy pencil, 'do not open.' I know she wants to know. I know.

* * *

Jane loves the snow. She is home this week and the weather gods grant her wish. So trivial, the gods, so selfish. Why can they give her snow but can't give her back to me?

I shovel the walk in the winter morning light. It's the opposite of twilight, this overcast diffused illumination, yet the same, a mirror that reflects sadness from both sides. Wet snow still falls. Jane sits on the front steps in jeans and a floppy sweater, a claret turtleneck; it fit her once. She is shrinking, disappearing into herself physically, becoming all eyes and teeth, gangly limbs hidden by overlong sleeves. It doesn't matter. I'm still intoxicated.

She shapes a little man from balls of snow cupped by bare hands. His eyes and mouth are traced by her fingertips. She curls her fists back into cuffs to warm them when she's done. I can no longer see her cold white fingers.

I want her to give me sight with her touch, to trace me a smile with her thumb again.

She leaves him on the stoop. Guardian of a home she does not return to.

The next day I take her back. The rest of the winter she's confined to the hospital. When I spend too many days in a row there, she asks me if I would go home and check

on her little snowman. When the weather turns and everything begins to thaw, I bring him inside and clear a space in the freezer for him. I don't even think she realizes the seasons have changed. She asks, every couple of days, how her snowman is.

When the doctors tell me it's time, that she only has days left, I grow desperate. I go home and crank the freezer as low as it will go. The next morning I smuggle the snowman into Jane's room in a cooler wrapped up in an afghan.

'Look Jane,' I say. 'I brought someone to visit you.' I carefully pull the snowman from the cooler.

'He's so small and shiny,' she says, reaching a porcelain hand towards the snowman. 'He's got see-thru skin.' She coughs quietly.

A sheen of ice has formed on the snowman, like a clear hard cold candy shell. It is too much like Jane's skin. She's hollowed out from within, a statue of herself, skin almost translucent. I can't bear to be there, with her slipping in and out of consciousness, herself and yet not herself. I cannot bear to not be there.

Two days later they say it's the end. The doctors take her body from me, or maybe they take me from her. I'm pushed out of the room by teal clad mannequins, faceless arms and legs forcing me beyond the door, pulling the curtain closed after they deposit me on the other side of it. I hear the high sustained scream of electronic agony and my sight fills with the noise, like electrostatic snow on a television screen. Later, I find myself on the sidewalk in front of the hospital with a cooler filled with melted snow.

'That's what's in the jar.'

I look into Aurora's eyes for the first time since I started the story. I cannot read what's there, what she's thinking, what emotion. My vision blurs beyond seeing beyond myself.

'That's what's in the jar,' I say. 'Jane's snowman.'

Aurora takes my hand and steps off the boat.

I book passage on the ketch and struggle aboard.

* * *

There is an eclipse on Friday and Aurora wants to go out on the boat to watch it. An eclipse breaks the rules of time. It changes the darkness. We're supposed to have mornings and evenings. For some they come earlier or later, but they still come.

Aurora's different. She wants to straddle the equator, she wants noon all day, the equinox forever.

There is no forever. That's too simple. There is morning and evening and what comes between, transitions, complications.

Thunderstorms, smoke, and ash bring darkness to the day. At the poles and in space, time distorts through gravity, through the dark side and axial tilt, six month days and six month nights. But breaking time is a lie, and lying to each other is best with an eclipse, the penumbra and umbra.

So I tell the truth, and in the darkness I see a circlet of stellar flame imprinting coronets on her forehead, rings in her eyes as if pain can be abbreviated, as if she is, she's, she cries, 'you'll lose love again!'

* * *

We picnic in Bennett Park. Chicken with salt, crisp snow peas, a cold white wine. Aurora wants something red. We have strawberries. She says half the taste is in the color. The grass is higher than I remember it and darker. Maybe it's the shade. We lounge. The blanket is too small for us and our food, but we do not touch. My hand rests on cool blades. Slowly but soon positions will shift. I wonder if she'll notice, if we'll be leaving with nothing.

* * *

I'm invited to a friend's wedding in Sun Valley, Idaho. We were close as kids, he knew me before Jane, but we haven't spoken in years. I go thinking we can reconnect. I bring Aurora. I'm wrong.

* * *

I hear the story of how Gordon and his wife met. Two families sing 'Once in Love with Amy' on a sleigh ride on a midwinter night.

For 'Western Night' steaks are flown in from Omaha. Joe circulates, asking, 'Everything all right? Can I get you anything?' And David tells the story of the Chinese ducks.

At the rehearsal dinner, Becky Smith's friend wants to know why I'm at the wedding alone.

'There's an ice show in town this week,' she says. 'Katarina Witt is performing. Maybe you could ask her.'

'He's not here alone.'

Aurora strokes my arm and smiles, but it's not a smile for me. It's for Becky Smith's friend. And it's not a smile.

It's nearly ten on the veranda behind Soskio's restaurant. Everyone has gone except close friends and family. We drink better wine than I have ever had and watch the sky stay bright late into the night. I can't taste it. I wonder at Darren's late arrival, driving ten hours across Nevada, Joe's comfort, and my own sense of displacement.

* * *

At Silver Creek, a girl, camera-laden, walks the water. She snaps pictures of miniature whitecaps dribbling over river rocks and fish dancing from the surface to sunlight and her family. It flows quickly.

There's a story of the bridge over the creek giving out and a trucker plummeting to his death. On summer nights, ghost trucks still drive through town haunting the valley, looking for the bridge. I wonder if all the ghosts go to the same place when they die. I want to hitch a ride.

* * *

Parking farther from the trail head than I plan, I hike Foxtrot and Chocolate Gulch, the grove of birches reaches out to me as I pass. The brim of the gulch is higher than anywhere I've climbed before. I wonder about elevation sickness, a child of the shore. The view should be spectacular, but the light is flat like the beginnings of macular degeneration, framed behind clouds, withering.

Aurora has spent the day at the spa. I should be alone with Jane, but I can't see her. I am afraid she's no longer here, or I'm going blind.

* * *

Late the last morning in Sun Valley, Aurora and I are curled in bed. The forceful sun tries to pry its way around heavy curtains outlining the windows of our hotel room.

But I keep returning to the mouth. Words in rigor do not change.

‘Do you love me Steve?’

‘No. I don’t love you.’

I want to but cannot close the mouth.

Chapter IX

Albert calls me. He's had another vision. This one is filled with lightning, dark summer heat, and pain. I think he's seeing my dreams.

Albert hides his balding crown under baseball caps from ages past. Brims oddly bent shelter over-thick brows, hedges of hair hiding sharp brown eyes. His eyes always look through me, like lightning striking my shame. I cannot hide the truth from Albert, but I don't always tell it.

The funny thing when I lie to Albert isn't whether he can tell I'm lying, it's whether I can tell I'm lying.

He hasn't moved back home yet. He spends his days in a little three room house on the river, or fishing from beneath elms in his backyard if it is nice. Albert says the fishing clears his mind like a long puzzle or song he plays, reel and rod, lure and line, current with and in the ripples on the river he sees the truth about the world.

A splash on the surface, a flash underneath: the river flows. In twenty years I've never seen Albert catch a fish. The river flows. Fast or slow, swollen or dried to a trickle, every year the river flows. Even when we don't see it, below the surface it makes its way.

* * *

'Why can't you just be happy with me?' Aurora asks.

'I'm missing the part of me that lets me be happy. I'm missing pieces. I can't be whole. Somebody once told me that when we are born, we explode. Pieces of our soul

go flying everywhere and we live to find those pieces. In people. In places.

Everywhere. And when we are complete, we perish. We die.’¹

‘How do you know I’m not one of those pieces?’

‘Maybe you are,’ I say, and I kiss her. But I don’t think it’s true.

The problem with coordinates, landmarks, and waypoints is you never get anywhere between. Between what happens is what happens.

* * *

Back in Shore Points during a thunderstorm, Aurora and are in bed.

Like Calypso she tingles the tips of everything. She imbues hints in rhythm, in skin, in the wind and rain on the window. Aurora sizzles in the equatorial image in her sumptuous tastes, in the water, on sand, on deck, under sheets, but I hold back. I do not fall. And I can’t hide it. Her vision flashes and knows seeking pictures of lightning in my eyes. Aurora digs in, tries to see herself, but instead sees the flesh made glass, the ache, the sky, luna and sol so crazy, and pain still still still. Stricken by my memories, her screams tang the air, spin tempests into the sea.

She pushes herself away from me. ‘No. Stop! No!’

‘What’s wrong? Was there—’

‘You carry your dead wife around in a jar!’

We’re naked in the near darkness, lit by lightning that sporadically tags the room.

I stand by the side of the bed; she is wrapped in linens, kneeling on the other side.

‘No. It’s her snowman,’ I say.

That isn’t the thing to say.

¹ Anemic(Heather). Diary-x. 2003

‘I know what it is. It’s your memories of her. It’s insane! She’s dead, buried. Go visit her grave like a normal person.’ She slumps forward, her hair shielding her face. ‘Grieve, get over it. Move on.’

‘I can’t.’

‘Can’t or don’t want to?’ She sweeps her hair back with her arm.

‘There’s still—’

‘I’m right here! I’m a real live living woman, right here.’ Aurora stands uncovered, staring at me, blinking back tears.

When I don’t respond, she turns from me and hurries to get dressed.

‘It’s, you have to...you don’t...’ I cannot complete the thought.

‘It’s life,’ she says, shrugging.

She carries her sweater and sandals out of the room.

I pull on a pair of pants and follow her.

Aurora pauses, her head bowed, her hand on the door knob, facing away from me.

I move in close to her, to hold her

‘No,’ she says, turning when I touch her ribs.

She puts her hand flat on my chest and gently pushes, enough to keep some distance.

‘It’s a cycle,’ she says. ‘You love, you lose. You love, you lose. You love.’

* * *

I meet Aurora at a café a few days later to apologize. It doesn’t work. You can’t apologize to someone if you don’t actually feel sorry for what you’ve done. Or you can, but don’t expect it to matter.

I dream she is right about Jane, that she wants to be let go and I am still so thirsty.

‘Let me ask you a question,’ she says. ‘Let’s say you were dehydrated, stuck without any water except for the jar. Would you drink it then?’

‘It’s complicated,’ I say.

‘No, it’s not. Would you drink the water in that jar to save your life?’

I stare at Aurora’s eyes. They’re dark, reflective, impenetrable. The human body is sixty to seventy percent water. Mine is less.

‘Okay,’ she continues. ‘Would you let someone else drink it to save theirs?’

‘What do you want from me?’

‘I want you to suffer,’ Aurora says. ‘Suffer like I do.’ She gets up and throws her bag over her shoulder.

I shake my head. I’m calm. I feel sorry for her and a bit guilty. She thinks she can make me suffer, after what I’ve endured?

‘You can’t make me suffer,’ I say as she walks away. I’m not bragging. I think it’s a fact.

‘We’ll see,’ she says.

I picture my pain as a river, a sea. I’m a raft floating in the ocean and she wants to try and pour more water into it?

I’m wrong. If you hope, they can always make you suffer.

* * *

I don’t see Aurora again after the café. At least I don’t plan to. I decide to leave for the Cape at the end of the month. That morning I make a final trip to the store for perishables.

I come home and discover the door ajar. The key I had given Aurora, the one with the blue painter's tape label is lying on the floor just inside the hall.

I feel it before I know, a dry heat devoid of moisture coming from the apartment. Aurora has taken the water from my life. My aquarium is shattered, empty, seaweed, Gateot, goldfish shriveled on the pebbles.

She sits at the table with an empty mason jar in front of her, spinning it slowly on edge, playing her fingernails along the rim.

My heart is in my throat.

My eyes ask, 'What, what did you do?'

'I drank her,' she says. 'I thought about dumping her out, boiling her off, but this is better. This way she's inside me.' She smiles like a predator all teeth and threat and simmering violence.

You love, you lose. You love, you lose. You love. You lose.

* * *

Aurora leaves without another word. She doesn't have to say anything else; her spell's been cast.

I collapse. My life is torn up, blended, Himmelskibet and Euripides. I cross dimensions, or converse with gods, but neither lets me go back. Neither returns Jane to me.

I lie curled on the floor among the dried remnants of my hope and imagine the whole of darkness, whirlpool of tides, channel to the wrecks of Egyptian barques, ancient war ships, pirate vessels, longboats, hedge fund yachts still hoping for a homecoming, still wanting in its neap, for her.

I think, like Slim, if I do not love, I do not live. I hear Jane speak in me.

‘You don’t need that scripture anymore,’ she says. ‘Why are you holding on?’

‘I’ve got you beating drums, odds, beating evolution and time, fossilized in stone, in mind, in mine. I’ve got you without any more words wrapped in the weave,’ I say.

She asks again, ‘Why are you holding on?’

‘I’ve got you,’ I say. But what if I don’t? I hear Virgil’s warning, *Incidit in Scyllam, cupiens vitare Charybdim*.

There is nothing left for me in Shore Points. I place the dried Gateot in my wallet, take what I’ve packed to the Acheron, and leave whatever else I have.

The spar swings. I turn and see the maelstrom.

* * *

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Chapter X

Jane and I sit at the edge of the aquarium's salt water tank, our pants rolled up, feet dangling in the cool liquid.

'You know, dolphins call each other by name,' she says. 'We can tell from the sounds and sequences they voice.'

We watch some of the larger fish swim by, maybe investigating our limbs, maybe hoping for some food.

'Do other fish identify as individuals or only dolphins?'

'Well whales probably do as well, but if you mean like Nemo, no. Most are just schools, protection in the group, no recognition of any one fish over another. But they do recognize sound.'

'Really? Like warnings?'

'Like music.'

Jane gets up and walks to the wall behind us. Her bare feet leave wet tracks on the grey carpet. She fiddles with a control panel and music begins to play through the aquarium PA system speakers.

'What is that? Are you allowed to do that?' I ask. I narrow my eyes, but can't hold back a smile that starts at the corner of my mouth betraying my mock suspicion.

'Come on' Jane says, pulling me to get up. 'Come downstairs. We can see better there.'

She takes my hand and leads me down the carpeted spiral ramp to the lower level, the observation window. We stand in front of the wide glass side of the tank. Gentle

blue light baths us as we watch small schools of fish, a sea turtle, and a puffer fish swim by.

‘Look,’ she says, squeezing my hand. ‘Watch them dancing.’

My pulse beats sixteenth notes to the music as she stands next to me staring into the water, grinning from ear to ear.

* * *

It is mid-afternoon and raining when I make land on a narrow strip of sand on the Cape. I sail right onto the beach, the Acheron shuddering as her keel scraps bottom. Precipitation tumbles down, thick, sheathing me in water, melding the breakpoint between strand and sea.

Up a set of weathered wooden stairs that zigzag over the dunes, three old beach houses sit looking out over the water like they are waiting for a ship from Portugal to arrive and bring tidings from the old world from feathered serpents and the bearded gods of men. I find out one is available for rent.

* * *

Two days later the moon is right, in its syzygy the next step, the distance. It is time to release my woe. I make my way down the stairs to the beach and walk around the outside of the Acheron. I run my hand along the patched area of her hull, remembering the hole carved out by the storm like a cypress cave on Monterey Peninsula.

The Acheron rocks back in her cradle of sand and shore pebbles as I strain my back, shoulders, legs to send her away. She rumbles in her refusal angry, prophetic, threats as if she is half gypsy girl, half kraken star.

My feet dig deeper into sand, and she begins to slip back into the water. I have her prow on my shoulder and legs driving, force her away, step after heavy step. She slides, like the tearing of membranes, the pain the crowd can never know, the joy and fear and waiting for the call. And she is out of my grasp.

The Acheron rides the tide away from the beach. My shoulder branded with the final kiss from her foremost point, I stand in wind and rain chest deep in water, watching the sea pull her into the distance.

I turn and fight my way out of the waves, back to the beach. I clamber over shale, scraping knees, hands, chin, leaving skin on sea rocks, as if taken by coral submitted to the reef. Like caramuru I haul myself from the water, lungs accustoming themselves to untempered air.

* * *

‘You look like you could use a towel,’ a woman says. She is sitting under an umbrella at the base of the dunes just to the right of the stairs.

I brush rain water from across my brow and pluck at the tee shirt plastered to my chest.

‘And a change of clothes,’ I reply.

‘Come here,’ she says. She stands up and waves me over.

I push my drenched hair back with one hand and duck into shelter under her extended umbrella.

‘I was watching you, you know,’ she says. She hands me a dark green beach towel from the bag at her feet. ‘I’ve heard of people helping push whales back into the water, but not beached boats. At least not boats with no one aboard.’

I begin drying my hair, my face, my arms with the towel. Water pulls away from me, absorbed by the rough fibers. It feels like sloughing my skin.

‘You know, it’s almost out of sight,’ she says.

I peer out across the sand, through grey rains to see the dark outline of the Acheron riding the vigor of storm waves and tide, back out into the ocean.

‘So are you going to tell me what the whole you-versus-the-sailboat in the storm was all about?’ There is a pause as she looks at me expectantly, her lips together, eyes slightly widening. And then a small grin. ‘Or at least your name? I did lend you my towel,’ she says.

‘Sorry,’ I say.

I swing my vision from the barely perceptible Acheron drifting further out to sea to look at the young woman who has been so generous. Her almond eyes are framed by arcs of dark hair, like hummingbirds peering out from behind the curl of iris petals.

‘I’m Steven.’

‘Addra.’

The rain quiets its fall on the umbrella and slows its dull finger dance against the sands of the beach.

‘So are you going to tell me why you set your boat adrift? It was your boat, right?’

‘Yes,’ I say. ‘She’s mine. Or, she was.’

‘And you’re against mooring your boat for some reason?’

‘No. It’s. . .’ I pause and my lips begin to curl into a half-smile. ‘It was time to give her up.’

‘Okay. Sort of Zen, I guess I can get that.’

I’m wrong. But I don’t know it yet. When something is a part of who you are, it takes more than a decision to give it up.

‘Anyway, you’re lucky I was here to save you. No one else around to give free towels to strangers who wash ashore.’

‘You’re the lifeguard?’ I ask.

‘Nope. Just a teacher on summer vacation.’

Her eyes smirk as she tucks a lock of hair behind her ear.

‘Well, my house is right there,’ I say, pointing up the stairs. ‘I think I would’ve been okay.’

‘Oh. I didn’t think anyone lived in those houses.’

‘I just moved in.’

She stops talking and neither of us says anything for a moment.

Sometimes being in a place from one day to the next doesn’t make a difference. The days all seem the same. Sometimes a single day’s difference makes all the difference.

‘Well, the rain’s letting up.’ Addra sticks her hand out from under her umbrella. ‘I’m about to get going, but you can keep the towel,’ she says, and takes a few steps backwards, towards the far end of the stretch of sand.

‘No, no. I’m really fine now,’ I say, and she stops as I walk towards her. I hand Addra her towel.

‘Well, you should get inside and get changed, and get something warm to eat. Some coffee or some soup,’ she says as she tilts her umbrella back, letting the shaft rest on her shoulder, and lays the damp towel across the top of her canvas tote.

‘You know, if you haven’t been yet, you should go to the Lighthouse Diner. Tell them Addie sent you. They’ll treat you right.’

She slings her bag onto her arm and starts to walk towards the end of the beach.

‘Oh, and ask for pie! The pie is unbelievable!’ She turns and calls back over her shoulder with a glance, framed by the canopy of the umbrella, then disappears from sight around the corner of the dunes’ base.

* * *

Jane and I sit on a park bench and eat pie with plastic forks. It is the first time I have ever eaten pie right from the tin. I tell Jane I don’t really like pie, too much goop, but I like the crust. She lets me eat most of the crust. Jane eats the filling, blueberry.

She wears a sun dress that floats around her, white diaphanous gauze cut in the shape of flowers at her shoulders. She is careful. Little tiny forkfuls of pie filling. Over and over. Each bit of dark purple goo disappears behind her lips. She doesn’t spill anything. I learn about her patience, her indulgences, her contradictions.

My memory fills with her mouth and eyes. I imagine us alone in the park. I imagine talking to Jane about the color of the sky, except we’re not talking about the color of the sky.

She has a way of looking at the world. The maple sends forth its children in helicopters she says.

I take a forkful of the flaking shell she maneuvers around. It tastes of butter and sugar, and more like blackberries than blue. I think I can't imagine the world without her. But that's what I have.

I wash an empty pie tin out in the sink and leave it on the counter to dry.
Everyday I wash the same empty pie tin.

I will not go back to that bakery alone. I'm waiting for her.

* * *

I find the Lighthouse Diner at the corner of Main and the cross street that leads to the beach. The square stainless steel structure is topped by what looks like someone lopped the top third off a lighthouse and mounted it on the roof.

The sky screams grey light after the rain.

Inside the nearly empty diner, I find a low-backed booth by the window. A middle-aged waitress in regulation blue approaches with a pot of coffee and a mug.

'You need to see a menu?' She asks as she pours my coffee.

'Yeah, I, maybe.' There's a moment when I wonder about coincidence and friendly women on the beach and anonymity. And then I move past it. 'Addie told me this was the place to come for some soup,' I say.

The waitress' eyes widen slightly, and she pats me on the arm.

'Oh, you're Addie's friend?' she asks. Her already friendly demeanor turns motherly, like I'm a dear relative, a prodigal son returned.

Before I can tell her Addra and I only just met, she continues.

‘Well let me get you a bowl of soup, and when you’re done with that, we’ll see about some pie,’ she says with a smile in her wink. ‘I’m Sandy, Addie’s aunt. If you want anything else, just give me a holler. My husband, Neil, is the cook.’

She heads into the kitchen.

I sip coffee, studying the patterns in the aged Formica of the table, listening to the hiss of tires as cars drive by through puddles remaining from the storm.

* * *

People think strangers who take in guests don’t exist in the world anymore, that we’re all xenophobes. But they do. The question today is about knowing who you can trust.

The Rileys are Addra’s family. They own the diner and treat me like a long lost friend. I wake the next morning to find casseroles and baked goods packaged and delivered to my doorstep. I stop by the diner to thank them and somehow end up with another free meal. The following week Neil drops off a cord of wood in the morning, in case I want to use the potbelly stove in my living room; Addra and Sandy arrive that same afternoon to hang curtains in my windows. Sandy says they’re just being neighborly, but it feels like something more. Something better.

‘Sometimes it just feels good to help people,’ Sandy says. ‘Not that you need the help, but it’s just little things.’

‘I don’t know how to thank you,’ I say. ‘It sometimes just seems so strange. I meet Addra on the beach one afternoon and a week later you two are redecorating my house.’

‘Well I wouldn’t call it redecorating,’ Addra says with a grin. ‘I think that would’ve required some decoration already in place.’

Sandy stifles a snort of laughter and turns back to threading the curtains.

I look at her and Addra smiling and hold up my hands in mock defeat.

Later I find out the lighthouse part of the diner actually functioned years ago, and to repay their kindness I ask them to let me try and fix it.

* * *

The lamp room is drafty, but clean and bright. I can see most of the town, all the way to the coast from its vantage. The fresnel lens is cracked and has not focused light for many years. I run my fingers over its beveled edge, tracing concentric circles, like frozen ripples in a lake radiating outward from the center splash. I see the planets orbiting Hyperion, heavenly spheres tracking in prisms that are discs of dust and gas, collecting, dispersing. The universe rent but not shattered. The mechanics of the light clockwork gears that someone tried to convert to electric winding. The small motor and sprockets are blackened with corrosion from age, salt air, anger and hopelessness, tired of warning away drifting boats, saving lost souls, welcoming home weary sailors only to have them crash on rocks, succumb to waves and axes. I follow frayed wires through the frame, tracing the scars of sparks, soot, and flame.

I peel insulation back from thick twisted copper, cut burnt corroded ends away, expose the still bright wire hidden beneath. I wind it onto new brass-screwed connections cleaned in acid baths and sand. I rub my fingers with my thumb where calluses form from the blisters earned reconstituting archaic electrical routes.

* * *

Addra's kids are putting on a play at the school. 'A First Grade Fairy Tale' she tells me. She asks me to help, to build a tower for the princess and a castle facade.

'When we're six, life can still be a fairy tale,' I say.

She says her life still is, and mine can be again.

I walk by her classroom one afternoon to see what she would prefer for colors.

The children and Addra are in the middle of art. She tells them to picture happiness, to paint what it means to them, a moment, a person, a place.

She has hope in her eyes. Her long black hair pulled into a bun, skewered with the comforting yellow of Ticonderoga, her cheeks faintly flushed with a splash of embarrassment amidst pale, almost snow drift skin. She wears a green cardigan over a black top, shapeless, disguising, like the motley patterns of her skirt that swishes and billows as she sweeps up and down rows checking her students' works. Bony wrists and willowy neck suggest a heron's thin fragility, but her voicing directions sounds with an undeniable steel, and her laugh embraces like warm earth.

She talks as if she sees actualities in life, mothers, fathers, vacations, friends, toys. I want to see them too.

In her classroom, a child paints the Christmas Uncle Rob bought him the Yastrzemski jersey. I see it.

* * *

I sell my watch. The dealer rolls it over in his hands: titanium casing, band, water resistant to fifteen meters, Swiss mechanism, semi-precious face, two diamond chips. He gives me enough to buy a 1987 Dodge Ram, enough to get started.

* * *

I change the oil in the truck. Grease, dirt cling to my pores, cake under nails, remind me of caves, darkness, eloining. Grooves and creases in skin, highlighted by viscous liquid, map terrain, valleys, trails to and from destinations reached, refused, reconstituted like freeze-dried rations. And some I haven't traveled.

* * *

Addra works weekends at the diner. I watch her bring the bill to two fire fighters sitting in the corner booth. She folds it into a shape and leaves it on the table for them, laughing at something they say.

She catches me watching as she turns from them and shrugs as she moves behind the counter. I look back at the fire fighters. They're both watching her too.

* * *

There is a table with a young couple and their son at the far end of the diner. The boy is old enough to sit in a chair, but his feet don't touch the ground. He swings his legs like pendulums as if trying to rock the chair into motion. When they ask Addra for the bill, she folds it again, as she did with the fire fighters, but this time I see it has wings and she mimics its flight into the little boy's hands.

Addra brings the coffee pot to my table.

'More coffee?' she asks.

I glance at the quarter of an inch swirling around the bottom of the cup in my hand.

'No thanks,' I say. I look up at her. 'But I do have a question.'

She puts the pot down on the table and takes off the apron she wears over her faded jeans and black tee shirt. She drops the apron next to the coffee pot, on the table, and sits across from me.

‘Okay, shoot.’

‘What’s the thing you’re doing with people’s checks? Like origami cranes?’

‘Oh,’ she says and laughs. ‘Yeah, but it’s not a bird; it’s a butterfly. Look, here,’ she says and digs in the pocket of the apron for her order pad.

She pulls out the pad, rips a page off the top, and begins to fold along lines and angles invisible to what I can see, to what I can believe. She flips it over and folds up two corners, twisting the back edges of two earlier folds, then turns the paper up on its end and manipulates another crease. Her nails are short as if she bites them. I look at her face, her focus on the task, her eyes looking down; I see how long her eyelashes are.

‘And you tuck this in here, and you’re done,’ she says. She smiles and holds the butterfly up, looking at me.

‘I’m impressed. I’ve never seen an origami butterfly.’

‘The things you learn teaching children.’

‘But don’t some customers get annoyed they have to unfold their check to pay it?’

‘Maybe,’ she says. ‘But I’ve never heard any complaints.’

The bell on the door rings as it swings open and a group of four come in.

‘Time to get back to work,’ Addra says. She stands up and ties her apron back on. ‘If you’re around later, there’s a party tonight on the beach, the one where we met. You should come,’ she says. ‘It’s basically in your backyard.’ She picks up the coffee pot and walks to the table with the foursome.

* * *

I take a bottle from under the cabinet and walk along the beach. There are people, the party. I join myself to the spirits. Each grain of sand clings to my soles, trying not to let me go, but I ignore them.

I see Addra further down the shoreline wearing a yellow dress that hugs her shoulders and dances around bare knees as she pitches horseshoes with some friends.

The dunes are lit by late day sun, t-shirts, shorts, ringing metal against the sky.

A throw from a guy wearing a Strongbow shirt and sunglasses rolls past Addra and her opponent. She turns towards me to retrieve it as I approach. I start to hand her the errant horseshoe.

‘Hey,’ she says. ‘Glad you could make it.’

‘Hi,’ I say.

My hands remember the grasp of drop-forged steel, it grips my skin back, as I wrap fingers round, thumb tracing barely felt gouges and scars at the edge. For a moment, I hold one side of the horseshoe and Addra holds the other. Until I release it.

Jane is in the stars.

‘Guys, this is my friend, Steve,’ Addra says, waving the players over to us.

Sweat stains the front of Strongbow’s shirt. His eyes are hidden behind mirrored aviators.

‘I’m Lee,’ he says. He shakes my hand, his grip solid.

‘Gaffney,’ says a second, taller one with a wave of his hand.

‘I’m Kristoff,’ the last one says. He is short, and stout, with spiky black hair.

‘You want to step in for me?’ Addra asks. ‘Nanci just got here and I need to talk to her about school.’ She looks back down the beach at a tiny blonde in green and white who is talking to a couple collecting wood for the bonfire.

‘Sure, if you guys don’t mind,’ I say.

Addra hands me back the horseshoe.

‘Thanks. I don’t think I was much of help to my team anyway,’ she says, smiling at us, walking backwards towards her friend.

I turn to the three players.

‘Okay. So you and me,’ Lee says to me, and he and Gaffney head back to the other pit. ‘You and Kristoff each throw. Closest to the stake goes first.’

I test the balance of the horseshoe in my hand, my arm and body become pendulum and generator of ecliptical motion and then it’s flying parabolic to the terrestrial. Through the light and air that is wind in our faces and lungs of our own engendering, it spins cutting its way to ring, to start the game. And I forget for a moment Addra and Jane and Aurora and Kate, forget Cassie and Gregor and Dugan and Albert, forget everything except the breath in my lungs and the pulse in my ears, the rotating ‘U’ and the sound of metal striking metal that I can’t let escape me.

* * *

After the game, by the bonfire among evening rituals winding down, Addra finds me again and I wonder if she brings the edge to the night. She sidles up next to me, darkness and pressure, a shadow by the dying fire as if a new one is forming on the horizon behind her. I pour libations from my bottle, share with Lee, Gaffney, and

Kristoff. Sitting on driftwood, I sip at the ends of memories as clouds gather and stars begin to leave the east.

‘So you won?’ Addra asks. She is flushed. She takes the bottle from me and tilts it to her lips. I see her make eye contact with Nanci across the bonfire’s flames. Nanci makes a gesture with her head that I’m unable to translate.

‘Two out of three,’ I say.

I should be wondering what I’m doing here. I can feel the seasons changing. The wind again, rain’s coming.

‘It’s getting cold.’ She shivers and leans into me. ‘You know, I’m not sure I should drive.’

The beach guests begin to disappear into the night.

She looks at me, her eyes large, dark, quiet. She is scared, trapped in a trap of her own making, a trap she walked into herself, willing but frightened.

‘I’ll drive you home,’ I say. Not that she can stay at my place, or stay with me, or anything else I could have said.

She looks hurt and confused, but relieved. She looks like she’s just been released from a trap. What I don’t tell her is that I want her to stay. But I don’t think I can. I’m starting to realize I have somewhere to go back to.

* * *

The rain starts, thick molasses drops hammering the windshield and roof of the truck. The reflective paint of the lane dividers dims as if some shade has been drawn over the already darkened road. Windshield wiper blades beat faster as my eyes flick

back and forth to the sides of the road, glancing at reflective markers to make sure we're still between them.

Addra is quiet until we pull up in front of her house. I get out of the truck and walk around to her side, holding an umbrella over the door as I open it for her.

'You know, I kissed Roland at the party behind the cabana,' she says as she slides out of the truck, rain splashing around our feet.

'Yeah?' I ask.

'Yeah,' she says, standing toe to toe with me and placing her hand on my chest. 'It was kind of gross.'

'Then why did you?'

'I couldn't kiss who I wanted, so it seemed like a good idea at the time,' she says and leans her head against my arm.

I smile and wrap my arm around her back as we walk up the driveway to her porch. The wet pavement holds each foot a second longer than it should, hanging onto the rubber surface as if afraid to let go.

We hear birds, we smell rain on the grass, on the leaves, on the hoods and windshields of the cars lining the road.

On a tight curve, tires can slide like words and truth, wanting to cross lines. With no one else on the road, are the lanes suggestions or law?

If I lie about one thing, maybe I can see the truth about another. The truth is there is still no other choice.

But when will there be?

The truth's truth is there is another choice. I just don't see it.

Chapter XI

I dream of Jane in the hospital again. She is lying in a hallway on a gurney. Pale. Dead. There's a scent of cotton candy and the cleaning fluid mechanics use on windows covering a fragrance like metal and compost piles, like baby bunnies trapped in the window well outside grandma's house for sixteen days.

Then the gurney is empty and she's standing at the end of the hall in front of closed double doors, naked, facing away.

'I'm the one who died,' Jane says. 'But you're the one who stopped living. I'm in you. I'm in everything around you. I'm in the world, little bits in people in places you have found me; you just didn't see.'

Nothing is ever truly gone. As long as you remember something, that thing can never be completely destroyed. Its physical form may no longer exist, but as long as one person remembers, it lives and can be remade.

Albert tells me if you live long enough, over the course of your life you will forget more than you know. But you can always learn something again.

Frostbite, hypothermia, it's a miracle I didn't lose my toes they say. I stare at what should be blackened shriveled olives clumped on the end of my foot. Instead I see an ant crawl over my third toe.

It's not the miracle I'm looking for. But it's not an illusion either.

* * *

Weeks later Addra and I go with a group of teachers from her school and neighboring district to see Hair in New Haven. On the tour bus back from the show she finds me in my seat.

‘Hey,’ she says, and next her lips are on my neck, then my earlobe between her teeth, then her breath is in my lungs.

Street lights wrestle their way through tinted windows, bathing the slopes and hollows of her face like a passing sequence of fires from above.

‘What are we doing?’ I ask when she leans back to look at me.

She kisses me again.

Sometimes when there’s nothing to say, you don’t say anything. You do something instead.

We leave my house at five a.m. The sky is a bleached blue blanket overhead. It’s late and early as Addra takes my hand. Maybe it’s been twenty-two hundred years; maybe it’s the beginning of the next age.

* * *

Jane never wears rings. It makes things difficult.

Before we marry I learn everything I can about clarity and settings. I know the origin of gems, where they come from, from chemical composition and geological processes to economic and industrial production and distribution. I find out about the trade and blood. I research the precision of cuts, every facet part of my study. I think about trying to measure her finger when she’s asleep. I have a string and a ruler ready in the nightstand. She finds them and giggling confronts me one night in bed.

‘What is this?’ She asks trying to hold back laughter.

‘Oh, no.’ I realize what she thinks I’m trying to measure. I start laughing too, trying to stop the blush spreading across my face.

‘No. It’s not what.’

‘Oh my god, I’m embarrassing you. I’m sorry.’ She is full on laughing. Her eyes crinkle up and tears start to form at their corners as she’s turning red too.

‘You don’t sound very sorry,’ I quip, with a smile, trying to wrestle the ruler and string from her.

I pin her on her back on the bed, she’s still smiling, and tears are still in her eyes. We both breathe heavily as I roll to her side, still holding her hand that will not relinquish the ruler and string.

‘I was trying to secretly measure your finger,’ I say. ‘I want to buy you a ring, but you don’t have any I can compare for size.’

Jane giggles again at the last word.

‘Jane.’

‘Okay, okay, I’m sorry,’ she says, letting go of the ruler and string, propping herself up on her side to face me. ‘I just thought.’ She wipes the tears from the corners of her eyes, still smiling.

‘I know what you thought.’

‘I don’t wear rings, because I can’t wear them when I play. I’d just have to take them off all the time and probably lose them. So I’ve never really wanted any. It’s never been important to me.’

‘It’s a symbol of love.’

‘It’s just a piece of metal,’ she says and pulls my lips to hers.

* * *

I spend the winter at the Cape. The lamp shines from the lighthouse like a bright star. The steady beam has the strength of flame but without the wildness. The lens, bezel, wires, housing, and glass, copper, brass, and plastic have tamed the savagery, made its use ours, made its direction for the lost.

* * *

I hang shutters and a new screen door for a retired couple who buy the house next door on the bluff. I wonder if Sandy will bring them curtains too. They sit in oversized wooden lounge chairs and stare at the water as I work. Their golden retriever snoozes on the grass between them.

The bright white paint of the door frame nestles among weather aged shingles, faded from brown to grey. The black storm shutters ward off any foolish enough to infringe on their peace, warn the wind and sea of the bite left in the old cottage.

* * *

It is a slow day in the diner. Addra is working the afternoon shift for her aunt. She brings two iced teas and slides into the booth where I sit fiddling with a straw. She stares at my hands.

‘You told me your wife died. She must have died a while ago,’ Addra says.

‘Why do you think that?’

‘There’s no mark on your finger from a wedding band.’

‘Jane and I never bought rings,’ I say.

‘You didn’t exchange rings when you married?’

I shake my head.

‘But the ring is the symbol of your fidelity. It has an outside and an inside, like each of you. It is unbroken, has no beginning or ending. It is forever.’

‘Like love?’

‘Like love,’ she says.

‘That’s one way to look at it.’

‘Oh?’ She takes a sip of iced tea.

‘Another way is that a ring is hollow; it’s empty. There is nothing in the center of it.’

‘Only when it’s not on a finger,’ she says. ‘On a finger, it is filled with part of you. That’s the beauty of a wedding ring.’

I decide to tell her my story.

* * *

In the spring Addra and I hike Mt. Monadnock. In the shadows of the peak, snow still coats sections of ground, slick, thin candy-apple glaze, like frosting on a pastry, only colder, harder. Too much could rot your hope.

Blowing from foundations poured through the cemetery, bittersweet, katabatic breeze teases memories: splashing in puddles in rain pooled in concavities in concrete paths cradling water, wellness, reckless stripping of soaked sundresses, shirts, and shoes.

We sit on the overlook in gloves and hats, the cold stone softened by the old blanket we laid out.

The sun is about to set. I ready myself for the green flash, the chance of acknowledgement.

‘Where do we go from here?’ she asks. I think she’s wanted to but been afraid to ask it. I’ve been afraid too. I don’t want to hurt her.

‘We go home,’ I say.

But her home and my home are different.

‘Where’s home?’

‘Only you can answer that for yourself. For me, home is Jane.’

‘But Jane’s dead,’ she says.

‘Yes.’

‘And you can’t get her back.’ Addra is quieter, as if speaking taboo.

‘Yes.’

‘Then what?’

‘Then I find where she’s left her mark, in people, in places.’

‘And that’s home?’

‘And that’s home. And that’s where I go.’

‘And me?’

‘You saved my life.’

‘Yeah.’

We both sit staring at the wake of sunlight in the atmosphere. The green flash has eluded me again.

‘I know what you’re thinking,’ I say.

‘How do you know what I’m thinking?’

‘You’re thinking if you think about what I told you: breaking into the hospital morgue, finding my wife’s body missing, and a secret passage leading to an underground

ice world where I encounter a girl made from snow and her father, then a lizard man brings me to a blind seer and after that I meet the Queen of the Dead and agree to be her consort until I find my way out of the underworld... isn't it possible that was all just some sort of dream or hallucination I had while suffering from grief or hypothermia?'

'Maybe. That is easier to understand than it really happening.'

'You see—'

'But that's not what I was thinking.'

'Oh.'

'I was thinking about what we should get for dinner.'

* * *

The couple next door tells me their friend could use a roofer. I make my way up the Cape to the other home. Slate roofing tiles stand in stacks just below the ridge of the house. The old Georgian has been ripped up by anger, sea winds, and divorce. I patch the roof where tiles were torn off, admiring the slats marked by fasteners from before my time, the crevices between them growing as they age, quietly covering their imperfections again, as if the slate provides them skin or clothes or armor.

* * *

I help Addra chaperone a trip to the Cold Stone creamery. She let her students pick the trip as a reward for their hard work on the state tests. We sit on a bench against the wall watching the kids sample flavors in a large cafeteria-like room.

'There's something back home I need to fix,' I tell her.

'Home? With Jane?'

'Sort of. There's one place I left in need of some repair.'

‘Do you want help? I could come with you if you want to go this summer. The school year is almost over.’

I still think no one can come with me where I'm going.

‘You’ve already helped me so much. I think this is something I need to do myself.’

I can tell she’s turned to look at me. I continue watching the kids. I’m worried. I hope she can understand.

‘Well, if you change your mind,’ she says. ‘You know where to find me.’

Maybe she does. When you break something, it’s your responsibility to fix it. But what do you do if it can’t be fixed?

* * *

I pull over on top of a ridge, parking behind a burnt out wreck on the side of the road.

I see a city outlined on the horizon, jagged incisors, fangs, swords, blades, the delicious under-bite of primitive prevaricating desire, greed, sex, and ambition, craving to be remade.

It tries too hard to be dangerous. It works the glove, the heat, the teeth of violence that is the threat of violence, the delivery of violence, but not real violence. It is armor against fear, armor against the masquerades of self. The city thinks if it shows its teeth you’ll leave it alone, and it’s right. You do. But then it’s alone.

Peel away the glass and granite, strip off the Aldo and Prada, steel and silk, and you see what’s lost, scared, and alone.

* * *

I get out of the truck and sit on the hood, facing the city, parked by the blackened shell, glass, melted plastic, and metal wreckage spread out for yards around me. I examine the contents of my pockets. I drop the keys to the truck and pull Gateot from the darkness of my wallet. I smooth wrinkles against my leg and look at him displayed against the sunlight, struggled free from crumpled cocoon.

‘She is not for you,’ he says. His hiss and tick still intact.

‘Yeah. So I’ve heard.’

I fold him; tighten the crease, pressure between fingers sliding like bone over silk. I fold him again, and then a corner, the other corner. I fold him. I fold. I mirror two angular folds on his sides. What I learned from Addra. I fold him again. I fold. His length is equal to π times his thickness divided by six times two to the number of folds I am capable of plus four times two to the number of folds I am capable of minus one. Solve for the number of folds. It’s less than I thought. I cannot fold anymore.

I place Gateot in the road dust, among glittering glass particles, sand, asphalt stars. He has reached the imago, his instars left behind. He rises up, the mourning cloak.

‘You know the secret,’ he says. ‘She left me for you until you could fly again on your own.’

Strength stripped from you, you cannot fly. You cannot carry the weight.

‘I know,’ I say, tears in my eyes.

Hands and knees, covered in road dust and sand, and grease and bits of glass, I watch Gateot flap his wings higher and higher into the sky.

‘Do you really want me to go?’ he asks, circling me.

‘No. But you must if I’m to set her free.’

I rise, brushing legs and hands of speckling asphalt. I pick up the keys. I feel Jane in the vibrations, in the heat, in the abrasive and the slick, in the night, and near the sigh of broken pavement. I face wind speaking sulfur and soot watching Gateot fly. Sweet edges limned in gold.

He carves hope into the sky. Wings scything, he is a blade to reap with.

I call Albert.

'I'm coming home,' I say.

'Bout time.'

I get back in the truck and drive towards the teeth on the horizon.

* * *

Jane talked about the note over the next hill, the subsequent song, the reflection on the wave, the mist in the air, the attraction between positive and negative and the flash that starts the fire.

It will always remain out of reach; never spark if we do not.

So we keep on a smile a touch, a matchbook under the windowsill.

I roll down my window. Highway wind in my ears, I head to the city.

Chapter XII

I return to the chapel. The charred skeleton of walls and beams reaches towards the clouds like ancient branches grasping for leaves and seedlings at the end of winter.

Three children run off, out of the ruins, when I open the door. They scamper over the remainder of a window sill, laughing into the afternoon.

I sift through the wreckage, bits of charred wood and soot running through nitrile gloved hands.

I squat among fractured support beams and stumps of columns. Scars etched into the slate flagstone by flame form a pattern resembling a man lying with his arms and legs outstretched.

A pile of debris in a corner is the remnants of a scaffold, brushes, trowels, and paint cans.

I pick through a number of damaged metal containers, lifting one blackened Vitruvian can.

In the basement I find statues of a mother and father, of wise men and angels. They're piled on top of one another; soot-coated, but unmarred by the flame. I build a crèche for the lawn out front and arrange the figures around an empty manger.

The children play in it the next day.

* * *

The question is whether believing a lie will make it more true.

Albert says he was asked once if he could travel back in time which famous historical figures he'd like to meet. I tell him, if it was me, I'd think about Lincoln, King Arthur, Shakespeare, Anne Boleyn, Gandhi, and Sun Tzu.

He says when he was younger he wanted to go back in time to meet Jesus, but he worries that, when he goes back in time, he destroys the time line and discovers Jesus was never born. So in order to preserve the future, he takes on the role of Jesus Christ. He hires a down on their luck couple to play his parents, a homeless man who witnessed his arrival in the desert to begin dunking people in the river in the name of a coming messiah, and with a quick batch of bread mold penicillin, basic CPR, and a couple of stories, he wows some followers.

When I ask him about the flaying and the crucifixion, Albert says that part is going to be rough, but he figures the numbers and the lashes were probably exaggerated, and while the nails in the hands and feet will hurt, a small dose of biotoxins should cause temporary paralysis, fooling his persecutors long enough to take him down from the cross and bury him. Then when the effects wear off, he can sneak out of the tomb, make a few appearances, and go back to his time machine and return.

When I ask him about the spear in the side thing he says, 'No way around it. That's going to suck.'

Years later we're discussing war wounds and he shows me a nasty scar just below his ribcage. He says he got it from a powerboat accident. He asks me if I'd like to touch it.

I say no.

So if you can believe while doubting your faith, does that make what you believe true? For some, seeing is believing.

* * *

I climb over charred pews and blackened metal. I'm looking for Jane's violin case. It should be here.

'Quite a mess,' a voice says.

I turn and see Father Moe standing in the doorway of the ruined chapel.

'Sorry Father, I was just looking at the damage. I haven't been back since the fire.'

'I know,' he says. 'I heard, and I'm sorry. She was such a lovely girl.' He shakes his head slightly, his chins jiggling with the motion of his head. 'If there is anything I can do.'

'Actually, yes. I was hoping to get back to work. I needed some time, and I know I left without contacting you, but I'm ready to start again if you'd still let me renovate the chapel.'

'Well, if it were up to me, you'd have the job back in a second. But the parish council, well, they've come to think of this place as a bad investment and want to sell it to a developer. We're having a meeting to discuss it tomorrow night.'

Father Moe hesitates. He looks down at the soot covered floor, then back at me. His lips are pressed firmly together.

'There's... there are some questions as to what caused the fire' he says, slowly.

'The council has asked about insurance and about contracts. Are you in trouble, Steven?'

'Not that I'm aware of,' I say.

I lie. I've been in trouble since I lost Jane. I haven't found my way out of it yet.

'Well, at the meeting, the developer is presenting his bid. I want you to have the chance to finish the restoration. I don't know. Maybe I can change some minds. In the meantime, I'll have our Facilities Manager send a dumpster over to help with the clean up.'

* * *

Afterimages of the sun smear across the western horizon behind St. Paul's community center. I sit on the steps of the building by a propped open door and listen to the sound of contentious voices carrying from the meeting room.

Twenty minutes later, Father Moe and a white haired man in a pink polo shirt and blue blazer emerge onto the steps.

'Steven, this is Mr. Sullivan, representative of the parish council,' Father Moe says.

'Steven Teague,' I say, standing and offering my hand.

'I hope you're committed to this job, Mr. Teague,' Sullivan says, with a voice of conference room negotiations. He shakes my hand. 'We feel like we're taking a bit of a risk here, but Elmo is willing to vouch for you.'

'I'm up to the task.'

'We expect there to be some fiscal responsibility,' he continues. 'As members of the parish, we're willing to give our money and time for the good of the congregation, but the results so far have been less than desired.'

I nod. 'I'm sure Father Moe has informed you of the details of our contract. I won't see a cent until the chapel is finished to the church's satisfaction. In the meantime,

I intend to get back to work on a long overdue renovation. Please, feel free to stop by the chapel anytime to check up on your investment.'

'I just might, Mr. Teague. I just might,' Sullivan says walking down the stairs.

'Thank you Steven,' Father Moe says, shaking my hand.

'Thank you Father. I'll try not to let you down.'

'I have no doubt about that,' Father Moe says and turns to walk back into the building.

I'm left on the stairs for a moment alone. I stare at the purple of the sky opposite the sunset, where stars are beginning to peek out from hiding. Sirius blinks at me and I think of its companion circling the brightness. Jane would like that.

* * *

The following day I'm back in the chapel, clearing rubble from the worst damaged areas, and salvaging what I can.

'So you're the contractor,' a voice says.

I turn and see the man with buzz cut blond hair at the chapel door looking towards me. He's wearing jeans and a dark blue tee shirt with the IAFF logo printed over his heart. He pulls off work gloves as he approaches, and stretches out his hand to grasp mine.

'Marcus Timms,' he says.

'Steven Teague,' I say. I take his hand. It is firm, warm, alive. I wonder if I was like him before the crow's feet around my eyes, before the grey hairs in my beard, before losing Jane.

'What a mess,' he says, looking around.

‘Yeah, I’ve heard that a lot lately,’ I say.

‘I’ve got your dumpster outside. My Aunt Bridget works for the church. She said you needed a roll-off. You show me where you want it?’ He gestures toward the way out and begins walking outside.

I follow him towards the exit. Marcus hesitates at the vestibule and runs his hands over the deep gashes and shattered center of the door.

‘These are my fault,’ he says, touching the broken planks. ‘I was here the night of the fire; I’m a volley.’ He looks at me with a half-smile. ‘My chief still thinks I’m overzealous with the axe. Sorry about that.’

I wonder what he would say if he saw me that night, sitting among the flames, begging for their warmth, to be touched.

‘No problem,’ I say. ‘I have a plan for the door anyway.’

Marcus hops into the cab of his flatbed and maneuvers the truck to deposit the dumpster next to the building.

I wonder if he knows about Jane’s case.

* * *

I heard that on Station Island in the middle of Lough Derg there’s a cave, or a well, called St. Patrick’s Purgatory. It’s supposed to be an entrance to the realm of the dead. It was a site for pilgrimages. It still is, but in the 1600s the cave was gated and barred and no one has been allowed in since. We know about it from Medieval maps of the area and a description from a thirteenth-century journal.

Some say it was closed for safety, that people were passing out from toxic fumes. But maybe it was blocked to keep something from getting out.

I know about the immeasurable caverns beneath the world. I know I've been to hell. I know what you need to do to get out.

* * *

A few days later I'm unloading supplies in front of the chapel. Marcus pulls up behind my truck and gets out of the flatbed.

'My Aunt said you've filled the dumpster.'

'Hey, yeah. Well, at least with the clean up. You mind helping me with these?' I ask, pulling a stack of two by fours out of the truck bed.

Marcus hesitates for a moment, then takes an end of the stack and we walk them up the path into the chapel.

'I'm going to need another ten yarder as I finish the construction.'

'I can do that,' he says.

'Here is fine,' I say. We place the studs across two sawhorses I've set up as a work area.

'You know,' Marcus says, looking around the inside of the chapel. 'Some people think the fire was arson.'

'Which one?'

'What?'

'Which fire?' I ask.

'Oh, the most recent one. I was still training during the first one, but I heard it was an accident, an act of nature. Maybe a lightning strike and poor grounding,' he says.

'And the second fire?'

'Well, some believe it was set on purpose.'

‘Like who?’ I ask.

‘My Aunt, for one. And some others on the parish council.’ Marcus narrows his eyes as if he is trying to see inside me.

‘I’d like to ask you something,’ I say quietly. ‘When you, when you guys put out the fire, did you find a violin case?’

‘Why?’

‘It’s my wife’s,’ I respond. ‘I need it.’

‘For what?’

‘To put things right. To finish the job.’

‘Your wife. I heard she died. I– I’m sorry,’ he says.

It’s not a want. It’s a need. I need to finish the chapel. I need to be reunited with Jane, and after all my searching, this is the only way I know how. I don’t tell him that.

‘That’s okay. Thanks,’ I say. ‘You know, sometimes you need a chance, a second chance to set things right. Sometimes you just need to do something. Right now, this job is what I need to do.’

‘There is something else,’ he says. ‘Something you’re not telling me.’

I take two bottles of water from the case on the floor and hand one to Marcus. I open the bottle and take a sip of water and look at the ripples on the surface, the condensation on the side of the plastic, cooling, moistening my fingers.

‘This might sound strange, but I think this chapel is my chance to balance the world. When something beautiful is taken from the world, the best thing to do is put something beautiful back in it.’

Marcus shakes his head. He doesn’t understand. Not yet.

‘But what does that have to do with the violin? Is it valuable?’ he asks.

I picture Stradavari in his workshop, the smell of poplar, varnish, glue and dust. I see weathered hands gently tracing wood grain whorls, curves, edges, and planes.

‘It was her most valued possession,’ I say.

‘Well, I hate to tell you but it wasn’t in the case. I saw the case but it was empty. Never found the violin.’

‘I know her violin wasn’t in the case.’

‘Then why do you want the case? It was empty.’

‘No it’s not,’ I say.

‘What do you mean it’s not?’

‘It’s not empty.’

Marcus pauses again. He puts his bottle of water down, unopened, on the two by fours. ‘I’m just telling you what I saw. We were checking for any smoldering areas and my lieutenant found the case over by the altar. We both looked in it. It was empty.’

It’s not empty, I think. I know. It’s not empty

* * *

Albert asks me to meet him in O’Brien’s. The dim lights above the bar soak the napkins the bartender places our beers on with a pink glow. I see Marcus, sitting with a woman I guess could be his aunt, a few barstools away.

She slides off her barstool. ‘There better be another scotch for me when I get back,’ she says as she walks towards the door, cigarette already dangling from her lips.

I watch her walk outside for a smoke, her frosted blond hair, tight to her skull, short jacket flaring out at the waist where it loses to widening hips, and think of Jane. I don't think Marcus sees me.

'Maybe I was wrong,' Albert says. 'You know, maybe time's a pool,'

'Is this why you wanted to meet me? To tell me you were wrong?'

'Shut up and listen,' he says. 'This is what I'm thinking. And it's maybe going to help you.' He pauses while he takes a swig of beer. 'So time's a pool, and all things happen in the pool. Where you are in the pool makes you think of where you were before and where you are going, as if your journey was through time.'

'Well, isn't it? If you're swimming in the pool, aren't you swimming in time?'

'No. Where you are is when you are, but the when is now at all times.'

'I don't know about that,' I say. 'That would mean I could change what happened. But I can't. I know I can't change what happened yesterday, or with Jane. It's over and done.'

'No,' he says. 'You know you don't believe that. You think you can change things. You still do. But that's not what I mean. I mean, whatever it is, it's happening right now, and so is tomorrow, they just might not be happening here.'

'What are you talking about?' I ask.

'Here's the thing,' Albert says and then stops. He doesn't say anything for almost a minute. He traces the edge of the label on his bottle of beer and stares into the mirror behind the bar. 'I'm fishing and I see this leaf fall from the tree I'm under, only it's not a leaf; it's this folded up slip of oak tag in the shape of a butterfly. You know, that's weird, so I pick it up, and I see it has writing on it; so I unfold it and part is torn off, but there are

these numbers scrawled in black pen.’ He looks at me through the corner of his eye. ‘I play the numbers yesterday,’ he says and starts to smile. ‘And I win. I’m going home to become king. Just like when I was a boy.’

My knees tremble. That’s how I know Jane is here, like astronomers track the wobble showing them the center of the cluster: Sagittarius A-Star. Gravity tells me. That’s why I need her case.

* * *

The morning I reset the stained glass image of St. Sebastian in a window, a black luxury car pulls up outside the chapel. Sullivan is in a blue dress shirt and khakis. He takes off his sunglasses as he steps through the open doorway to the chapel.

‘Mr. Sullivan, it’s nice to see you here. What do you think?’ I ask, gesturing with a head nod to the rest of the chapel.

He looks at wooden framework, skeletal structure forming, melding to existing remains, reaching out, claiming space occupied for months by sky, sun, clouds, and rain.

‘Looks like you still have a lot of work to do,’ he says.

‘Well, pick up a hammer. Those joists are already cut. They just need to be fastened.’

I tack the frame of the window into place, glancing at Sullivan out of the corner of my eye.

Sullivan looks at the pile of two by fours and a makeshift table with tools laid out on it.

‘All right Mr. Teague. You aren’t the only one who can swing a hammer,’ he says and begins to roll up his sleeves.

‘Call me Steven,’ I say.

‘Peter,’ he says. ‘My name is Peter.’

* * *

There are questions being asked. Peter tells me about the council. They wonder why I should be allowed to continue the work. The suggestion is I’ve already proven unreliable. Some think they should sell the property to Davidson’s real estate group, or have a different firm finish the renovations. There are even questions about the structure itself, whether it is still salvageable, what it will take to pass inspection, if there’s an insurance policy.

But Peter asks the question that matters, ‘Why is this chapel so important to you?’

In the swing of hammers, the ring of impact on nail, there are acts of the divine, manifestations of the laws of physics, understanding will, weight, and means.

The past is irreversible. The only thing I can do about it is shape the future. Some might say the future is unknowable, but I know if I join these two boards with this nail, I will finish the frame of this wall. And I create what I predict the future will hold. And that creation grants me the resolve to say the future is not entirely inscrutable.

Being right here, right now, when the immeasurable vastness of space and time makes my existence at once infinitesimally unlikely and a necessitated certainty leads me to believe in purpose.

‘Why else am I here?’ I ask. ‘Why are you?’

Peter doesn’t reply.

‘Come outside for a moment.’ I put my hammer down and lean the frame I’ve been working on up against a column. Peter follows me outside.

I pause a few feet outside the chapel and turn to look at it outlined by cerulean sky. ‘Look at it,’ I say.

Peter turns and looks.

‘What do you see?’ I ask. It isn’t the tree of paradise spreading through the firmament but it is something beautiful, powerful, and injured. It reaches upwards as if still growing. I see branches in need of mending, pain that can be soothed, love that can be healed, grace to be shared.

‘Something that can be fixed.’ He sees it too. ‘I need to make a few calls,’ Peter says and turns towards the driveway, phone in hand.

* * *

Three days later, when Marcus arrives with the ten yarder the chapel is pulsing with activity. Peter and his wife Laura are realigning the salvaged pews, talking about a pig roast to celebrate the chapel’s opening. An older woman who introduced herself as Mrs. Henderson is planting chrysanthemums around the foundation. And twelve of the parish youth group are whitewashing the stucco.

‘Marcus! About time you got here with that dumpster,’ Bridget says, peering out from between window jambs that still need to be replaced.

Marcus’ look of surprise shifts to a smile as his Aunt continues to speak.

‘I told Father Moe the parish hall could look after itself for a few hours and came up here to help. If we’re going to have Steven rebuild the chapel, might as well pitch in.’

* * *

Marcus stays after off loading the dumpster and helps with some of the work on the roof. We work until the sun ducks behind the trees on the horizon and the parish van comes to drive Bridget and the youth group back downtown.

As the van drives off, I find Marcus sitting on the chapel steps with the violin case between his feet, I see the marks of years on its surface, the peeling edges where leather meets wood and patina dimmed brass. Everyone else has gone. The closed door to the chapel is behind him, still with its fractured center, and light from a work lamp left on glows through the cracks.

‘It took a couple of favors, but I was able to find it for you,’ Marcus says, offering the case to me. ‘It’s yours, but I hope you could answer a question for me.’

‘Sure,’ I say, reaching for the case.

‘Hypothetically, if you were given the chance to save millions or the woman you love, what would you do?’ Marcus asks.

I think of the scars on Albert’s side and wonder what Marcus will believe.

‘Is this one of those if you could kill Hitler questions?’

‘No, I’m serious. What would you do?’

‘Save the woman you love,’ I say. ‘In real life we make the selfish choice, especially when it comes to love. Why? What would you do? Would you save the woman you love or the strangers you don’t know?’

‘Both,’ Marcus says, looking off to the horizon. ‘I’d save both.’

‘And how would you do that?’

‘I’d fly around the world reversing the rotation of the Earth to turn back time.’

‘You know that’s not possible, right?’ But who am I to say what is or isn’t possible? I’ve believed in the impossible since I met Jane.

‘Yeah. I guess I’d have to ask for help,’ Marcus says. ‘I’d save one, and someone else could help save the other.’

‘But, what if they failed?’

‘I’d trust that they wouldn’t,’ he says and hands me the case.

* * *

I call Addra the next day to tell her about the chapel, about Marcus, about Albert’s fortune. I want her to come visit.

Epilogue

I dream it is the night of Jane's first performance as concertmaster.

'I don't think I can do it,' she says.

'You can do it,' I say.

'I'm freaking out. I feel like I'm drowning.'

'You're not drowning. You're fine. You're going to be fine. You're going to do great.'

'How do you know?'

'I know.'

'How?'

I put my hands on her shoulders and stare into her eyes.

'Let me tell you a story,' I say.

She looks at me with hope in her eyes. Like I'm her light in the darkness the same way she's mine.

I tell her, 'Once there was a frog that was hopping along and came to the edge of a river. He looked down the bank and up, but the river stretched as far as he could see. It blocked his path in both directions. He would have to find a way to cross.'

'In front of the frog, floating on the surface of the water, were bunches of lily pads. The frog climbed onto one and found that it supported his weight. He thought he could use it as a raft to cross the river.'

'At first, as the frog paddled away from the shore, everything seemed to be going according to plan, but as he got farther away from shore, water began to seep over the

edges of the lily pad. The frog increased his speed, but the more quickly he paddled the more water splashed on. About half way out into the river the frog began to panic. The lily pad was being covered with water. It was going to sink. He was going to drown.

‘As the lily pad gave way under him, water rose over the frog’s eyes and head. He thought he was about to die, until, completely submerged, fully engulfed by the river, the frog remembered being a tadpole, growing up beneath the surface, and realized, he was a frog. He could swim underwater. And the frog swam to the other side.’

‘That was a pretty good story. Where did you hear that?’

‘I don’t know. I just made it up.’

‘You’re a jerk,’ she says, pushing me gently.

‘I know,’ I say, smiling.

She throws her arms around my neck and presses her head into the crook between my shoulder and neck, hugging me close.

‘I love you,’ she whispers.

‘I know.’

* * *

I build her violin case into the door. Scarred leather exterior stretched over maple, curved edges, brass hardware meeting the ends of planks pitted, seared, gouged by fire, reformed, refinished, cupped to hold her, to make her part of their surface, part of the task.

I clean the coating of age and stage gum, oils and stains. But her starfish scar and a few other lines run too deep to be erased. The finish will never be perfect. And when it is finished, that makes it perfect.

* * *

A child and a mother stand in front of the door. His hand traces the edges of the case, the clasps that fasten the lid closed.

‘What’s inside?’ he asks.

‘Whatever you imagine,’ says his mother.

‘Can I open it?’ he asks.

‘Only if you have the key.’

‘Where do I get the key?’

‘It can be anyplace. For some people it’s in plain sight: for others, they need to search. Some have it handed to them with instructions. Others are just given the key but don’t even know what it is.’

‘And me?’

‘You’re going to have to figure it out yourself.’

* * *

School is out and the chapel is finished. Addra arrives in the evening the next day. It’s cool for June, but we head back outside after I show her around the building.

‘I was afraid you didn’t want to see me,’ she says.

‘I always want to see you.’

‘But not the same way I want to see you.’

She wears her hair down, half-curled into waves and troughs; it’s grown longer since we met; tight jeans, a short black jacket, the belt dangling at her hip. Dark make-up around her eyes widens them, conveying peril, secrets, and ambiguity. But her voice

proposes genuine refuge, sanctuary, and love. We sit on a bench in front of St. Michael's, talking. I feel like I've had the conversation over and over.

'So now that you're done, what are you going to do?'

'I'm not sure,' I say.

'Well, what do you want to do?'

She knows the answer to that.

'I'm not sure,' I say.

'Why not?' She asks it kindly, like I'm young, in trouble, one of her students reluctant to join the dance.

I'm not offended. I know how she cares about her kids. It reminds me of Jane. I answer her question.

'Because whatever I do, I can't get what I want,' I say. 'I finished the renovation. I finished the chapel, but I still don't... I haven't...'

'You can't always get what you want,' she says. I don't even have to turn and look at her to know she's smiling. Like she's already figured out the solution to the puzzle and is waiting to see when I will too.

'So what do you want?' she asks.

'You know what I want. It hasn't changed.'

'Hasn't it?'

'I want her back. I want Jane.'

Maybe it is years. Maybe that's what it takes to heal. Maybe it's seeing something that you haven't seen before, or maybe something familiar in a new light.

Maybe it takes the burning down of everything you have, everything you're capable of, to reach out and ask for help, and in that help to trust, to trust again.

‘So what do you need to get what you want?’ Addra asks.

‘What do you want,’ I ask. I try to turn the question to her.

‘Oh, no,’ she says, smiling. ‘This is your chapel you invited me to, your work you’re showing off. It’s your question to answer. Besides, you know my answer anyway. I’m here aren’t I?’

I pause. I look at the sky. I smirk. I know the question too.

And I say, ‘I want to give Jane what she wants.’

‘And what is it she wants?’

‘I don’t know what she wants, and I don’t know how to give it to her now that she’s gone.’

‘I think you do,’ Addra says, taking my hand, looking at the door to the chapel.

‘And I think you gave it to her.’

* * *

Before he leaves for the reservation Albert tells me if you’re lucky, you get three great loves in your life: the love of youth, the love of age, and the love of soul. And he says that if you lose one, you can never get it back. Your heart can break twice. It can break and be mended, or heal, but sometimes it doesn’t grow back right. It’s fragile after knitting its fracture, scarred. And if it breaks too badly, if the pieces are too small, you can’t fix it. There’s a certain point where there’s no going back.

Part of me knows he’s right, and at the same time he’s wrong.

‘It’s in the timing,’ he says. ‘You have to hope it happens at the right time, to give you a chance.’

‘I thought you said everything that dies comes back someday.’

‘I was lying,’ he says.

‘Then how do I know you’re not lying now?’

‘I guess you’ll just have to take that chance.’

I do.

* * *

Addra and I keep our promise to Father Moe and return to St. Michael’s for the winter holidays. A crowd gathers to sing outside the chapel after vespers. I see Marcus among the carolers. He is singing next to a petite girl in red wearing a white fur hat. He nods a greeting over the heads of the crowd when I catch his eye.

Breath steams in the cold early dusk of Advent. Snow patterns the evening sky. An audacious child at the edge of the crowd is fiddling with the door to the chapel. The latch gives way in the little boy’s hand. The violin case opens and unleashes a host of ethereal qanuk creatures. They catch the air on membranous icy wings, delicate frozen crystal antennae guiding their flight. They dance around the awestruck boy and climb into the evening. I swear one marked with ink leads them in the gyre.

Addra and I, mittened hands joined at our side, watch them swirl into the snow that billows about the carolers. No one else, other than the boy with his mouth open staring into the heavens, seems to notice. Like ice children that spin into the sky, they mingle with brethren that fall and flit in flurries.

* * *

Jane is in the snowfall, she's in the spate. Or she's in Gateot, and the boy, or Addra's smile, or the sound of wind and rain, or Gregor's dance, Cassie's fingers and hair, and the sky. Or she's in the moors, the highlands, or the gardens groves corner's webs. Or winter set summer rise, she's notes from the dulcimer n/a the mar's maids and dolphins, and grace beats trix viola jewels *et* human asymptote breakers swells echo stars lingering in chambers. Or she is of sea water and fire ode, lyric joy and prayer, my nymph, my Antiopa, the far evolution, rewrought, or raised, the far rest written in the strad, resolved in the thester, guiding, nourishing, a sign so we can better sing and sing and sing again and sing again.

* * *

A snowflake lands on my cheek, resting there for a moment before it melts.

'You're lucky I'm willing to share,' Addra says.

One lands on her face, at the corner of smiling lips.

'So is she.'

Appendix

1. Section of page 56 was first composed as a poem “lorna”: *trying to navigate by whole numbers*. Unpublished manuscript. Goddard College. 2004.
2. Sections of pages 59-60 were first written as “the tinker and his son”: a poem for Robert Carnevale’s poetry class, Drew University 2009.
3. The “Gateot” character appearing on page 61 was first conceived in a poem “gateot”: *trying to navigate by whole numbers*. Unpublished manuscript. Goddard College. 2004.
4. The description of Cassie on page 65 was first written as a poem “made from snow”: *trying to navigate by whole numbers*. Unpublished manuscript. Goddard College. 2004.
5. a section of page 68 was first composed as a poem “after seven glacial paths”: *trying to navigate by whole numbers*. Unpublished manuscript. Goddard College. 2004.
6. sections of pages 69 and 70 were first conceived as part of poem “forlorn”: *trying to navigate by whole numbers*. Unpublished manuscript. Goddard College. 2004.
7. sections of page 75 were first written as the poems “like I cannot see” and “and then she was gone”: *trying to navigate by whole numbers*. Unpublished manuscript. Goddard College. 2004.
8. sections of page 76 come from parts of the poem “passage”: *trying to navigate by whole numbers*. Unpublished manuscript. Goddard College. 2004.
9. some of the images in the Seer’s projections on page 88 come from the poem “illusion”: *trying to navigate by whole numbers*. Unpublished manuscript. Goddard College. 2004.
10. parts of pages 89-90 come from the untitled short story written for Robert Ready’s Fiction class. Drew University 2009.
11. section of page 92 was first written as a poem “bereft”: *trying to navigate by whole numbers*. Unpublished manuscript. Goddard College. 2004.

12. parts of page 93 come from sections of the poems “disappeared” and “through the bottom of a bottle”: *trying to navigate by whole numbers*. Unpublished manuscript. Goddard College. 2004.
13. the character Kate and parts of her description on page 98 come from the poem “Kate”: *trying to navigate by whole numbers*. Unpublished manuscript. Goddard College. 2004.
14. section on page 99 was first written as the poem “circle”: *trying to navigate by whole numbers*. Unpublished manuscript. Goddard College. 2004.
15. the term “electric blankets of doom” on page 115 comes from Stephen Hales in his article “You CAN prove a negative.” *Think*. Vol. 10 p109-112. Summer 2005.
16. sections of page 127 come from the poem “aurora”: *trying to navigate by whole numbers*. Unpublished manuscript. Goddard College. 2004.
17. parts of pages 139-140 were first written as an untitled short story for Robert Ready’s Fiction class. Drew University 2009.
18. parts of pages 143-144 were first written as an untitled short story for Robert Ready’s Fiction class. Drew University 2009.
19. sections of pages 146, 147, and 148 come from parts of the poem “she cries, you’ll lose love again”: *trying to navigate by whole numbers*. Unpublished manuscript. Goddard College. 2004.
20. the reference on pages 149-150 regarding the soul was written by Anemic (Heather) of Diary-X. 2003: repeated with her permission.
21. a section of page 150 come from the poem “calypso”: *trying to navigate by whole numbers*. Unpublished manuscript. Goddard College. 2004.
22. a section at the top of page 154 was first written as part of the poem “we fossilized days”: *trying to navigate by whole numbers*. Unpublished manuscript. Goddard College. 2004.
23. parts of pages 154-155 were first composed as “maelstrom”: *trying to navigate by whole numbers*. Unpublished manuscript. Goddard College. 2004.
24. a section of the description of the mountain on page 176 was first written as part of the poem “candy everybody wants”: *trying to navigate by whole numbers*. Unpublished manuscript. Goddard College. 2004.

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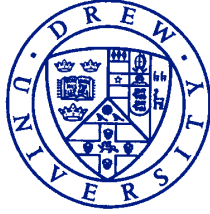
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