

*LIVES BEING RELIVED*

# HERMETIC

*EYES*



INGLADIBUS ROOK

# Chapter I: Island of Souls

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The names rang true to the end of the hour. What was the purpose of life? The man by the boat asked me, and it rang true. It ranged the depths of the blue, purported in the very front of my eyes. By the time I entered a house that was unlikely to be built for me, there were three men, their feet hanging by a vine. The vine had grown wildly from the ceiling of the house. Their bodies were entangled, their legs wrinkled a pair above one another. In hindsight, they seemed like the five-legged beast the fascists were so afraid of. One that crept up one's dream and haunted the remainder of their life. The first man spoke in candor, and the second spoke by names I hadn't heard. I could hear a pattern from the second bite. It was three words being spoken over and over again that drove me insane. The third one hadn't spoken as I was already outside, seeking fresh air.

I didn't have problems the first week settling in, apart from the constant crashing of the sea waves that bloated the inside of my eardrums, precisely the left one. It had been loose before I got here, a fact, though I couldn't imagine, living in quietness would drive one-half deaf. Was it the way of the world? To be a man without the surrounding was to be a half-broken man? They ripped whatever was left of my soul. They wanted to make a monster out of me, but I couldn't simply accept their idea. I had a bearing of my own, a motive, ever so sweet it was to have purposes.

Until that very day, I still couldn't go to the main room. I could hear them hanging by the vine. I had to drill a hole from outside that led straight to the bedroom. *I had to*, I swore. I couldn't bear looking at those three entangled men in the living room. Only the rain would make me feel as livid since the water could come heavily into the bedroom, and I had to clean it always in the morning. The cloud brought the

precipice, and I had no choice but to fight the thunder. It was always that way. Three safe nights and four days of rainstorms, a pattern associated strictly with that island every week.

I wanted to explore once. But the thought dashed through my mind, slipping away after hours of waning the crashing waves on the coastline. I read through the waves and found fish. They were all staring at me, "Mycah." They hissed once; I swore that I had not gone mad. I went to the doctor who resided right over the hill. The only person I spoke to on the damned island. The doctor was not kind. She had administered me with remorse. She talked every time I visited, and it was never the kind talk. It was always about me and my past, something I had long forgotten. I always thought the doctor was gaslighting me. She, too, wanted to make a monster out of me, so I persevered. I resisted.

Just like many hours of the world and just like Alexander conquered the world, I became brave. It was only after my last visit with the doctor. That day, I was endorsed with supplements for youth. I was probably 39 years old, but I had the spirit of Amun's priest. I felt it within me, the rich energy overflowing. It was the same energy that flew through the ventricles of Alexander. It was the very same energy that went powdered upon the Eucharist or the matrimony between young princes and princesses. With an immediate alarm, I ran straight to the beach, and the fish started talking more.

"Mycah," they screamed more. However, the recursion ended with a base case of another name in their glistened mouth. "Hya pol," I heard them saying, though I was unfamiliar with the latter. The second word of the sentence. Just like the second coming of the savior. I watched the world sink into the drowsy flames of greed and vengeance. Of love for their country. Of the devil prince being resurrected to the zenithal. I saw him standing on the very top of the world. Sat in front of him, an infernal chair made out of the marrow of the backbone that belonged to

a false prophet. A prophet whose life had been spent sitting on a chair, spewing lies and hatred upon the tablecloth. It was only then the followers and their kind realized he was not the savior the world was obliged. He was only a man. He, too, had sins, however not original. If birth gave sin, then that man gave many sins. His children were the comeuppance of the false-eyed one. The one who spoke of the horns. “Hya pol,” said the fishes, but that time around, their call woke me up from daydreaming.

Upon the gardening of my swollen eyes, out of the furthest water in the vicinity where the sunlight was cut off from the Earth, a great serpent, or perhaps dragon—I was dumb to be able to tell the difference—jumped like a whale looking to breathe. The beast had golden fangs or yellow teeth, and once more, I couldn’t separate one from another. The yoke to the reefs by the coast, a pang to the fishes that swam there. Guile took over my body, and I found myself walking to the ocean. I was praying; let *me walk* because the gods wouldn’t let me speak. Once men had been forsaken by their own, even the gods wouldn’t spare another glance. At the bleak of my walk, I felt the surge of the water as I descended upon the cold sea. The dream had lied to me, the prophecy was a strung-out guitar, and the prophet was a mere instrument to a grander scheme, and I was one of their victims, or perhaps I was the only victim. “One could only lose to two things” I remember the man with a golden helmet saying that. “Either you believe in too deep or you are simply too stupid,” I continued the rest of the words. Weird, it was the depths of the ocean that reminded me of someone I hadn’t thought of for a long time. The living memory was sweet, but the opposite was not, for I was destined to be in hell since that day while the man was sent to heaven if they did exist somewhere within the capsule of the world.

Was it a capsule, though? Men in my time believed it would simply be a challenge against the gods. How could the brave Atlas lift a capsule? It



didn't make sense for the screwed heads, but the theory prevailed. Bends in time had proven impossible to be possible. Even the old gods couldn't tell. They were busy in their eminence and indulged their living in our world because heaven was surely created out of despair. The absence of heaven would be the absence of the year that would soon come, and there would be swarms of bees, as the lord of flies wouldn't ponder and sit in silence. Zero, they named the period. Empty, the world was pitted between their games. What if they faced discord amongst their ranks? Wouldn't hell simply be a better version of heaven for people who sinned? If so, why would the lord of the Bees break arms against the lord of the Flies? Obviously, they weren't competing for the best of the best. Instead, they had been orchestrated to decide who had the most sting, the sharp edge of a bee's tail or the loud wasps of the fly's wings? One was lethal, while the other was tactical, but both were as hostile. In their last years of fighting, a new world would be made. A brave new world, like one preceding the great flood Gilgamesh had slept over the course through, or when the twin statues were torn into pieces, like the card games the bright people would invent. I couldn't say more or see more. I was blinded by the depths of the ocean and nullified by the coldness of it. There and then, I drifted to sleep.

Waking up, I woke up in my bed. It was dead of the night, and I felt something was missing. The energy that had been there was then gone. It had disappeared swiftly into the night, like the white-bearded man who would come from the tile of my floor, creeping on little boxes. Then I heard for the first time someone calling my name, "Mycah," but with a voice I didn't recognize. It came from the living room where the three crooked men were. It had to be the voice of the third man. The voice was croaky, loud, and somehow imperative. It attracted the attention of my body as I found myself clinging to the door connected to that room. I didn't open it, but I hugged it. I had sworn that I would never open that damned door, but I was tempted. I was tempted to see

the owner of the lonely voice that seemed to call to me. With a saggy tune suddenly playing, probably the broken record player, I opened the door rhythmically. Every creak of the door was in time with the timing of the snare drum. I saw it through the hallway. I saw their legs dangling, slightly tilted, though I couldn't see their bodies. A wall was blocking the view. I swore their heads were supposed to be far away when all of a sudden, a face I saw the first day I entered the house appeared. A voice called out to me, "Mycah," and my visions betrayed me as I lost myself in a blackout.

The day my consciousness was away from my terrestrial body, I dreamed of something gritty yet vast and insightful. I saw a castle burning and a revolution brewing. People gathered in the line of a gun's sight, and the collateral bullet went through their heads. But when those same people whose heads had been laid down in the underground tomb, shelved like lab items belonging to some madman in the eastern part of my home, I didn't scream. Even worse, when the heads opened their eyes with no bodies tethered, I only felt relief. I saw it to be the same. They were victims of a rule. A rule no one was afraid of, but honor compelled them to be. The sun came out in that rare dream where I saw the leader of all rules being slashed by a gruesome machine. The head was fabricated out of fibers which in turn the fibers were made out of tissues, and the tissues were made out of cells, not wood. The cells stemmed from an even smaller cellular thing that bounded the existence of everything. It was even later when a man with a brown coat and hazy mind who didn't claim to be envisioned by the gods eventually discovered that. That was the most significant discovery of the universe's scheme. It was the opposite for the ones who claimed to be descended from the gods. If the gods would lay that low to plunge themselves into profiles of madness, why should we follow the rule of their right and wrong? Shouldn't we behead the gods if the same rule would cost our heads, just like the one who wore a

distinctive white wig and impeccable gluttony that got beheaded earlier? I didn't know the meaning of the dream. The moment I escaped would be the most remarkable tale ever told to mankind or not.

The following day, I finally woke up. I was greeted by the face of the doctor who resided over the hill. I realized that I was also seated on the sofa by the living room, and I saw no vines and the three men. So, I asked the doctor in turn, "Did you see anything when you found me?"

The doctor only smiled and shook her head before saying, "No. I'm sorry."

"What are you saying sorry for?" I asked because I could not comprehend the meaning.

"Your past. Your future on this island. Simply, everything I'm accountable for."

I suddenly felt shivers running down my spine upon hearing her words. I hadn't known the doctor knew about my past. I didn't understand either what she meant by everything she was accountable for. Was she involved in my past mistakes? But the notion of being afraid of my future, that too I was afraid. I simply didn't like the island. I had no idea why I arrived here. It was as if I only started thinking the moment I stepped on the island. As if I was just a vassal to the gods before I entered the island of consciousness. Perhaps, that was the island of souls. The same dead dwarves would swim in, searching for their souls. Or perhaps, I had been simply inhumane or a monster. I was insane for being unable to differentiate the two. If a human was not acting like a human, could they be a monster? Or perhaps, a slave? Since I swore, I remember they were lower than humans, but that didn't apply to the island. The island carried souls, and it didn't matter who you were or what you were; you were simply a butterfly in a cage. You weren't waiting to be freed; you were waiting to be sold into heaven or hell. The more you sin, the lower your bidding. Perhaps, the visions of mine were me being accounted for living a life as a whore. Only tell

people what their silver wanted them to see. But how was it fair? I had Death visit those who'd paid more. Men couldn't think the obvious, so they had their money out, and I provided it in return. Was I a whore for telling them the truth? I was seldom a victim of impunity, though most of my words bred their calamity.

Nonetheless, they were never satisfied. I meant those who came only to learn their impending doom, unlike the charming man with the golden helmet. He was hot-headed, just like the gates he died in, but he never once complained about his fate. I had told him, "Oh mighty one, 'tis only a granting from above." I heard some of his men soon after screaming, "you sun whore!" but only to be stopped by the man with the golden helmet. I loved him, and I sent him to his death. Perhaps that was another reason I ended up on that island of souls. Perhaps, I, too, was searching for his soul and wanted him to return to the world of living. Perhaps too many, never absolute.

The great misery became lesser when something actually happened on the island. A piece of comfort came when I saw the North Star, pointing to an abandoned farm high on the hill within an uncharted forest. A flip of a coin would soon be betted on. The ants and the deers would also like to know to whom would the star give birth? A fickle bastard that erected stones or a wise shepherd who brought down the stones? It was more ancient than I thought it would be. I ran to where the star led me. I found a baby who sat on a cradle, and it was lovely. I held him in my arms, close to my chest, like a mother who fed their son with breastmilk. I sensed some familiarity, though I could not comprehend. I didn't realize I was so stupid until I went away with the baby and sheltered him inside my house when something insidious happened. The baby cried every time I placed him in a crib in my wet bedroom. A rainstorm was razing the hole in the wall, torrenting it with a great flood. It was peculiar since the baby was dead silent outside when the rain was spraying his tiny face, but there was no way I would



let the baby sleep outside. Perhaps, I should let the baby sleep in the living room instead. I could put on the record player and sing him a couple of tunes. I sauntered to the living room while the baby kept on crying.

When I had a glimpse outside in the hallway, something majestic occurred from afar. I saw giraffes in line with the triumph of proud elephants. I saw tigers in union with lions. Though I couldn't see a single bee or a dragonfly, perhaps they were still fighting one another with their liege. I was impressed, and following my instinct, I held the baby high, allowing him to see what was happening outside. However, the circus was simply not amusing enough for him. He didn't stop crying, but I didn't care. In the ceiling above me, I could see a vine. I swore that the vine hadn't been there before. Regardless, I could use the vine to hang the baby so that he could enjoy the scenery while I took something in the living room, perhaps the record player.

I walked to the living room where the record player had been. I had complete trust in the vine to keep the baby hanging. The cries weren't stopping, so I knew the baby was fine. I opened a drawer in the kitchen when I suddenly wanted to brew a coffee but didn't know how to. Alas, I had my finger cut, and then there was silence. The baby had stopped screaming. It was a mixed sensation of both relief and pain. The relief came from the tranquility, while the pain came from the wound of the cut. I saw through the window, and the animals were still at it. The dark and hazy environments made it hard to see their colors, but I saw a flash of something. Something large where the animals were heading to. It had red lights flickering, and from it came a loud sound, like the heaviest trombone ever sounded, that I had to cover both ears. The sound deafened my hearing for a while, but when my hearing came back, I started to hear the baby crying once more. I couldn't believe it. I needed to take a break and catch some breath, but then the electricity went down, and I heard no other sound apart from the baby's cries. I

couldn't feel any air flowing. When suddenly, I heard something moving behind my left. I was terribly afraid. So afraid that I didn't dare to look behind, so I waited for the moment to pass by. When suddenly, I heard it unexpectedly very close to my right ear, a hiss sounding, "Mycah." I screamed while flailing around my arms to push whatever or whoever that was. The panic pushed me into the floor, and once more, my vision betrayed me as the world went pitch dark, but one thing I noticed before dozing off was that the baby had stopped crying.

It was hot when I woke up. I was in a temple, and everything felt strange, from the rotten odor to the strange flowers scattered on the ground, and there was an altar. A sermon was being held, but I could not hear the words as my ears roared in ache. The person of wisdom wore white robes; he was young and fit and had eyes blinding like the sun. "Under his care, the forests grew," suddenly someone spoke inside my head. I heard it as a twilight of my own voice. The voice sounded heavy with a layer of another high-pitched man; it was truly like a choir.

However, darkness came sweeping as the disturbance of it. I was transported outside the temple, and I saw the scenery. The lush brown vegetation painted the landscape, and I saw rivers plunging through the landslide. Outside the temple was a vast market, and I saw people dressed in antiques. They were carrying baskets, water buckets, and some hugging crops. Unlike the island, the place was buzzing with activities, and it was not despair that I felt there. It felt like home like I had always belonged there. That was at least until I was reminded of my past when I saw soldiers with hoplons. They were yellow with red branded marks, while the soldiers themselves wore red capes and brown clothing. In their lead, they had installed a man with a golden helmet. He was the same person that I had seen many years prior. He was the man I loved, and oh, how I loved him. I ran to him, but when I tried to hug him, my body went through his. I was phased out of reality that, I noticed. I was distressed, but that didn't stop me. I was a ghost,

not a monster. I followed him back inside the temple, and then I saw the unmasking of the mysterious helmet man. I gasped in surprise; he had the face of my former lover, Leo. The appearance convoluted things as I struggled to escape the living nightmare. Was I still inside a dream, or was it another dream, or was I really there? Was that the reality I had been in? I was quizzical.

The answer came after I blinked, and when my eyes were ajar, I returned to my bedroom on the island's house. I heard the baby crying again, but his voice was from the hallway, and as far as I could recall, something was there. Calling me, "Mycah." I was tempted to leave the baby there, but I could not be that cruel. That was not the monster they would transform me into. I opened the bedroom door slightly and saw the passage was safe. I saw the baby was still hanging by the vine, so I immediately ran to him and unleashed him from his natural chains. "Mycah," a voice suddenly came, and I didn't bother to look as I had already sprinted to the bedroom with the baby, luring the owner of the voice to the door. I sat down, blocking the door, and the owner of the voice was banging on the door in reps. I barely woke up, and I felt my energy shimmering. I felt every dent of the door due to being knocked out harshly in my back, and it felt like a painful stab. The person who believed himself to be inspired by Alexander had felt the same; twenty times he had been stabbed, and not even he could outlive cats. The pain grew worse when I felt scratches on my hand. My teary eyes couldn't see clearly, but I saw the baby and his putrid manner. He had his hands stretched out and his fingers clawing the skin on my right hand. He kept crying until my skin was peeled off, and blood came flowing out of it. Again, in one of those rare moments, the baby stopped crying, and I had reached my limits. With a painful shriek, I dropped the baby to the floor more harshly than I should have. I didn't have an aid kit to address the wound in the bedroom, it was back in the kitchen, but I could not run to the kitchen. It was too risky. So, I sat there in disbelief. It had

reached a point where I found things to be unfair and unbefitting to my name. Something told me that it was more than my name. Perhaps, my past was linked with all of that, but I could not remember any of it. I only remembered my former lover, who wore a golden helmet. And that, too, he was reminded thanks to the dreams I had been having.

*Kings died of dysentery, and Queens died in the beds of red sheets.* In rare moments of fairness, kings would sometimes die in bed of red sheets too. But it was never the other way around. The world revolved, and it seemed the two never mended the broken rift. Kings died to pave the way for another king or queen. Queens stood there watching and sometimes dying. I was a queen in my own right. That island, technically, was my dominion. I had all the animals as my realm. They had vowed to serve me as their rightful liege. I only wished I could speak to them as Solomon had done in his hour of change. I wished I could be granted more miracles. I would love to transport me somewhere else, away from that island. I knew my stay would be in perpetuity. I had no love lost in my past. Hence I could not remember anything from it. Beyond the shadow of my mind, I kept it locked somewhere, though I had lost the key. Perhaps I was too lifeless to remember a thing, and maybe I, too, needed the vine to keep me hanging in the balance with sanity. Perhaps I was, too, the baby who would always cry in moments of comfort.

During the third month, I had gotten used to most of it all. The island, the hanging men, the vines inching even closer to my bedroom door from the living room, the rainstorms, the baby's cries, even the wounds that malevolent thing kept on causing every time I held it. I got used to the deafening sound that crashed upon the rocks at the beach, and I got used to the voice calling my name, "Mycah." The voice never approached me, but I knew that it was waiting for me to come out and approach them instead. There were two things I had never gotten to experience again, however. The vision of the animals seeking shelter to

the large thing that appeared two months earlier and the fishes that spoke to me. Yes, the animals never appeared again. I didn't see any signs of life in the forests anymore. I couldn't hear the birds, the waterfall, or the ants. They were all dispersed following that event. I believed that would be the last straw of my sanity. The only thing that reminded me that I was human was the baby who had the face of an angel yet had the behavior of the selected heir from the bloodline of the dark architect. I had marks around my right hand by then. I was cursed, I swore. Perhaps, I had done something cruel in the past with my right hand.

The fish had stopped talking to me. It was when one day, the fish seemed to be in a gathering. I approached the shore and saw them, in a flock altogether, circling something with ashen color. It was a burnt basket. I reached my hands out, and the fish had smiles on their faces. I thought they would talk once more, but they didn't. Inside the basket, I found a book. It had golden pages, and an emerald stone was embedded on the cover of the book. The book, strangely, only had writings in every three pages. The first two pages within the set of three were all empty. However, the meaningful pages all held something of value. The truth of the universe. Mathematics, deep insight into human behavior, and astronomy.

It was mysterious at first glance, especially during the preface. In the preface, written the following words: *"In memory of Diophantus, Aristotle, and The Almagest. Hereby, in the sanctum of the Nile, I had written down the very last of the readers' fates, twice over."*

I could tell the book was ancient. The mathematics side of the book didn't have knowledge of modern science. It was very naive as it didn't believe in the unreal despite the quadratic functions that had been written all over the place had an allusion to it. Like the entailing of the shadows being chased, the same way humans rejected things their forefathers had seen prior or the same way humans corrupted their



guidance though the guide had been written from facts, the outdated tended to do so. The book was the clarity I had so long needed. It gave me something to think about. The pattern of the number three.

I thought about how the pattern matched some madness within the island. There were three hanging men, three names written in the preface of the book, and three pages for every written text. However, that only answered a little. It didn't answer why the baby was there, why the North Star guided his arrival, why the animals sought shelter during the thunderstorm, why I encountered strange dreams, and why my former lover, one wearing a golden helmet, appeared in different dreams. None of it made sense.

I spent around two weeks finishing the book, though there was some part I didn't understand. The astronomy side was insufferable, and I could not read any longer before suddenly the baby started waking up and crying again. I approached him with an open mind that time around and held him close to me when a thought struck me. He never had a name, and I had never cared to give him one. Alas, the time was up, so I thought of names to call him. I asked him, perhaps I could seek his response, "Now what say you, David?" But the baby cried louder than before. "Peter?" Still crying out loud. "Jarvis?" What a bad name, and the baby agreed with his warcry. "Alexander?" It still cried. "Diophantus?"

I eventually tried every name I could think of, all famous figures. Dante, Roger, Clark, Steven, Richard, Saladin, Baldwin, George, Reinhart, Constantine, Alfred, Attila, and many other names until two hours after listing the names, I came to an abrupt end when the baby's cries became softer. I repeated the last name, "Isaac?" However, the baby was still peeling my skin, so I prompted another, "Ishmael?" But the cries were as soft as before, and he remained peeling my skin. In a desperate voice, I called out, "Abraham." There it was. His chosen name. He had stopped crying and rested his hand back on his body, leaving my hand untouched. Abraham, it was decided. It was funny, to say the least.

Abraham was the one who brought down statues made out of stones. Was it truly funny?

Following the name-giving day, Abraham stopped crying, and the island was bliss. The three hanging men were still outside, but at least the crying had stopped. The fish started to gather more frequently, too, by the beach. On that very eventful morning, I decided to take Abraham for a walk. We had grown very close to one another; he had stopped hurting me. Perhaps, a name was all he had been crying for. I was glad I could give it to him. On the quarter of our walk, we were interrupted by the gurgling of the fish next to us. I saw them gathering once more like that day the book was given to me. I approached them, but Abraham started crying before I could realize it. I looked at him and realized that the tears weren't really tears. They were rather the same color as the sand where I stepped on. It flowed like the Rubicon and the tidings of the Aegean. I knew there and then that the visions came back to me. I felt an energy burst inside my body. The same energy I had felt during my early stages on that island. I saw flames on the horizon. The flames were smothering a boat, a galley more like, and a man with a thousand struggles stood high on the hull of the galley. He was tired; I felt it. His back was slightly hunched, and I could see the weights around his neck. Then, the fishes each took the form of a human, and they gathered around me. My hair grew twice as long, and they grabbed me by the hair. I was drowned at first, then they tied me to a chariot. The owner of the chariot was seen underwater, his mouth was singing, and his hands were holding a lyre. I could not hear him sing, but I could tell he had impassiveness on his face. He wore a fancy purple attire with a crown on top of his head. The fish-turned-men then said harmoniously with a spectrum of pitched voices, "Can you tell me who the man is?"

The name was at the tip of my tongue, but I could not spell it out. So, I said in my heart instead that perhaps it was Abraham. However, they thought I was wrong. One rode the chariot away, punting my sides to

the ground. Then, I received a blessing of knowledge. I knew exactly who that man was, so I shouted the name, "Nero!" They stopped, and my eyes were sandy, but I was not tearing sand.

The fish-turned-men encircled me, and they claimed, "By the second and right before the same experience, you were also this smart." They let me go after saying.

I did not understand the meaning of their words, but I was glad that the suffering had ended. I stood up in pain; my left hand held my left side. The pain was unbearable; there were moments when I struggled to breathe. I went to Abraham to check if he was okay, and it seemed he was sleeping quietly. I rocked him, and Abraham woke up. However, his eyes had stones in them. I feared it as cataracts, but surely an infant could not conceive them. I blew his eyes with my mouth, perhaps it was just the dust, but the stones remained inside his eyes. Suddenly, my sides gave up, I could not breathe, and I felt lifeless. I was still alive, but I could not move my body. Perhaps, that was what a coma felt like.

Waking up, I was in the bedroom. I heard something moving in the hallway, so I looked at the bedroom door. I saw the door being overridden by lush green vines. The vines had finally reached the bedroom, and I was scared out of my mind. I heard a big rumble stop outside the door. I waited and waited; I could hear breathing loud and clear as if the door was an amplifier. I assumed it was the three hanging men approaching the door. They seemed to only move with the vine. Now that the vines had reached the door, they could move to it. It would be days before they could finally open it, perhaps.

It was only at night time when I finally heard them speaking. It was the exact three words being repeated by the second man when I first met them the first time. However, that time it was more clear despite my ears being deafened.

*Shen. Apol. Hafknutmers.*

I knew it had to be the second man talking those three words. The first man, that only spoke in candor kept saying, "They took you for vengeance." While the third one, one that I never saw his face, was repeatedly saying something that I could not make clear because he was shy. He seemed to be the most distressed out of the three. The three kept repeating the name "Moses." That night, I didn't get a single sleep.

Moses. Moses. Moses. Moses. Moses. Moses. Moses.

My energy waned out the following morning as a result of being sleep deprived. The three hanging men were still at it, but I would not let them disturb my routine. I went out with Abraham; he was sleeping soundly. My walks were slow, and my eyes were as heavy as the visions that had me thinking. I went out to seek the doctor who resided over the hill. The climb to the hill was very tiring; it felt steeper than it had ever been before. The moment I reached the summit, I sensed something heavy lingering in the air. The hill didn't look tall, but I saw clouds covering the plain. It felt suffocating, and I didn't think Abraham would be appreciative, but he didn't complain. The North Star that brought Abraham appeared only East from that hill, alongside the abandoned farm. I never questioned once whose farm it was, but then I thought that perhaps the farm was owned by the lady doctor. I saw her house, the pillar of rusted gold was its walls, and the foundation seemed too strong. I approached the door only to be greeted immediately by the doctor. She seemed to know that I was visiting.

"Good morning! Please," she directed us to enter her house.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you," I started upon sitting on the sofa in her office. It was a red sofa, and I held Little Abraham. I saw the doctor only shook her head, implying that I wasn't a bother, but how could I truly tell? That was early in the morning, and Abraham was crying as usual, though at that time, he wasn't scratching.

"Who is this little baby?" she asked me, eyeing suspicion.

“I found him months ago. He is Abraham, though sometimes the ants called him Abe,” I explained in excitement, only to realize how ridiculous that sounded, so I remedied, “I mean, I sometimes call him Abe.”

“You have no need to explain that to me, but good,” she said, sharpening her eyes. “I mean, good name, Little Abe,” she continued as if she had been caught slacking. Honestly, I wouldn’t be able to tell either if she was hiding something anyway.

“So, what brought you here?” the doctor asked me.

“I wish to consult about things. I fear this is something I should’ve consulted many months ago already,” I spoke with a slight discomfort. Judging from her eyes, the doctor could tell that I was, too.

“Is that so? Then please, go on.”

“When you found me blacking out that day months ago, I saw things that I didn’t know existed,” I took a long breath before resuming, “I-I saw–” I couldn’t bring up the description. I didn’t know how to explain it to the doctor.

“Are you okay? Would you like tea?” she offered me, and I could use one desperately. I found my throat to be sore, and my mind hadn’t warmed up yet during the morning, so yeah, I could use tea. I simply nodded.

She went outside, and I was there, staring at the wall in her office. I noticed paintings, from oil paintings to digital vector art. And again, there were three paintings. The first painting on the left was clearly made using oil. It was a painting of Hodr, the blind godson of Loki. In the painting, he stabbed a large blue spear at Baldur The Unharmed chest. However, Hodr had another face behind his head, and Loki The Trickster could be seen smiling. It happened in a skirmish land of the light elves. Sometimes, faith could deliver you to death. It was a recurring theme in religions of old that human lives were only toys in the eyes of the gods. The gods used the worshippers' piety to stoke the



fire of hell. In turn, centuries would see the guided becoming misguided, and plenitude resulting in hollowness. Then, as things turned out, the gods were merely a tool used by governors to rule over the weak mentally. The gods we had known then, or the god we had worshiped then, were simply a decoy, serving an even greater god or any creature or substance more superior.

The second painting was a Renaissance painting from the look of it. It was romanticized. A picture of Jeanne d'Arc being burnt, though her body wasn't marred with red skin of deadly fire, with the seven seals high in the sky. The seventh sat, he had his trumpets, waiting to echo God's command. "War," I saw the seals moving their mouths in the painting! But then the mouths were restored, and I heard the doctor had returned. "Times of war killed her, Joan," the doctor said. She walked to the painting and stared at it sternly. She had her right hand out of a glove and went on to palpate the lips of the woman in said painting. "Would you believe me if I say the gods played a cruel game on us," she said, pausing before she looked at me. She waited for me to answer, and I only shrugged. She went on, "They did. The games these gods played were always the same. If you wish to break bread in heaven, you shall break your bones on Earth. I always assumed that was the fate of Joan." It slightly made sense. Why did wars exist in the game of the gods? Surely, that could not be the only ticket to eternal peace. On the other hand, it made sense for it to be. The tribulation would be for those blinded by faith, never blinded by a single earthly matter.

The third painting was a digital vector art, it was unfinished, yet I could see how colorful it was. Or maybe, it was left that way intentionally. So, I asked her, "Why is the third painting like that?"

The doctor chuckled, and she answered, "The gods hadn't seen through it just yet."

And I was riddled. How could the gods who knew everything would not simply see through matter like that? Perhaps, the doctor was

speaking figuratively? “Gods aren’t almighty, is that the message of the painting?”

“No,” she replied. She sat down and then offered me the tea she had made. “But you’re right, the gods aren’t perfect. They’re always jealous of us. They took our form, deceived our sons and daughters. Can you imagine that? Even gods betray,” she added. She then pointed at the first painting and explained, “The gods see eternal power of Baldur, so they have him antagonized. Turns out, the killer isn’t who they think to be. Loki ultimately plays the string, but the realms view Hodr as the killer.” She shifted her finger to the second painting, and she, too, explained, “Joan possessed knowledge beyond the world, visions of the angels, but the world couldn’t fathom the reverie. They had her killed cruelly. As cruel as that be, perhaps God had decided her fate to be that way. Again, gods playing with human lives all along. It became a cycle in history.” The third one was longer to be explained, the doctor seemed to phase out a little bit, but she eventually said, “The third painting... It’s a mystery. The gods are forgotten in the realm of pixels, they can’t survive. The gods are surely jealous for not making it through the passage of time this time around. However, they have their aim set. Colors!”

I was conflicted by that point. I didn’t understand a single thing about her third explanation. I considered it to be unsatisfactory, or perhaps the doctor was just babbling and didn’t know the meaning either. It was confusing, just like my existence on that island. I went on with the session then. We talked, and I shared some of the things that had occurred, including the North Star, Abraham, the animals seeking shelter in that heavy rainstorm, the fishes that took the form of men, and even when they had me tied to a chariot, visions of Nero. The doctor was pleasant to be with, despite the occasionally cryptic talks. I was disturbed; however, I could not get the paintings beside me out of

my head during the session. Something about the paintings was compelling, and I had not a single clue what to make of them.

When I stood outside the house's door, about to return home, the doctor patted my shoulders. "Keep an eye on Abraham, will you? He's a cute boy," she said. I nodded and said my thanks. She replied, "Remember. The gods play cruel tricks on us. They can take the form of a man to deceive another man." There was something bogging me, why was the doctor so mouthful about the gods being cruel. Was she a faithful person at all? So, I asked her whether she believed in any gods, only to be answered with another trivial answer, "I believe in family." It was eerie how she responded to the question, so I smiled and immediately brisked away from the house.

The weather was lulled as I saw no thick clouds covering the summit anymore. It didn't feel suffocating as it had been earlier that morning. I swore it had felt like I was on Mount Olympus. Walking down the hill, I realized a terrifying fact that I hadn't realized before. The doctor had never, not even *once*, mentioned me by my name. Speaking of it, was Mycah even my name? Was I being misled by the three hanged men and the fish that spoke of the name directed at me? Who was I? I looked at Abraham and realized how our stories paralleled one another. Then, I was unconvinced by my name. Did I have a name? Was Abraham crying the whole time before I gave him the name, a reflection of the mess ailing me? I felt my eyes building up a well of tears, and it broke right in front of my house. I cried hard, the same way Abraham did when stripped of his name.

I went to sleep that night, and I had even more troubling visions. I dreamed of the fish that gathered in Nero's corpse that had drowned in the ocean. His head was a feast for crows, his abdomen was cut wide open, and the insides had been nested by leaping frogs. The sea ran with blood. The blood was so thick, then out of nowhere, a great serpent emerged out of the ocean and saw me. Mayhaps, it was

Jormungandr? It made sense since it was in the realm of men, but how would I know what the outside of it was? No, there was no possible way. I couldn't tell the difference between a serpent and a dragon. *I was dumb*; I remembered saying that in my head when I first had a glimpse of the creature. But all I knew was that serpents didn't have skewed tails; only dragons had those. When I took a closer look at the beast that was emerging out of the water indefinitely, I noticed the skewed tail. It was something I hadn't seen before. Surely, it was not the Midgard serpent. Abraham started laughing all of a sudden, and I felt a tiny bit of jealousy. He never laughed when he was with me before, but now that creature appeared and stole the honor from me. He had never once felt safe with me and would constantly start crying for unclear reasons. The monster was terrifying, but not even once Abraham wanted to hurt it, just like he liked peeling the skin of my right hand. I was jealous that Abraham had a name.

I accidentally threw Abraham into the ocean, but then the ocean gave way to him. The water he landed on gave way to him instead. It was like Moses departing the red sea while my body remained still. The third hanging man spoke of Moses the other day. Perhaps I was being led to that very moment. Upon the clearing, I saw Abraham being swept across the ocean, and he reached the other side of the departed ocean. I followed him deliberately, but my legs felt heavy. It felt like a ton of sandbags were tied to the nozzle of my legs. I wanted to sprint, but I couldn't. I feared the recurring theme of chasing after the chosen would be bequeathed unto me, and I was right. Halfway through the course of the departed sea, I couldn't see any birds that had followed. I had stopped in awe. I saw dead fishes gathering on the drained land, and the converging rocks that formed it started diverging also. Right before the erected walls of water collapsed, I saw a black cat with striking yellow eyes. *Death* is an omen widely known. I knew it there, and then; I was dying.

The wall of water collapsed, and I was taken away by the crashing waves. It was as painful as being stabbed over and over or perhaps as painful as being dragged by a chariot. The same chariot I saw belonged to the late Nero. I felt something even heavier; the water dragon was somewhere within the depth of the ocean with me. I couldn't see; I wasn't brave enough to open my eyes. Everything was painful. Saltwater became blood water. The iodine of seawater had been contaminated with the reek of death. With one last choke remaining, I finally stopped moving and breathing. I died with no name on an unnamed island, bearing intangible dreams or visions, conceiving knowledge of old, and failing to guard the little baby. My sweet little Abraham. If only he knew.

I was woken up by disturbing turbulence. A tingling sensation felt on my sides. I stood up, and I was standing in an endless corridor. The walls were red and segmented for every particular gap. The room was neat. The floor was slippery, and it had red bumps on it, tiny, like papillae. I counted for every sixty seconds, the walls moved, and I heard grumbling from the further part of the hallway, though the hallway was endless. I walked deeper into the hallway and found myself struggling to stand straight. The constant movement of the hallway made it impossible not to slip. The bumps were sometimes a friend, sometimes an enemy. There were moments when the bumps were as plump as cotton and moments when they felt like spikes. Though endangered by it, I kept on moving, though I kept getting slower. Then, I saw something behind me. A flow of acidic-looking gas. It was contorting my throat, I couldn't breathe, and my eyes were getting saggy. Inhaling it then made me feel unusual. I had a feeling of jealousy. I felt jealous over life. I knew I had to be dead. Hence I was jealous of the living. Whatever was at the end of the hallway might probably be the decider whether I went to hell or heaven. Or perhaps, I was in limbo. Perhaps that was the place where the dead became undead and incubated in an



eternal void. Or perhaps, that was just another dream. I had considered the possibility of it.

Drunken by the gas, I felt myself falling even further into the pit of jealousy. I even began stirring my head, scanning visions upon visions only to be met with jealousy in each. I saw the man with the golden helmet again, my former lover, though he had more scars on his body, and I saw him with a woman he had called Georgia. I then saw another vision in which I was holding a papyrus, Almagest it was written. I was with another person in a bizarre fashion, like he was a caveman but cleaner, I thought. He had been planning a palace of knowledge, some sort of library. It would have a tower tall enough to scan the “ether,” he mentioned, to realize what was written on the papyrus. On top of the tower, a large brazier seemed to help sailors navigate through the dangerous ocean the palace was built in front of. Then, the vision was fast-forwarded further where the tower was struck by an enormous catapult, and a large crowd gathered on the ruins of it were screaming, “Not again!” repeatedly. Then, the crowd raised their attention at me, and I felt anxious. Their gazes made me feel naked. There was a loud carriage noise, multiplied by the sound of a large wooden ship that breached the atmosphere of sound. I saw animals onboard being transported within cages of seclusion. The voice grew louder, and eventually, it reached a point where everything was mute. And I gained back my senses. I was still inside the red hallway.

I dragged my legs, not having the strength to stand and persevere. The red walls were moving, and I saw gushes of water leaking in and flooding the interior of the hallway. I surveyed the floor, being inundated; the red bumps now felt like coral reefs rather than spikes on a trap’s floor. The water was salty, and the air reeking out of the hole that leaked the water was heavy. My ear popped as if air pressure seemed to be dropping. Once more, I was drenched in water like my death earlier, but that time around, I wasn’t drowning. I took advantage

of the shallow water to slide down the hallway, using some of the submerged bumps as ramps. I traveled significantly faster, but I still couldn't see the end of the road. The red corridor was as daunting as it appeared. The color was red, like blood. And blood was always familiar with wounds. Wounds ate until a person died. I was a guest in the house of death or limbo.

When the water level gradually increased, I also lost contact with the bumps. I had been pushed high to the ceiling of the corridor. The ceiling, I touched it to regain balance, was gooey. It felt like the lining of my cheek. I clawed the walls with my hand, and I felt a roar, a loud one, sourcing from where I had been. The walls began to spurt out blood, and the water that drenched the inside had then been mixed with it. The corridor ran with red water, and the entire corridor wall grumbled; the shape flexed. The motion was subjugated with whatever making the roar as the movement was in rhyme with the roar. It sounded like a large creature in pain. Then realization knocked inside my head. Perhaps, I was inside a large animal. The only creature I recalled being close to me was the sea dragon, the one I felt jealous of when it interacted with Abraham. Perhaps that jealousy ensued still inside earlier when I felt jealous of the living. Perhaps, I was still alive! The thought provoked me to survive even further. I was probably inside, somewhere along its pharynx, if my assumption was correct. Then the ceiling or the walls had to be its muscle. It explained why it roared when I hurt it by clawing my fingers, unleashing blood massacre, or why the peristaltic motion kept happening on idle every sixty seconds. I kept on slashing, hoping that the great beast would suffer and eventually stop. However, no matter how much I tried, the thing wouldn't cease. I kept on sliding until, eventually, many minutes later, I saw a brink like the brink of a waterfall. I saw no light being shed upon the threshold. It led to darkness, a void. It reminded me of a piece of my

memory. Never to be uncovered as I eventually reached my death by falling through the brink.

My body was free-falling, and I saw nothing. It was as cold as space, a parched expanse devoid of pressure. I had never felt so free. The emptiness of the world made me think clearer. How demure it was to live out of pressure. To be free of responsibility and curiosity. Not being in charge of self-growth or any social leaderboards. In that momentary bliss, I stopped hearing. I hadn't heard much in life anyway. Even if I had, I would not know since I had long forgotten the memory before the island. I wondered there and then what life was like before the island. Would I eventually regain my memory in the hereafter? When are the scales being measured as a passing of my judgment? Would I be sent to heaven or condemned to hell? Did the two coexist? Mayhaps, I only needed that patience in that void. The only thing I had to do was to close my eyes and wait. Wait, what would come? What would arise from nothingness?

I waited and waited for hours; my body was still free-falling; I could feel myself being dragged though I was sure there was no air. The friction of air, which felt tiny in the mortal world, was now rigid upon my cold skin. It went against the direction of my fall, and I saw the body that I had. It was imperfect. My right hand, which was covered in a cast, slowly started peeling off, showing me the scars Abraham had caused. The hand felt stiff and frail but lovely. It embodied the affection of a broken relationship between Abraham and me that couldn't be mended. At the end of the day, the stiffness reminded me of the stone my heart had been set as. I was harsh at times to Abraham, neglecting him and hurting him. I remembered throwing him onto the ground multiple times every time he'd hurt me. I remembered leaving him hanging by the vine, though I knew the vine was an omen of the hideous thing surrounding the island, the three hanged men who roamed the hallway outside my bedroom door. I could still see their faces, apart from the

third, whom I had only heard his voice but never once witnessed his face. I needed an eraser prepared to erase the first two faces out of my mind so desperately that I even began murmuring in that vast empty space, “Eraser, face. Eraser, face,” over and over.

Upon chanting those words, I heard a loud blaze underneath me. Then, I stumbled upon a surprise. A vision of the unordinary. Multiple orange-colored dots appeared far down below. It was slightly similar to the red dot I saw that day where the animals sought shelter. I noticed that when the scenery was looming closer. They were lanterns, those orange dots. And each lantern was being transported by a boat. Before I could look further, I landed on one of the boats, softly like landing on cushions, and I escaped the fall unharmed. A tall robed figure all the way to its hooded head, it stood on two grounds like humans did, at the back of the boat. It was paddling the boat while grumbling something sounding heavy. The voice was a deep cutting bass, even lower than the lower of eight octaves below a piano. I scrambled in my position and shrieked away from the figure who stood menacingly. It looked me in the eyes, and I saw yellow. The figure didn’t have a face. Beneath the hood, it was black smoke with yellow eyes instead. The smoke was shaped round, forming the shape of a human's head. Terrifying would be an understatement. It was rather sinister, like its surroundings.

Using its dark voice, the thing murmured, “You were one of the Moses.” I was flabbergasted. The same thing the third hanging man whose face I hadn’t seen said to me was similar along the line. He, too, was saying, “Moses.” But what did it mean? Were we just tugging along the pedigree of Jewish prophets, or perhaps Moses meant something else. I feared there and then that my ear had betrayed me, but I swore it had not. Perhaps everything was linked. The baby Abraham, the allusions to Moses, that stormy night when I saw animals seeking shelter in a union, the water dragon and its insides, the frolicking frogs digesting the corpse’s abdomen, causing a spot of blood in the surface

of the water, the name Mycah. But I had thought about it repeatedly, and it had never made sense. That connection didn't explain the vision of the golden helmet man or the one time when I was tied to Nero's chariot and dragged along with it. That didn't explain the stabbings I felt nor the book from the fish. So many things were still left unanswered; it made me slightly frustrated. I wished I could live to find the answer to it all. Surely, I had died.

I saw a giant squared gate by the pier the boat was reaching. It was cold, but the dock was lit by a large white fire. It was burning bright, but why did only the emission of coldness that I could feel. It was betrayal through and through. Walking to the block-shaped entrance that was presented in front of me, I felt the iciness growing thicker and the rate of the invincible blizzard going faster. I entered the gate, and the walls were chocolate but chiseled with red amber lining. I touched it, and the walls were moving. The motion slightly generated a slight heat, so I hugged the walls while walking.

Half-standing was all I could manage when I reached an open field at the end of the entrance. I was greeted with a vision like no other. There were hundreds, no, thousands of people gathered. They were naked, and they were translucent. I walked past them and noticed they all seemed to be praying toward an abomination. A big deformed human face was embedded in the wall before me. It was deep in my imagination before I approached. In the aperture of its eyes, it saw me and greeted me with a foreign language I did not understand. It seemed interrogative; its eyes were full of questions; I could tell, and judging how it ended its sentences in agog, I knew I had to answer. But I had no idea what to answer it with. With the barrier of language between us, I shook my head and said, "I don't understand. I'm sorry."

The face replied aggressively with a loud voice. It didn't seem happy with my inability to answer the question. So, I insisted, "I swear I do not understand!"



The face seemed to calm down after that; perhaps he found the moment when hell froze over. It was impossible to communicate when none of us understood each other, or perhaps only I did not understand it.

The face stopped talking and closed its eyes once again when the wall beside it started sliding like theater curtains. It paved a passage for a cold wind. The wind was howling wildly onto my face, and I could feel my dejection building up. I did not want to enter that place. My legs were frosted, consumed by the formation of ice underneath my feet. At least it felt that way until I felt heat rising behind me. The face opened its eyes again, looking troubled, sweaty even. The cold deemed it impossible to trigger the eccrine gland, but whatever it was behind me managed to do so. I felt the pull, gravity-like, towards whatever was behind me. I turned my head around, and I saw a star. “No,” I murmured. It was like the sun. The same sun-Earth revolved around. It came from the entrance tunnel, and the rays were looming over the cold and damp ground of the brown floors. The sun then spoke to me, “Come forth, my muse.”

“You!” the face shrieked against the sun. And I was stumped; a delirious feeling usurped my very chill bone. The face could speak the same language I was speaking, so why did it insist on communicating in a foreign language earlier? “Do not listen to that insolent mummery!” The face warned me, but the heat of the sun made it unlikely to heed. The heat was... reassuring. *Safe*. It reminded me of the life I had on the lonely island. Oh, that felt like a different life already. Yes, the sun particularly reminded me of that. It felt like I had lived *another* life. The sun had its edge trailing the skies, like a wheelset for motion on a water turbine.

“Why choose the coldness of death when you can embrace the warmth of life, my muse?” the sun asked me. And I made sense out of its words. The sun seemed logical and wise, but not everything was as it

appeared. Not in that pit of depth. Why did the sun call me muse? Where was it when I was falling if I had been held so dear? There were moments when I thought the choice was as clear as the sky, but the sky was red, and the rays of red could represent the mummery mentioned by the face.

I turned back to the face and asked, "What are the choices I have here?" before the face could reply, the sun interrupted, "Isn't it clear? The gate you were about to enter would lead you to hell. You may not know of your past sins, but I know, and I'm ready to absolve it and bring you back to the world of living."

"If that is so, why is hell cold? Wasn't the promise of hell a fiery blaze of eternal fire?" I confronted the sun.

"It is because of the absence of the sun. Hence, hell is condemned with perpetual blizzard," the face now spoke to me. It sounded sincere. The conversation had done nothing but confuse me even further.

"What do you mean by that, face?" I asked it once more, trying to sate my curiosity.

"The sun is under duress. It had been tricked into falsehood and tricks. Didn't you notice it on the temple?" the face admitted, but still, I couldn't comprehend.

"Enough! Do not confuse my muse even further. He shall go with me," the sun spoke at the face. It was desperate to bring me back to life. It was a romantic display, and I eventually melted over it. It was nice to be wanted, and it was something I could not feel back on the island. The island was daunting. That much was true, and I had never once felt wanted. All I felt was just cold due to the thunderstorm and rain and the occasional getting drenched over the vision of the ocean. Due to the bare force of the face and the implication of hell's field laid beyond the gate, it was an easy decision to choose love, warmth, and life. That was one of the rare moments when the sun actually came to do what it was supposed to do. I never recalled seeing the sun, apart from the mention

of it in one of my dreams. It was when the soldiers with Hoplon called me a sun whore. Perhaps, I eventually realized that dream. Submitting myself to the sun, I was a whore to it.

I walked back and wandered through the same pavement I had walked before. The entrance tunnel of slimy brown walls was decorated like animal flesh. The walk was heavy, and my mind was clouded with all sorts of fear. I pondered whether I had made the right decision or had done enough to deserve another life. I didn't know what to do nor what to think, but I was slightly glad that I would be returning to the living. The idea of a second life terrified me to some degree. Would it be the same life, or would it be callous? The undead was a name given to those who had died just to live again, and they were never portrayed as the heroes of stories.

I reached the peak, and the boat remained there. The hooded figure owner was also waiting for me to step in. The sun watched me, and when the boat rowed away from the edge of the marsh-brown land, the sun guided our way. The figure had to wait a couple of yards before it said, "You've always been one of the muses."

"What does that mean?" I asked in return. Did it refer to me whoring out for the second life granted by the sun? The sun did call me its' muse earlier.

"The false sun. He likes to play with you," the figure had something to say finally, but the words didn't strike a single sense.

"Who's he? What is the false sun?" I asked, and I felt dread waiting for the figure's answer. There was something dreary about the figure's tone that made it as if I had made the wrong choice.

"Ah, you've no idea, haven't you?" the figure said. It then stirred the water strangely using the paddle. The water was twirled, and a massive hole was created in the middle. The boat was sucked into the gap, and we entered a different place. There, the boat was floating within a dark blue space. Stood in front of us, a giant network of vines. Among the

vines, tethered unto the cord of the edges, were hanged humans, men and women. They donned unique clothes from bottom to top; the bottom wore nothing. Then the ones above it wore slightly more modest but still revealing skin, like leaves covering their genitals. Ever upwards, I saw a bearded man wearing ancient combat armor with the sigil of a crescent moon, forming a triangle with the sun and a star on the remaining two edges. And I felt the tug at my memory.

*Shen.* I remembered the first word of the second hanging man. Could Shen refer to the god of the moon in ancient Babylon? He went with many names like Nanna but was sometimes referred to as Sin as well. Sin sounded similar to Shen. My hearing perception could betray me. But, I paid it no mind because I could not make anything out of it.

The boat was rowed higher by the figure, and we reached the very top of the vines. On the top, I saw myself being hanged. My skin was wrinkled and pale, signs of a drowned death. My eyes were opened, though the pupils weren't adjusted.

The figure stopped the rowing and explained, "Some people in the living world name this the Tree of Life." The figure dragged the boat closer to my body and continued, "We call it the vines of life. And these people were all your lives past."

My past lives? These were all people that I had lived through the course of their lives? So, was reincarnation real? I wouldn't be surprised anymore. The explanation had been presented. The visions of another life I had on the island, the strange dreams of seeing the same person in a different body. They had to lead to a certain answer, and that was it. I had lived separate lives.

"You've lived an infinite number of lives, though you've never suffered the same way you have in your last three lives."

I saw the recent three lives on the vines. The third one would be me. I saw the second one, it was a woman. She was beautiful and held the same book the fish had granted me. The book of knowledge. The figure

went on, "You were the smartest when you were her. She lived a cruel life, and simply believing led her to die in a cruel manner."

"Who is she?" I asked.

"Hypathia. The thinker at Alexandria. Lived around the 4th century," the figure answered, and it made sense. I didn't know who she was, but her face looked content. It seemed like she knew she had died for something greater than her life. It was a shame I could not build another giant milestone upon her shoulder. I felt weak and embarrassed.

We then hovered over the first person of the three hanged from the top of the vines. It was a woman with a face like mine and Hypathia's. Very eerily similar, though we were of different sex. We were the same conceptually, but still, it felt like cross-dressing.

"She was a prominent figure in the ancient world. Her name is Pythia, the muse of Apollo," the figure explained.

*Apol. Apollo.*

"She's the muse of the sun god?" I asked though I wasn't really searching for an answer. It just struck me that the sun was calling me its' muse. Was the sun the embodiment of Apollo himself? Had he been mistakenly calling me Pythia? It would make sense if he did.

"I fear this is the end of your road. I wish you a safe return to the living."

I felt my body getting weaker, and I saw a glimmer of light as the sun returned, enlightening the dark blue space where the tree was. "Wait!" I called out one last time at the figure, "What business does the sun have as the guide of my soul here?"

I couldn't grasp the figure within the reach of my hand. My body was translucent, and I was phasing through its body. I wanted to tug its robe and beg for the answer immediately before it was too late. I wouldn't want to come back to life without answers that may define the entire saga of my past lives.



“Pythia, Hypathia, and Mycah. Remember those names,” the figure spoke. Its tone was sad. It sounded like the whimpering of an animal. “Within your remedy, ask yourself this,” it paused briefly and then continued during my last moments, “What is the purpose of your life?” Then emptiness swept my vision, and I felt like disappearing.

## Chapter II: Hourglass

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The names rang true to the end of the hour. What was the purpose of life? I had the memory of a man by the boat asking me, and it rang true. It ranged the depths of the blue, purported in the very front of my eyes. It was the ocean. I was on an island, and I felt the sourness of the plateau. It was dour. I looked behind me, and I saw a house. It was a single-floor house with red brick coloring. The roof was tiled dark brown, and a blast furnace exhaust was erected through its tip. I entered the house, and I was greeted by three hanging men; their legs were tied to a vine. Their legs dangling, one foot above another. The first one said to me, "You struggle at hearing, so you'd better listen twice." And I smelled the sweet perfume lingering from his breath. He spoke of the truth that I was struggling to hear. His candor-ness felt warm.

I remembered one of my days before the island. I was working in a bank as a teller when masked men came crashing down the place one day. I saw red alarms being triggered and people being killed. I remembered when the nozzle from a certain masked man's gun at the side of my head was being pointed at a customer. I was forced to choose his victim as a part of his foul game. I had no choice but to choose the old man very far behind the queue that was frozen in front of me. It was painful, but he promised us our safety upon the man's death. The stack of his magazine trampled one by one, and his eyes sodded off with the gaze of killing. The old man died under my instruction. The masked man shot next to my left ear, and I'd had trouble hearing since then.

I was exempted by the manager as the site went bankrupt. The heist was a taint on my resume. Days went on, and I was struggling to make a living. Everything was a hassle. My rent, my fiancé, my parents, my pets,

and everything else ceased to make contact with me. I prayed to whichever god or goddess existed and had existed until my prayers were answered. It was a sunny Saturday when I woke up to the sound of the door's bell. I scurried to the door, but there was no one there. But something was left on the floor. A pamphlet. It was an invitation, and there were promises of a job on a remote island. *It was perfect*, I remembered thinking excitedly. The only catch was that I would live with virtually no one, no neighbors apart from a local doctor who would fill the role of companionship and healthcare. The island meant everything to me. I could use a break from everything and start fresh in life. Mayhaps, by the time I returned, I would be a changed person. My life wouldn't be a mess. But I knew one thing to be forever true. I would struggle to hear for the rest of my life.

The erosion of the throwback failed to bring me with it as I was brought back to the house on the island. The sound of the second hanging man pulled me back to reality, and I heard him saying, "Shen. Apol. Hafknutmers," but then the first hanging man ordered me to listen twice, and I obeyed.

*Shen. Apol. Hafknutmers.*

*Sin. Apollo. Have you no mercy.*

I heard it loud and clear after adjusting my hearing, and it spoke of names and a question by the end. Sin and Apollo. The names were both a product of my hearing that got twisted inside my head, while the last word was not even a word. Instead, it was an entirely spoken interrogative sentence. I didn't understand what the second was implying with the repetition. Was it something important? I didn't think so, but the man by the boat did tell me to remember names, but whose? I had no idea. Time passed by as the grain of sand folded over within a world upside down. Nothing was as it seemed.

I turned my head to see the third-hanging man. He covered his face with his hands. I could tell immediately that he was remote, just like the

island. He was shy and solemn, just like life on the island. Modest. His hands shook as if he was scared for me to reveal something behind them. I did something intrusive, though I knew it was rude, but something urged me to do it anyway. I reached out for both of his hands, slowly pulled them away from his face, and saw something wondrous. His face was a round mirror, and the reflection showed mine instead. The mirror was only partial until his lips, and below his lips were fibula and its' cronies of ordinary jaw foundations.

I saw an error being displayed, however. The mirror wasn't working correctly; I could tell as my face was slowly being melted. It then revealed a face of a woman, but her eyes were of mine, and her cheeks were of mine as well. I screamed after the change. Her soft skin emerged out of the molten, and her pupils were green. She had a tall crown made of decoration depicting the figure of the sun. And the mirror slowly absorbed me, placing me inside the body of the woman in the mirror.

I woke inside a temple, kneeling to a bronze statue standing atop an altar. The bronze was rash but cleansed. I noticed the embroidery of the sun being situated throughout the body of the supposed male figure. I started speaking out of my own will, "Apollo, grant me your visions for the foreboding occurrence. Hear me, oh god of the sun. I hereby present you with the gift of my love." It was the voice of a woman. I assumed that it was the woman in the mirror that I had been placed inside her realm of consciousness. I, or rather, *she*, slit down my right hand. It bled a little, and I poured the blood sipping out of it into a basket in which the basket had herbs mashed. I then transitioned into a praying stance. I was conscious, but I could not control my body. I could not speak, only witness. I felt a sudden tranquility. It felt peaceful to have something to believe in, even though I never belonged to any faith. I knew a stronger force had to exist. An all mighty substance, or

mayhaps substances, but I had never known which ones were real. Was it a god, or was it many gods?

I heard a loud thump behind me; someone was brash. A woman called out, "Pythia! Pythia!" I turned around and saw a young girl, probably under 10 years old, and she had brown tanned skin. She panted and seemed to be taking her time to continue. I only stood there, anticipating whatever the intruder might have to offer. She broke the news then, "King Leonidas is seen with his army passing the city gates, Pythia. He should be here any time soon."

I raised my arms to order the girl away and then proceeded to prepare. I had purple paint smearing the skin below both of my eyes. The paint was used to make a singular purple line below each eye. It was like conventional eyeliner. I prayed once more until a certain time arrived and forbade me to stay longer. I rose up from the carpet and walked to a staircase. The staircase led to the back of a stage. When I revealed myself on the stage, I saw many soldiers bundled up together. Their leader was a fierce-looking man with a gray beard and a golden helmet held next to his hip. His face was handsome, and I realized he looked like my former lover, Leo. *I remembered Leo.* King Leonidas was known to many in the modern days as the brave warrior who superseded his half-brother and later died a leader of great 300 men, though it was for sure an exaggeration. I, or Pythia, had heard reports of the king's garrison of more than 300. The Greeks also supported him, bringing at least another 100 men to fight against the invading fearless army of Xerxes, son of Darius The Great.

I fell to the ground and acted like I was in great turmoil before calling out, "Oh, mighty King of Sparta!" I sobbed, but I had no idea whether the tears were genuine or if it was a farce to keep the offerings in. He stood there, closing his eyes. It seemed as if he had accepted whatever I was about to say. His body was full of scars, signs of his many great victories. His men trebled with confusion, some dropping their hoplons



onto the ground. They seemed to feel an omen coming. Perhaps, that was before their suicidal battle.

“Exalted priestess of Apollo. I’ve come for the fate of Sparta, though it seems you’ve cut down my explanation,” his voice was loud. It echoed throughout the temple interiors. His soldiers were eyeing him. They had their eyes locked in. Their breaths were heavy and ready to explode any second. “Tell me of it, priestess,” Leonidas requested.

I gulped and spoke clearly, “Beware you wayward Spartans and your land of the brazen bolds.” I stood up and opened my arms wide before continuing, “For Apollo has shown me two paths diverge, and you must choose.” I took a deep breath and resumed, “Either Sparta must be laid siege by the Persians, or the laced land of Lacedaemon must suffer the loss of their king. A king from the blood of Heracles.” I warned them. I stepped down from the stage and approached Leonidas, seductively at it, too; I didn’t think it was necessary. “And do not doubt the vision of my lord!” I hissed at King Leonidas. “I’ve seen the fire being stoked at your Spartan dromes. I’ve seen the temple of Dionysus being razed at the hands of the Persians. It was the vision of the underworld presented upon me, but on the grounds of your mighty and glorious city,” I elaborated. That time I saw Leonidas was red in a fury, probably the same red as the fire I was talking about. It surprised me when the king steadied his breathing and calmed himself down. It was rare to see a king not being fickle. I rubbed his scarred chest and said, “As for the king. No mighty bulls nor lions would restrain him from his fearless foes, for he has been granted the might of Zeus.” The man looked convinced, but I could not be more sure, so I added a little convincing by promising, “I promise. He will not be restrained until he utterly tears apart one of those.”

The room broke into a panic. Everyone was angry at the words I had uttered.

“Don’t believe the lies of this witch, my king!”

“You filthy lying sun whore!”

“You whore!”

I heard them calling out to me harshly. What got them so triggered? I had only presented them with the truth given by the gods. If they had any faith in the gods at all, they should not be that mad. Was I a whore for simply delivering a message or a truth? A truth that quaked at their illusion of comfort. I saw Leonidas then; I could tell he was hot-headed, but he could control himself quite well. Perhaps he had made the difficult choice. Maybe he, too, had been sent to death. A game fabricated by the gods but played by humans. I was the umpire, while Leonidas was the player. I had technically lured him to his death. Leonidas just stared at the floor. He was too speechless to share his thoughts. That was until a woman screamed amidst the crowd, “No!” She approached Leonidas in a hurry, and she was crying. Her eyes were red, and she was dragging her skirt. She hugged Leonidas tightly and planted her face on Leonidas’ scarred chest. The view was so romantic. Amidst the chaos of his men, the king and queen were seen sharing their grief. It felt like the world belonged to them, and we were mere passengers. She was the Queen of Sparta, or rather simply a consort to the King of Sparta, but even I could tell they shared a deep bond. Her name was Gorge. *Georgia*. Gorge. I had to adjust my hearing twice.

*I saw the man with the golden helmet again, my former lover, though he had more scars on his body, and I saw him with a woman he had called Georgia.*

She cried and asked Leonidas, “What would I do without you, my love?”

Leonidas weakly gripped her shoulders, and he said croakily, “In the hour of my passing, may you find a good man to marry and bear his children. I wish you a good life thereafter, my love.”

The rest was a blur. Time passed quickly, and I saw the men retired to the barracks within the city. They had grown tired of harassing me;

that was also thanks to Leonidas, that brought an end to the insults. I simply stayed quiet during the entire ordeal. I had done my job delivering the visions granted by Apollo himself. I could not be held accountable even if the vision saw the destruction of the world. I was about to close the temple for the day, but before I could do it, I saw Gorge. She was standing outside, in front of the temple's door. I approached her, and she was still sobbing.

"My mother used to tell me stories of the gods once. I heard a range of them, starting from probable stories like when Heracles slayed lions on his own to the seemingly disproportionate stories like when Hermes stole Apollo's cattle," she began.

I didn't know where she was going with her rant. "I fear I'm not committing to your point, Lady Gorge," I said curiously.

"If the gods can do ill actions, like depraving themselves by stealing, pillaging, or raping," she replied.

"It is not wise to fathom the actions of our—" I tried to object but was cut off by Gorge.

"Is it not possible for your visions to be wrong? For perhaps the gods make another mistake to deceive Leonidas? The prophecy behind the rock was only a mummery?"

"How would I know?" I said arrogantly. I understood her grief. She was devastated by the potential loss of her dear husband. She had birthed a future king then, but nothing would ever heal that reserved hole inside someone's heart for their soulmate. I saw her huffing and murmuring words, but I wasn't entirely paying attention, so I only watched her leave without protest. I believed that everything would be fine. The war might reach Delphi, but I had lived my life fulfilling my duty to Apollo.

Later that night, I was praying in the temple again. I was in the same place when I arrived earlier. I was fully committed to it. I chanted many mantras, prayers, and songs, believing that something or someone

would provide me with more answers to life. I noticed Pythia's hunger for knowledge. Perhaps, she was searching for something beyond life itself. Something that not even scientists in my time could answer. I knew that Pythia was not the type to be satisfied with success. She kept on trying her best to thrive more success, especially after the ones far greater than her past. She was not the type to be content.

When I heard Pythia screaming from my sore throat the name Apollo over and over, my right hand bleeding from the numerous sacrifices. I heard something rose during the dead of the night. It was believed by many to be the hour of the wolf, but of course, the term hadn't been coined in that day and age. I turned around and saw a muscular man wearing a white robe. He had fiery red hair, so fiery that it outshined the brightness of the sun.

"Lord Apollo?" I called out to the figure.

"It is I, my muse," the figure spoke in return.

I felt my lips widen for a smile, and tears started welling up. For Pythia, that was her greatest achievement. To meet the god she has been worshiping for her entire life. Apollo stood there with his chest arched forward, boasting his vigor. I was only slightly surprised. It would not be possible to thoroughly surprise me anymore after what had transpired on the island. The three hanging men and the past I had lived. The bank heist, the depression, and the guilt had dried me out of the joy of being surprised in life.

"You've done well, my muse. Come forth and seek your reward," Apollo ordered me.

"You have no idea how long I've waited for this moment, my lord. I have so many questions," I cried out excitedly.

"I'm sure you have. Come, come," Apollo motioned his hand at me to come closer, and so I did. His smile was so wide that I could barely see his eyes. I walked straight into him. My legs were shaking. It was a good thing that the ritual was done while wearing fancy garb because I was

already presentable in front of a god. I approached him closer, and I smelled an odor. A reek. It smelled similar. It smelled like a wet vine or perhaps like the burnt wood of a boat. Maybe, it was the odor of the gods. They smelled unique. A mixture of charm and power. Of might and justice.

I held his hand and walked for his chest, wanting to embrace the god, when suddenly I felt something in my gut. Something sharp. A blade had been stabbed through it. The culprit was none other but Apollo himself. The tears of joy went unleashing but in the form of fear from the betrayal. Why? I asked myself, and perhaps Pythia was also asking the same thing, for I was merely a vassal inside her body.

“B-But why?” I heard myself asking. I coughed out blood from my mouth, and my gut was leaking blood as well.

He stabbed me the second time. The third time. The fourth time. “Nothing personal,” he said eventually after the twentieth time the stabbing. I felt my energy waning out. I was killed brutally in a similar fashion to Julius Caesar. Twenty-three times he had been stabbed, while I was stabbed twenty times. I felt the soul sulking out of my body. My body dropped lifeless onto the ground before I heard Pythia weakly saying, “Have you no mercy?” And once Apollo had confirmed my death and his hands were still bloody, he bathed his head with my blood. I saw his tongue brushing his lips, and when his hands strayed away from his face, I saw a terrifying presence. It revealed the face of another man. He was blonde and looked younger than Apollo. It was just a disguise. But who was that man? Who would trick humans into believing that he was the god they worshiped? When it was revealed, Pythia had been long dead, but I was still stuck inside her body to witness the horror. The horror of the truth. *Pull me out*, I screamed from inside.

*Please, somebody, get me out of here.*

I was woken up to where I had left the three hanging men. I was in front of the mirror, and when I saw Pythia’s face there, I immediately



yanked the mirror away. Well, I technically yanked the third-hanging man's face away, but it was the same thing. I jumped back, and the three stared at me passively. "What was that?" I asked them.

The first man answered, "A flitting memory of your previous life."

I stood there dumbfounded, and digesting everything took me a while. I nodded but remained stoic there, still unwilling to face the mirror again. The third man asked me to look while the second remained, repeating the same words. The first man tried to soothe me by saying that everything would be fine. That I needed to look further into the looking glass so that I could reveal the answers I had been looking for. But what was I searching for? I came here only for a fresh start in life. I didn't expect the island to be inhabited by the spooky three hanging men who kept forcing me to do something. I hesitantly walked back to the third hanging man; his face mirrored the darkness of the cloud lingering outside of the house. It was so dark outside. The rain started to pour down sequentially, bringing the thunder. I saw a door to my right; it was opened, revealing nothing but the chamber of the void. The creak of it rang in my ears, and the absence of colors was so appalling that I had streaks of nightmares forming inside my head. I sat again, and the third hanging man approached me. His body fluctuated. His motion dragged the other two.

"You must not fear the colors of truth if you wish to be free," the first hanging man spoke. I did not understand why I would want freedom. Was there anything I wanted to break free from apart from the past haunting me? But even then, I knew the past wouldn't let go. It would remain for the rest of my life. I just needed to keep on going, not break free from the shackles of the past.

Once again, I looked into his face, a reflection of the past. It seemed poetic, and the endeavor was like something out of a movie, but something about it compelled me to do so. I was bewitched by the charm of the mirror, perhaps the vines secreted something from its

pores, or perhaps I was just a gullible person who could not say no. I looked in the mirror and saw the same woman, but she was darker and had different clothes. She looked African. I gazed at her eyes, and it was green. It was like an emerald stone. Her eyes were so eccentric, a jewel that shone among the dark features of her skin. With the movement of her head mimicking the ones I was making, I noticed she was in a different place. Behind her shelved thousands of books, barricaded from color to color. Papyrus to scrolls, answers to knowledge. Vast was an understatement.

I entered her body like I did with Pythia, and I was surprised to see the giant library. It was so large I had no idea where I was. The skies were amber, illuminating through the glass near the ceiling above my head. The letter I was holding reverberated its content through the shaft. It spoke of news regarding the Dead Sea Scrolls and that it was meant to be hidden far away for preservation purposes. I wrinkled the letter and placed it inside my pocket, and continued reading a book I had put aside.

Following the library, I walked outside, and the streets were large. It was Roman, I could tell. There were houses made out of marble and slums out of mere bricks. I walked around, and people seemed to recognize me. Some were begging for miracles, while some were leering in wanton. I felt like I had power, and even some soldiers patrolling the city seemed to tremble in my presence. They had the look of fear and disgust simultaneously, but I could not separate them either. I was a naive person. I reached a house eventually; it was just across an ocean. I entered the house, and it was large, and the inside shelved thousands of pieces of knowledge. Books and scrolls were scattered throughout the house. It was slightly cluttered, but the sidelines of my walk were off the path of cloisters. I arrived at what I considered a chamber where I usually slept and fell deep into slumber. The bed was comfortable. I hadn't slept since I arrived on the island. Even during the

journey on the boat, I was too consumed by the pulsing waves of water beneath me. The chill was contagious, and I had never felt more fresh. I acted like I was sleeping, though I was fully conscious that the woman was sleeping.

I was taken to the world of living once more, thanks to the loud rapping on my door. "Hypathia, wake up!" a woman called out behind it.

I scrambled through my drawer to comb my hair and straightened my garments. I hovered my hands over the door's handle, slightly hesitant, saying, "Patience!"

I opened the door then, and I saw a young girl, exhausted from the look of her face. She also looked worried. I asked her what had conjured her to come to my house. In a hurry, she explained, "Hypathia, crowds are gathering outside Orestes' house!" The moment I heard her mention the name Orestes, I had my hand out, rubbing my forehead. The news seemed worrying for me, and I had a big gap in my mouth before finally ordering her to accompany me. Before we left, I noticed the annoyance within myself or Hypathia, I guessed.

During our sprint for the person in distress, Orestes, I asked the young girl, "What did Orestes do!?" My tone was slightly scuffed as if I was caught involved with whatever Orestes was doing.

"I-I saw him forcefully bring Hierax to the theater, you know him?" the young girl answered, huffing her breath while at it too.

"By Apollo! What did he do to him?" I cried out loud.

"I heard he stripped him naked in front of everyone and had his fingers cut."

"Hath he not listen to what I had him warned, instead of digesting it by a minute!?" I said frustratedly.

That was the end of our conversation as we finally arrived in front of Orestes' house. A large crowd had been established, and I could see both anger and support. Some were seen fighting against their own. I slipped past the gathering and entered the house with the guards'

permission. I saw a raven-haired man with a beard scrubbing the floor, and I noticed how he painted a look of worry and perhaps a tidbit scared. He noticed my arrival and went on to hug me, slightly relieved. I asked her what had transpired, and he confessed to everything I had heard. The theater, Hierax, and the torture. He had admitted it all. I asked why he did it, and he only replied that he wanted to pacify the Jews. In anger, I clenched the crook of his neck and asked, "Didn't it occur to you that Hierax was sent by Cyril?" and he had a sympathetic look spread on his face. I sighed and just murmured, "Oh, Orestes, you stupid fool."

"One does not simply seek peace for one party only. By pacifying the Jews, you have reawakened a suppressed conflict between the people of their books. And worse, you brought Cyril into this!" I scolded him. I didn't see any resolution being made out of that. By the law of my time, I assumed far into the future, Orestes would be charged guilty of murder and torture, but the people had customs of old back then. They saw eye to eye, and I could not imagine Orestes leaving the matter unharmed. I needed to do something; I knew I had. I noticed Hypathia was thinking, though I wasn't able to share her thoughts. I offered Orestes that I would speak to the crowd in order to soothe the riot outside. I would then ask Orestes to do exactly what I ordered. It was always like that, it seemed. Orestes messed things up, and Hypathia would always fix his problems. I left a note to him by the end, asking for his prayers.

I would not be able to pacify the people of the books because Hypathia was a pagan, a worshiper of Apollo, but she just had to try. She was a pacifist too, but a better one for sure. Hypathia stood outside the door and delivered a speech. It felt clunky how the words came out of my mouth, but I wasn't the one crafting them nor the one murmuring them. The Jews yelled gloriously while the opposing mob slowly retreated. I could tell they were unsatisfied, but most importantly, the

riot had ceased. The anarchy had stopped, and I could only pray that it would not begin anew.

The days went on, but things had deviated even more from the ordinary. I noticed my school had been tentatively less crowded. The politics had been stirred by none other than Cyril himself. The day when the riot ensued outside Orestes' house, I had ordered him to remain low and to commit penance upheld by his Christian creed. Pray to whoever he bowed so that he could be forgiven. I had learned of their teachings prior and knew that he was still salvageable. I also emphasized evading Cyril so that Cyril wouldn't be able to discover any of his weaknesses. We, or rather Orestes, could not afford to be caught in bad shape. It was important. I had also ordered him to notify the uprising to the higher ranked officers, but he had sent an additional letter to the emperor out of fear. I didn't know whether it was a good idea or not, but then the other day, I learned of some troubling news. Cyril was involved in a race of letters to the emperor, and the world had not been the same ever since.

The turmoil had seen better days, and it was more bleak than it had ever been before. The conflict between the Christians and the Jews ensued. Worse came when the public spread false accusations of the pagans being brought into the fray. I was said to have tricked their prefect into the practice of heresy. From the pinnacle to the pit, I had fallen. From a pacifist to an undying martyr, they had changed their perspective of me. That explained the lack of students in public schools and the castigated Jews outside the city walls. They had been driven out of their homes for not accepting the cross. If there was anyone to be blamed, that would be Cyril. He orchestrated the entire propaganda, and I assumed, with the backing of the devout emperor. I sighed by the coast overlooking the *Mare Internum*, the great sea, but I attended a lecture once analyzing the work of Solinus, and he had coined the term *Mare Mediterraneum* for the ocean was pitted between lands. It



conveyed the situation perfectly. Faith pitted humans against one another, while victims were as torrential as the flow of the salty water.

I had seen the extent of the cruelty of man. From violence to sweet little promises, they hadn't changed throughout history. From tyrants to jealousy, I saw the parallels even far into the future. On the island, everything was quiet. There weren't any ill intentions. Inhabited by virtually no one, I was promised to lead a better life, but there I was. Stuck amongst the conflicts from the past, inside the body of someone I supposedly had lived as before. I only wished everything would end and hoped that something would come out of it.

The very next day, I left the school after teaching astronomy. It was an abstract subject, one that I sometimes struggled to answer whenever pupils asked me questions. The math behind it, I was no stranger, but the trivial purpose of it staggered me. Why would the stars be important, apart from navigation, to be learned? What was the purpose of examining the stars? Would we then make gods out of them too? Had we not had enough gods already? Would the stars interpolate answers that the world needed? To deprive it of suffering, famine, or bedouins? Walking down the marble pavements of Roman architecture, I was suddenly spotted by an angry Christian mob. Their eyes were devious, and their frantic breathing prompted my time to run and save myself from their detrimental intents, but it was too late. By the time I turned my head around, a blunt weapon had hit me in the forehead. I stumbled onto the ground, and then the streets reigned in chaos. I saw people trying to mediate the disorder, but they were intimidated to stay away. The threads had been knitted, and fate had been frozen in time. I felt like choking, and I saw them kicking my sides. I could not breathe, not until they stopped. They stopped to discuss something, but I could not hear clearly; their clawing fingers had hacked my left ear. It was then that I witnessed a golden chariot. Its' wheels were trampling, making the sound of a train passing its rails in a jag. One of them, a

large man, looked like a mercenary. He dragged my hair, and my head was hurting. He tied my hand to the back of the chariot, and the chariot dragged me around the city. My tied hand was broken; I could not feel anything out of it. Only the pain of being numb. My face was swollen, and blue marks started appearing throughout my naked body. The blue grew around my body like vines growing wildly. It was contagious, spreading to every inch of my body. I heard some of them mocking me that my lover, I assumed they were talking about Orestes, had fled the city like a coward. They painted him as my misery, but I never once cared much about Orestes. He was merely a vassal for me to deliver peace. Hadn't it been for Orestes, I would not be dragged into that. I started blaming him inside my head, but I didn't have the will to antagonize him. Hypathia only desired peace and knowledge, she never cared about politics, but the world killed her for it. We arrived at a temple named after the Romans' late Caesar. I was dragged forcefully into a table. I heard the mob screaming, "kill the pagan!" and some whispering, "vile whore." But I was only half of the two and definitely not the undermining one.

I could barely see when they held me on the table, and I sensed something sharp tingling around my body before blood came pouring out of it. My skin was scratched, and some even stabbed deep with the sharp item before I got the chance to reveal what they were using. They had the statue of Dionysus shattered and used the sharp pieces to cut me violently. One of them held it close to my left eye and cut off the eyeball. I screamed, and my body was jolting wildly in pain. I cried without an end until I heard someone shout, "No! Not her eyes!" It was the sound I hadn't recognized, but I saw him standing there. Cyril. The bishop of Alexandria. "Let her witness the failure of her gods." Cyril smiled.

At the time, the purging had ceased. The mob stopped in Cyril's presence, but the pain didn't. It kept devouring my body, and I felt

something stirring inside my stomach. It was an uncomfortable pain; I saw a big pool of blood emerging out of my stomach with my remaining sole eye. I could only paint the world in black and white then. Either gray or colors. Colors meant death, while gray meant life, not the other way around. I reached out to Cyril and saw faint red streaks on his hair before calling out, "Witness mine wounds, my lord. Have you no mercy at all?"

I could not comprehend the idea of Hypathia saying those words. Did she think Cyril was someone else? I could see clearly that it was Cyril, not some hero wearing a golden helmet, nor was he a knight in shining armor. He was far from it. I listened, only listened as I had been doing. I noticed the last breath escaped me. Hypathia had died, and I remained inside. The last time, I shouted for me to return, but it wasn't working that time around. *Get me out of here*; I tried but to no avail. I kept repeating it like a chant. I was tired of the vile mob and the faces, especially Cyril's. Nothing was working to my liking, so I waited. They cut my limbs further like I was William Wallace or anything of the sort.

In the moment of madness, I thought my vision betrayed me, but I saw Cyril's face morphing into something else. It turned into the young blonde I saw in Pythia's life. He was the same person. Could the same figure play a role in both of my previous lives? He had been sighted twice already in my death. I saw him levitating while pulling out a flute. Out in the air, he played it, and it soothed the mass. He was just like Death, a minstrel playing the flute. Around his girdle, an hourglass was seen dangling and contemplating. It hesitated the drop of its contained sand. Suddenly, seven seals came swarming behind him, and they were dancing. The fourth in line just stared at me, and I stared back with one eye from a soulless body. They acted as if Hypathia being born into the city meant she would lay fire to it. Like she was branded to rule over men or she was the one that would appear before the judgment of the world. Couldn't they see that the flesh she was made from was the same

flesh they had been molded from? No doubt for them, ignorance was bliss.

I returned to my house on the island. I could never get used to the sensation of being pulled back. It felt like being reborn. I shuddered out of shock. A shock from what I had witnessed. In the past two lives, the same blonde figure was seen twice in their deaths. I was fearful, and I saw the first hanging man who spoke candor approaching me, and he said, "That's enough answers, I hope." But I shook my head left and right and answered, "No! I still don't understand the purpose of these visions. Am I doomed to repeat the same death? What am I to do, please?" I begged and clutched the vine hanging them. They remained quiet and didn't answer. I felt tired, and tears came streaming down my cheeks. I wanted to rest and go to the bedroom that I had not visited before, but I felt the sudden urge to go outside and take a breather, so I did. I ran out, but the air was too arid, so I sprinted to the slope behind the house. I climbed upwards, and I reached a large crater on the hill. It was so high that the air felt humid but refreshing. I could think more clearly though I was clouded by the fog gathering around.

I saw a minimalistic white house in the middle of the crater, so I went there. I noticed the house had pillars of rusted gold and the scent of old perfume. It smelled familiar, but I could not make anything out of it. I knocked at the house, but no one answered the door. It turned out the door was unlocked, so I crept in. Sitting down by the chair in the living room, I waited for the owner of the house to greet me.

It was probably hours before an activity burst out but not from the house; it was from outside. I heard someone rustling behind the door, and I shouted, "Door's unlocked!" and the movement stopped. The person seemed to take their precious time before entering, and I saw a lady. "Ah, you must be Mycah!" she said upon her reveal. *She had to be the doctor*, I thought. I only nodded.

"I'm sorry. I-I wasn't expecting you here!" The doctor claimed. She hurried into the double door next to me, across the entrance door. She held a blanket in a bundle around her arms, and I saw a baby's face wrapped in it. The baby was adorable.

I confronted her, "You must be the doctor."

"Ah-ah, yes! I am the doctor on this island," she said. Why did she seem so scared? I hadn't invaded her house. I merely waited in the living room, and barely anything was there.

"What's the baby's name?" I asked her.

"Oh, yeah. Uhm," she paused to think. I felt bad for asking her that. She probably hadn't given a name to it. "Hmm, guess his name," she told me.

I was confused why she would ask me that. The baby was hers, and she asked me to guess the name? How would I know such a thing? I brought my head closer to the face of the baby and noticed how his eyes were glimmering. "Look at his eyes. Eyes brimming with questions. Probably can't wait to see what's ahead in life. The joy of adventures and the warmth of love," I said, but I noticed I had talked too much, and the situation turned awkward. I gave it quite a long time before I asked again, "So, what's his name?"

"What say you?" the doctor asked again. She had regained her composure, it seemed. She continued, "It's just that I just adopted the baby and I haven't given a thought."

Ah, *that makes sense*, I spoke inside my head. I looked once more into the baby's eyes, and with the anticipation filling those pairs of eyes, I could not help but blurt out a name. "Abraham," I murmured. She hummed in return for confirmation, and I simply repeated, "Abraham." She was half-smiled, and I believed she wasn't delighted with the name, but she asked for it.

She nodded and responded, "Abraham, it is." When she finally opened the double door, I saw a glimpse inside the room, and it was her office.

She asked, "Would you be a kind soul and hold him for me just for a minute, please?" and handed over Abraham to me before walking away from the door and into the kitchen, saying, "I would like to prepare tea for both of us." She winked at me and disappeared into the kitchen. I returned back to my chair and waited in the living room. I heard something moving inside her office, but she was in the kitchen. It was probably an animal, a cat, or a mouse. People said cats could be a blessing, but some colors meant a bad omen, such as black. But I had no idea because I had never been the cat type of person. The story of black cats being an omen is probably just a fig of the humans' overworked imagination. A product story from their own fear.

Abraham started crying, and efforts turned fruitless when the loudness became obnoxious; I didn't know how to calm him down. So, I ran outside and went on a walk with him around the house. The fog had dissipated slightly, and I could see further on the plain; from afar, I could see a farm. Quite the distance, it could belong to the lady doctor. I went around and arrived at the back of the house, where I found a trash bin. I noticed there was something inside the bin. There were three frames of painting stacked one upon another. I picked the first one on top. It was a picture of Jeanne d'Arc being burnt inside a large, though she was unburnt. I clasped the frame, pulled the painting out, and touched the canvas material. It was rough, and I felt the heat radiating to the tip of my fingers. Above Jeanne, there were seven seals circling the skies and the seventh, *but wait, no*, I counted wrong. There were seven seals and a person, it was the lady doctor! She held a trumpet or a flute; I could not tell, but it was an aerophone instrument. The scene was eerily similar to the death of Hypathia I had just experienced.

I cautiously placed the painting on the ground and pulled the second painting out of the bin. It revealed a painting of the giant Hodr stabbing Baldur with a large spear. Behind the giant's face, there was another



face. It was the lady doctor's face! What was the meaning of that? There was a recurring pattern between the two paintings. *Death*, I concluded. But why was the lady doctor being drawn? Was she narcissistic, or perhaps she painted it herself and meant it as an expression of some hidden meaning?

I placed the painting on the ground and pulled the third painting, but I could not see what the painting was because I had heard movement to my left. It was the lady doctor, her eyes were shrewd in panic, and she screamed, "You're not supposed to be here!" She came after me, but I moved back slowly before her pace became more frequent. I started running away from her, and I could hear her screaming, "You're dead!" She was mad! I kept running, carrying a crying Abraham.

Minutes later, we reached a large lake in the crater. The edge of the lake felt like the edge of the world. Two humans fighting one another in a fiery dance above deadly waters. I still held the third painting, but before I could see the content, I bashed it to the doctor's face, and she yelled at me, "You bitch!" I ditched the attempt to attack her twice with the frame of the painting, so instead, I took a sharp fragment of the frame's glass and held it in my arms. I used it as a weapon, a dagger. The doctor only bellowed in frustration, and she ran towards me, but before she could touch me, I slashed the sharp glass arbitrarily at her, and her torso was bleeding. She was bleeding a blue-like substance out of her veins. It was so strange. I kept on stabbing her and realized that she wasn't dying. She was just simply absorbing the damage and letting her body be ravaged. I knew I had to do something but didn't know what to do. I ran backward to the lake and slowly drowned myself. It eventually reached a spot where both of us were drenched up to our girdles, except for Abraham, that remained untouched by the water, but he was drenched in sweat. In that water level, we were equal. We were both heavy with water and restricted from moving around freely. The only thing I could do was threaten her with the sharp glass. She moved in

closer, fearless. In moments of desperation and fear of drowning, I threw the glass at her face, and it stabbed right through it. It was a mistake. She pulled the glass out of her face, and her face morphed into a gruesome sight. She had five slug-like parts coming out of her head, and the womanly face I saw earlier had gone entirely. The deformation and the gruesome sight made me sick to my stomach. As much as I hated it, I could not look away, not at that moment. The doctor swung the glass at me, and she missed, but before I could recover my stance, her arm twisted to the side and accidentally slashed my right eye in return. I screamed, but I wasn't alone. The doctor was also screeching when she hurt my left eye, and I was questioning many things. When Hypathia was tortured, Cyril ordered the mob not to touch her eyes. Perhaps, there was something about our eyes that could endanger them? I knew I had to try because I wouldn't survive the bleeding either way. I placed Abraham on the water and pushed him away from the scene, profoundly hoping that he would be washed away by the current and safely transported away from me and the doctor. She swung at me again, and I braced the stab, letting the glass impale my left hand. But the plan worked; I had succeeded in holding the glass. I pulled our joined hands together and led the tip of the glass to my left eye, and I stabbed it through. I held back from screaming while the doctor seemed to struggle with herself. She was screaming endlessly. The sound was a ringtone to my ears. It marked, hopefully, an end. A vengeance, though I wasn't sure that would be the end or not. The end of the cycle of torture and suffering.

Her voice ceased, and I could not see anymore. My eyes were both gone. There was only one thing I cared about losing my eyesight for. Colors. Only then, in the moment of blindness, I realized how colors meant everything to me. It allowed me to see everything in the world. The cheerful part of it, the dreadful part of it, the gruesome detail of it. It allowed me to see cruelty and jealousy. Saints and sinners. Justice and

injustice. Life and death. Juveniles and adults. Faith and ignorance. Trust and betrayal. The truth and the lies. *An end... and a new beginning.*

I dozed off, my body weightless. I drowned in the hot lake and could not see the end of everything. It was just dark. It was the absence of light and, at it, the absence of life. But I was glad that I could do something about my miserable past. I could finally find redemption or salvation for what I had done in the past. Hopefully, that would be enough. May better lives be led without misguidance and agony. That was a cheer at life and a wishful thought about the future simultaneously. I finally spared myself from the cruelty of whoever had been hunting me three times in my three lives. It finally came to an end. *I finally found mercy.*

## Chapter III: Epilogue

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“You did it.” a voice called out to me. I recollected my memories, and I was somewhere else. Somewhere... silent.

I recognized that voice and called to him, “You’re the creature rowing the boat. The one that took me to the vines of my lives.” It was undoubtedly the figure rowing the boat. “I’m back?” I asked it, and I could not see the creature’s face. “What just happened?” I wondered. “I can’t see,” I panicked. But then, the memories started flooding in one by one. How I dispersed into thin air and returned to the island. How instead of running to the bedroom after I met the three hanging men, I ran to the doctor’s house and how the doctor was unprepared to meet me. It was unlike my first visit to the island, where I cowered in fear and slept through the day and let the world play me like a fiddle. I met Abraham earlier; he was brought to the island by the doctor.

“It was Hermes,” the creature revealed. “The young golden haired boy, it was Hermes,” it said, pausing hesitantly before adding, “The false guiding sun and the healer lady too.”

Memories of my three deaths became squandered, and my head plonked in realization. The blonde boy was the god Hermes all along. He killed me two times over and attempted to do the same the third time, but I stopped him. Right? Was he real? What business did he have of me? Why was he aiming at me?

“He has always been a curious creature. And worse, he made Apollo his enemy. Watching you makes everything clear now. Hermes has always been the cunning one. He looked into the future and saw that his name would be forgotten. That he would be nothing but just a name in scrolls and a face in statues. He had the responsibility to ensure the gods survive the passage of time,” the creature explained, and it approached me. It continued while touching my chin, “And he saw it in

you. The answer he was looking for. He knew that your vision was the key to helping the gods secure their future. To help him prolong.” The creature let go of my chin, and it walked around the boat, swaying the boat in every step. It conspired, “Hermes thought he was a king and a god. But that was in the world he knew, and when he came to your time, Mycah.” It stopped, adding, “He realized he was merely a captive in this new life. He wanted to rule the world again, but you stopped him. He needed the colors to grant him a safe passage.”

“By stripping my vision, I stripped my ability to see colors. Hence, I barred the only chance of the gods securing their place in my time and the future,” I completed the creature’s theory, and it made sense.

“Exactly!” the creature agreed excitedly. It sounded proud.

“But why me?” I wondered out loud.

“Isn’t it clear?” the creature answered, “You’ve always been beloved by Apollo. Pythia was the best servant of Apollo out of them all. The gods called her the muse of Apollo. Hypathia, too, worshiped Apollo. While Hermes,” it paused again. I felt the boat being rowed once more. “Hermes always wanted to make an enemy out of Apollo. I remember once when he stole Apollo’s cattle. He was asked why he didn’t fear the wrath of the gods, but he was confident that his father, Zeus, wouldn’t bat an eye. He would be protected by his family.”

“That’s why I asked the lady doctor once about her faith and she answered that believed in her family,” I realized.

“But you’ve escaped the cycle of your suffering. You have outplayed the gods at their own game. You’ve broken free from the shackles of infernal torture. You’re free!” the creature repeated. The creature seemed to be surprised that I had managed to defeat a god. “This marks the end of our reign. We’ll disappear in your next life,” the creature added.

“Your reign? Who are you?” I asked. What did it mean by that? Was it a god too?

“The gods call me Charon. The ferryman of the underworld. You’re there.”

Shivers ran down my spine, and I got a chilling sensation. I could not believe that the ferryman of the underworld had been a friend that entire time. But that only meant one thing. He would soon disappear, too, with the remaining gods and their legendary creatures and figures. I felt emotional that everything would come to an end. It was a mix of satisfaction and guilt. I had sent the innocent figures into extinction.

“Don’t feel guilty, Mycah. Let this be the end of your cycle of guilt too,” Charon said. He gripped my shoulders. “I’m happy that you find some peace at last. In his pursuit of survival, all the gods paid in extinction. All due to him, Hermes the Trickster. How ironic,” he chuckled.

“I guess this is goodbye,” I said to him.

“It is. Farewell, Mycah.”

And I drifted to sleep.

I woke up next to an ocean, though I had no vision to see the beauty of it. I didn’t know where I was, but my assumption would be the island. I returned there, but hopefully, at that time, there would be nothing harmful.

I was right. I made my way even though it took me hours to reach the house and open its door. There was nothing inside. I heard nothing. It was an empty house, but the furniture remained the same. There were no three hanging men anymore. There was no crying infant. There were no vines; the house was recently maintained. There was still a large hole in my bedroom, but no more rain would seep in. The sun shone brightly ever since the day I enforced my freedom. I wanted to go to the doctor’s house and move there, so I did. It took me a couple of days to finally find the footing, reach the hill, and arrive at the doctor’s house. It was warm, and there was nothing evil. The paintings weren’t hung on the wall anymore; I did not know where they were. I stepped



into her bedroom and slept there. For once, the sleep felt like a victory, like the peace after treaties or truces. I just hoped that it would last forever.

And so it did. I remained there for the rest of my life as Mycah, the blind loner on a remote island. I died while visiting my old house by the beach. It was a quick and painless death next to the crib where the infant used to sleep. I never pondered once what had happened to him. Was he real, or had he, too, perished alongside the gods, or did he even exist in the first place? I strung out my last breath and died peacefully. In the last tug of my breath, I prayed that the next life would be better. And I wished that in the next life, I would regain my vision once more.

The next time I opened my eyes, I was pulled out of a tunnel. There had been lights at the end of the tunnel, probably for hours before I finally escaped. It was a strange feeling, and I seemed to lose my tongue. The only thing I could do was cry and cry more. I saw a woman behind me lying on a bed; she was panting, and underneath her was a sheet of blood. A loud crash was heard, and I saw a man; his eyes were teary, and he held me tight. He was happy to see me. The woman was too. He brought me close to her, and together, they discussed something. I could not fathom their languages, but I only heard one thing at the end.

“Abraham,” the man said.

I calmed down and stopped crying.

“We’ll name him Abraham,” the woman smiled at me and saw me as her beacon of hope.