

Miss Fortune

τήν ξένην...δουλίῳ ζυγῷ ...ἔμοι ξυνέσπετο

A hazy awareness tethers me to the scene unfolding. A silken thread of consciousness, like that of a spider's web, is hastily spun to flesh out the carcass where my personality has been scraped out and hastily patched with these empty terms. τήν ξένην...δουλίῳ ζυγῷ...ἔμοι ξυνέσπετο. The foreigner...yoke of slavery...she follows me.

I stay seated as Agamemnon, with feigned humility, picks his path down the bright crimson tapestry rolled out before his feet. I imagine it oozing under his tread, blood of my Trojan brothers and sisters, spilt to steep his tapestry in; just so he could be treated like a king.

What struck me was that the carpet wasn't the muddied red of congealed, dried blood, blood left on the streets as a reminder of deaths already wrought. That colour demanded reverence. Instead, the alarming red of a fresh wound, borne from violence and encouraged to bleed out. This colour was instead an unmissable warning.

An expectant call reared its head above the contending voices of my reverie, demanding attention. A name. My name. A name I'd come to distance myself from, having not heard it spoken aloud in so long. Instead, I had become synonymous with 'τήν ξένην'. The foreigner.

A woman looked at me, eyes alight with curiosity and amusement. The air around us hung heavy with anticipation, and my spine straightened imperceptibly. Still looking at her, I drank in her sharp features and permissive smile. I didn't dare move or do anything, for fear of extinguishing the flame I had unwittingly kindled. I felt a deep spark of connection. I saw comprehension etched into the lines of her face.

United in experience. Tied with injustice. Bound by anger. Chained from birth. Condemned in utero to bear the burden of truth, but never able to relieve ourselves by passing it to another. Imprisoned in the knowledge that we will be consistently proven right and ignored in spite of it. An act of defiance, the willing embrace of ignorance which leaves us untouched. Our bodies explored, exploited. Our minds left pristine, virginal. In that moment, I neglected to see a woman stood before me, but the defining collective experience of womanhood incarnate.

She was here to save me.

I could sense that she expected something from me. A response? Maybe she needed me to exercise my mind? Could she possibly be the first willing ears to truly receive a prophecy of mine? She might be the first to regard me as more than a mere artefact rescued from the spoils of war - dusted off and pocketed by a stranger. As more than an accessory to a man I knew nothing of. A finishing touch, an adornment. Capable of completing others, incapable of doing anything to save myself. But she was here to save me. None of that mattered anymore.

But the air grew stale around me. A distinct change had occurred whilst I was lost to my speculations. As if following a fictitious flock of birds, I threw scattered glances into the sky, trying to attribute this change to something I could observe, rather than the onset of a prophecy which could bring nothing but suffering. Moments later I had placed it.

The Furies danced sickeningly on the roof of the palace.

Returning to her gaze, I found it to be imbued with contempt previously absent from her expression. The lines of comprehension around her eyes had retracted back into her face, the wealth of mutual understanding I had perceived seconds ago now seemed to have been robbed from me, no longer mine to spend to my advantage.

Although neither of us had moved, I felt as if distance was pushing me further away from her, enlarging her domain of separation and simultaneously complicating communication. Even if I knew how to respond

to her now, it would not be me she heard but anonymous echoes, so far removed from the agent they would be devoid of meaning.

She turned away from me, and the words she spoke were laced with poison. This time, it was her words that sought to estrange me, calling on a man to ‘φράζε καρβάνω χειρί’ (show exotic handsigns) in order to communicate with me. No longer a woman, now a foreigner.

Stripped of my femininity, now a threat. Now the concubine of her husband. No longer a sane, rational being, but a creature defined by otherness. A stranger. A mad woman, with malicious whispers in my ears. I was now villainous in my victimhood. The agent in my paralysis.

In her I had seen an escape, but as she strode down the red carpet rolled out, the light refracted the red hue onto her palms. And it dawns on me that her hands will be stained with the same dye used to colour the carpet. I now see my imminent end projected before me with intense clarity.

Apollo. Nominally, I could pin my misfortune on him. He who cursed me because I refused to surrender my body to him. Apollo, I can blame. Ajax, who dragged me from the Altar of Athena and raped me, is also to blame. He who brought me to Agamemnon, who then brought me here as his prize.

And finally, surprisingly, Clytemnestra. She will be the final perpetrator of my misfortune. From whom all I wanted was to be seen as a person. She delivered the final blow – unable to see me as anything but the mistress of her husband. And so, I shall pay the ultimate price for this, a crime I had no part in, at the altar of female hostility.

Slowly, I get up and begin to walk. I don't halt in the doorway before I pass over the threshold. Hesitant steps won't slow the onset of my destiny. I know the steps I take will never be retraced.

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The fighting cry beside me isn't easily quietened. This gives me the chance to put up a fight, escape my destiny, but I remain still. I remain impassive. Silent even before I am silenced by that fatal blow, delivered by those unabashedly bloodstained hands. A superfluous sacrifice, in atonement for another man's crimes. A sacrifice to recompense for the sacrifice ordered by the man who now lies on the floor beside me. A third party, sucked into the family misfortune of the house of Atreus.

But my real punishment is not in death, but in always being seen as a woman above a person, a prophet, a priestess; as Cassandra.