

prologue

(nineteen years previously)

Swoop in low over rainforest; sound of heavy breathing stifled. She must keep her child quiet; too much noise will give away where she is, may the gods help her! She is tired, too tired, so tired; maybe she could rest her head, here, for a few minutes, on this rock, behind those trees.

And that's where they found her: such a proud woman, a queen nonetheless, but just another mortal soul to have shuffled from this immortal planet. Drawn by the sound of the baby crying, she is discovered near dawn by the search party who have been tracking her since she left the harem, for she alone among the enforced and the enslaved was unfortunate enough to conceive.

She wasn't even his favourite: he couldn't even remember her among the rest, but her child was his, and what was his stayed his. This child had a future, was something special. She remembered him though, the brutal heartless man – his whims, carried out so speedily and efficiently by sycophantic subservients – the phallogocentric womaniser, harking back to the medieval days of a wench from every town. He wanted Brazilian flesh, Brazilian breast, the warm womanly smell of a wild Brazilian woman, and his whims were met.

Hunting parties, employed on a hush-hush basis, traversed the Amazon rainforest to find some suitably nubile, suitably

unknown, suitably wild women for him – after all, he was the King of Greece, and only visiting for a while, and they needed the money while they could grab it from the rich pervert.

Most of the search party had been the hunting party (good men are so hard to come by, quiet loyal men so much worse) and could remember this one, she had been vicious. Bathing in a stream, they had taken her by surprise. She screamed in incomprehension, but then they all did – she was taken to the seedy palace where the conquest would be made. She was strong, all right, the men remembered that – but what was more striking about her was her one breast, the other cleaved straight off. She was an Amazonian, a fierce hunter woman, still living in a tribe in the jungle in this age of television and buy one get one free offers. That's how they were sure it was her: that, and the newborn baby, covered in blood and screaming, held at her remaining breast.

When she had escaped he was still body bound, but now he had haemorrhaged from her, tiny baby fists grabbing, pulling on the way out, refusing to emerge alone and bringing too much with him. Maybe the birth would have killed her anyway, but the escape didn't help. She was dead and her baby, her precious baby, destined to rule her tribe, was taken from her. All she wanted was to protect him, her life force, her heir, her son.

A cold arm still clutched his writhing body.

A river trickled past, oozing lifelessness.

A man coughed, shifting nervously.

The arm was removed, and the baby picked up. Then, feeling guilty, the men left her corpse (bestial, naked, bloody) to the jungle, and went back. She was, after all, only a savage, and they had what they came for – Aneurin, son of Theseus, heir to the throne of Greece.

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Sitting quietly beside a river at low tide, knees drawn up to his chin in foetal desperation for warmth. A cold day in London, the fog blanketing the distance like cataracts. He does not care, staring forth at the Thames with a disillusionment he could not shake. Misery seeped his existence, and his breath froze in the air, and he thought about why he suddenly felt so empty. He wasn't suicidal, he realised with a relieved glance at his wrists, attempting the self-pitying pleasure of imagining himself dead. Who would come to his funeral? Would they cry? Who would be drunk, would there be press, would it be private? But he didn't want this pit of pleasure, and resolved to move out from the fug of lethargy that descended onto him.

Sweeping orchestral score; a maelstrom of dream-like collages float around him, strings muttering delicately (harmonically) to themselves, effortlessly effervescent. Mournfully chilling and plaintive. He looked out at the river, and saw the bare shores exposed to the naked eye, themselves appearing somehow unsheathed, nude. All the stones and stories under the river

suddenly came out to play, a wrecked shopping cart (students), a sodden disused pier (a throwback to better times), graffiti on the far wall (punk kids). The scene was unsettling. He didn't know why, but there was something fantastically empty and desolate about the low tide – how a waste land was revealed twice a day, but covered with exuberant life the rest of the time. And how pointless it was. That a stone spent its life underwater, being slowly scraped away and into nothingness, its only break from the monotony of its existence was an airing to the skies, which would piss rain on it or send birds to shit on it.

‘Fucking cheerful, I know,’ he said, to no-one in particular. He got up from the pavement where he had been sitting, only just noticing the slight drizzle, and strode back towards the Tube, turning down a street where the drain had blocked, leaving him to leap in a balletic pose from dry patch to dry patch. He was momentarily distracted by a flickering blue light spark into existence in a top floor window in one of the nearby flats – a minor deity, he thought, and this was confirmed when a child's giggles shone piercingly into the urban gloom.

Tonight's dinner was a social function, he wasn't exactly sure what. He was sure it would be the usual suspects of dignitaries (all of whom ironically have no dignity...the tales he heard from servants) to whom he must be polite, so smarmingly polite, oh yes, really? No! whatever did you do next? Ah, yes, the political climate is tough, especially with Jupiter in such a mood! He wasn't sure how much more he could take, particularly in his advanced state of lethargy.

Oh the miseries of teenage life! The fact he knew he was typically teenage didn't help him overcome his pubescent problems; the disaffection; the irritation; the calculated antipathy. But recently, he'd been fine, which was why his

sudden misery struck him so painfully. Since coming to London to study Essil (the language that came before the gods) at University he'd been fine, it had done him good to get away from his family and his home. There was something undeniably uncomfortable about achieving adulthood under your childhood roof, something that nagged at the corner of your mind like bass rhythms in a tinny speaker. Present, but unheard. He didn't really mind his dad all that much, and – come to think of it – he didn't really mind his mother all that much, either.

She wasn't his real mother, of course, he had never known her. But his dad's wife seemed to have a problem with him, and had made his life a living hell back in Athens. Still, she seemed to have got her way, and with typical feminine manipulativeness, she had dispatched him overseas to study. Phèdre, finally free of him, got her wicked way with the King.

Aneurin liked his dad: apparently, he had been a bit wild in his youth, but when you're young and you have money in your pocket and power in your voice, you're likely to do anything. He knew how the blood burns. Not that it excuses anything, he thought, but at least Aneurin could sympathise with his father. He knew what it was like to be placed under the charm of women. Besides, since Aneurin's birth, Theseus had been a model citizen – not just to the media, but also in reality. Fatherhood made him grow up, and the change was not unnoticed: a slow shift in popularity accompanied his slow shift to decency. In many ways, he was unlucky that the thing that made him happiest was somehow connected to his tragic past.

He hadn't known it at the time, but the truth revealed itself (as it always does through the construct of lust.) It would hardly have been polite to introduce her as sister to his first wife. Safer,

much, to give her her own sparkling name: Phèdre. The name itself seemed sensual, breathed off the tongue, with post-coital softness and devotion.

Aneurin remembered when they met: it had not been all that long ago, really, and something about their encounter stuck in his mind. He pondered what it was. She had seemed awkward and on edge: but that was understandable given her desire for Aneurin to like her. Meeting prospective step-children contained all the self-doubt, fear and loathing as a first date after months of loneliness and isolation.

Perhaps it was how, when they met, she turned her feet slightly inwards, giving her an uncomfortably round-shouldered appearance that didn't suit her elegant, slim body. Maybe it was the blood-red hue that coloured her face when their eyes met, and the way in which she kept flickering her eyes towards Theseus as if seeking his approval.

Thinking about it now, he wasn't sure if he'd made eye-contact with her since that meeting. Maybe once. At the wedding.

It was fair to say he liked her: she seemed pleasant, and she made his father happy. That was enough for him, but things got complicated after the marriage. The baked meats did coldly furnish the wedding buffet. A crystal glass was approaching three-quarters full of amber champagne. The happy couple swung in each other's arms as their rings on their fingers glinted. The public outcry at the break with tradition, for a King to remarry, and especially to make that vow outside the Vault of the Gods, was tempered by Aneurin's public blessing of the ceremony.

If the child with legal primogeniture rights had no problem with the union, why should the public?

But six weeks later, Aneurin was in London, his head somewhat spinning at the course of events.

Home was a small basement flat. His father had wanted something more grandiose, but Aneurin liked to keep things small: save the big things for dreams. He spent all his days dreaming and his nights awake, too consumed by his own thoughts to sleep and too tired to make his daydreams a reality. (an all action plan never put into practice.)

Aneurin liked wiling time away looking at people's ankles as they passed on the street above his flat, finding something beautiful in the stories they told, and the tales he made up for them. Those heels? An important client...odd socks? An unorganised bank clerk...shoelaces untied? A fashion statement. There was something comforting about these tales, particularly when he made them up from his underground bunker. Safety. Snug. He got back and let himself in, inadvertently kicking the pile of junk mail into a scattered mess. Somewhere in that pile were directions for tonight's social.

First things first, though, he thought. There's only one way to really get through this evening: he slid on polished floors into his room, slipped a special CD into his equipment and sat on the floor between his audio paraphernalia, which loosely resembled two speakers.

The music started to play, and something unusual happened. As the sound waves burst forth from their metallic enclosures, they became visible, as if some amber particle hung upon them. Like dust caught in sunlight, the sound dances to Aneurin and settles on, saturates him. Aneurin breathes in this dust of the gods, having invoked Apollo, the god of music, and achieves a state of mind he can only describe as coloured blue. He experiences music, lost in the masturbatory act of musical

appreciation, but remains guilt-free because of the pleasure he knows the traveller, whom he sometimes meets, derives from their meeting. He lets his mind wander: blue, green, empty, khaki. Blue. States of mind consume him. He worked out that perfection equalled:

(state of mind) x ((visual input) + (audial input))

e.g.

(confusion) x ((moonlight on + (mockingly triumphant
frosty fields) pre-chorus))

With this realisation, he began to swim; he imagined himself trapped between the atoms in a violin string (those emotional teases) but soon realised he wasn't trapped between atoms but between worlds and the vast interplanetary spaces became him, and all he knew was he had to consume the electrons orbiting these planet-atoms. He met someone, another traveller like himself, and with an epic ambience roaring into existence around him, he spoke:

I SAW A MAN PURSUING THE HORIZON;
ROUND AND ROUND THEY SPED.

I WAS DISTURBED AT THIS;

I ACCOSTED THE MAN.

“IT IS FUTILE,” I SAID,

“YOU CAN NEVER –”

“YOU LIE,” HE CRIED,

AND RAN ON.

He bid him adieu, my liege!

For some reason, he felt this traveller was important, to be

revered, perhaps even worshipped, and he showed him the respect he deserved. He never spoke, but Aneurin knew him to be a traveller. From where he came, Aneurin did not know; nor did he know why he was visiting this world, why he worked his power through music, why he made Aneurin's state of mind ocean blue using the dust of the gods. Their dust couldn't be manipulated.

Aneurin had no control over what he said to the being, this power, but every time he spoke, he died, and every time he awoke from his hallucinogenic stupor, he was reborn.

He continued his journey – but this was a travel of reality, he rued as he showered and dressed smartly, but at least the rest of the evening's pleasantries should pass a bit quicker. Hey, maybe Aricie had been invited too – that would make the evening less of a waste of time.

Aneurin paused at the door to check the address where he was heading towards: he'd have to get the Tube to Maida Vale, then a taxi from there. He left, heading back up the stairs to rejoin the bustle of existence, a brisk breeze clearing his mind slightly as he turned the corner at the end of the road.

Back at the apartment, attention shifts to a now ringing phone, and the overly bulky answering machine. A woman's voice (concerned, out of breath, tearful):

'Ani? Are you there? Aneurin? Pick up...something terrible has happened...'