

a net of stars,
woven

a collection by sumayyah a.

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synopsis

“ sing, o muse, of those who ruled on high, of women scorned and loved, and of golden crowns,
and blood, and love, and war...

sing, o muse, of those immortalized, golden-wreathed and ever-lauded, silver-souled and many-
storied...

sing, o muse, of those myths and legends, adorned, unforgotten and newly woven...”

↳ a collection of myth retellings

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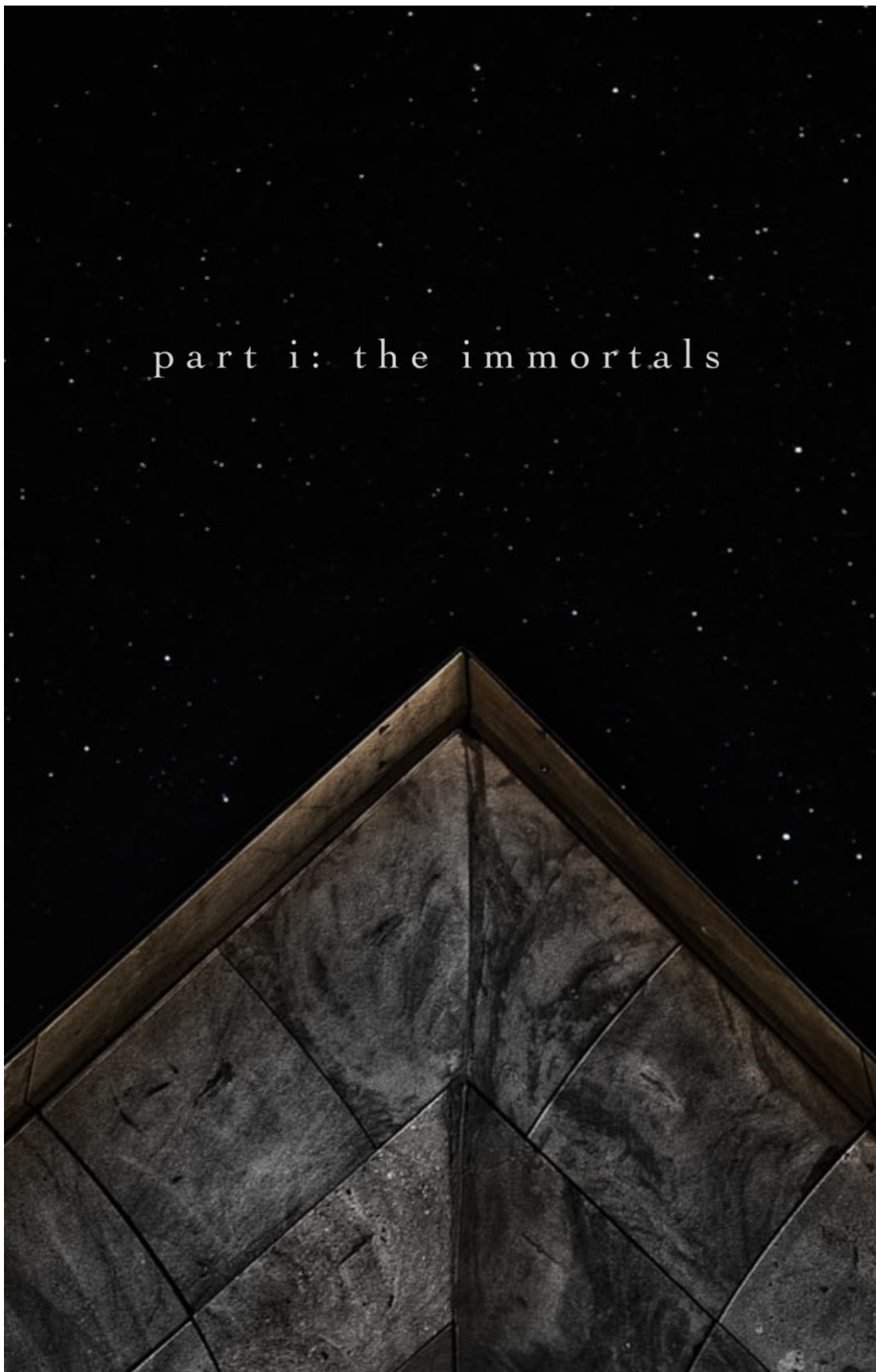
preface

i found this collection in my email, having thought i'd lost it along with years of other writing when my hard-drive crashed in 2018. it was previously posted piecemeal on my now defunct blog *petrichorlore* as well as on ao3, though i don't remember the username i had then.

the stories in this collection were inspired by prompts sent in by old followers but are otherwise entirely my own.

enjoy, my loves.

part i: the immortals



family » hades

I was so young when I was given the realm that now shares my name. Very young, and yet, old even then. Tired, I suppose. I had become used to that cavernous darkness, the limbo of my father's self, which had become my second womb, and to burst suddenly into light and rage and war...

I have never become used to it.

The mortals say that I lost the lottery, that I was tricked into ruling the grim abode that all things will ultimately call their own, that my liberator brother ruled the heavens as was his right, and that the choice between sea and shadow was never a choice, but rigged.

It is convenient to let others think as they will. Zeus, mighty though he may be, was almost a child then, and with a child's judgment would never have deigned to give me what I wanted, so I let him believe I did not want it. It was not so difficult, as children will always believe that what they have is what all others wish to have.

Poseidon suspected, I think. He governs all waters through his governance of their source, and my land has five rivers that he knows as his daughters, distant and removed though they may be.

We are brothers, tumultuous relationships notwithstanding, and Poseidon knows something of my preferences, knows something of me. The depths of his land are far more still than the sorrows of mine. He is the middle child, and as such, most attuned to both Zeus and myself.

Why do you think that the sea, that illustrious cosmos between Heaven and Hell, is his domain?

drive » hermes

Sometimes he misses the winged sandals. The humans have mimicked them, but they don't carry you anywhere but with one foot in front of the other across the earth. The motorcycle makes up for it, though.

He loves it; the sleek movement, the roar of the engine as it rattles through his bones, the noxious fumes (which, yes, he makes worse just to watch Hera struggle not to wrinkle her lovely nose).

He loves flying along the labyrinthine Los Angeles highways and its never-ending traffic, or watching the dust billow behind him as he races pick-up trucks full of sheep in Tunisia with no consideration for lanes or guardrails, or weaving impossibly quickly through the crowds in a market in Delhi.

Sometimes Artemis joins him, though she always drives and he holds onto her from behind, laughing. She rides like she hunts, fierce and fluid and very nearly catastrophically, but always retreating in the nick of time from that line of can't-come-back.

As much as Hermes loves his motorcycle, he will forever look at Charon's ferry with envy. He's driven all manner of vehicles, but never once has he driven that one. He's only allowed to bring the souls (who, the poor things, do enjoy the motorcycle as the last fun ride of their non-lives), but the ferry is one line that he mustn't ever toe.

Just once he'd like to glide across Styx with the shades milling around him like particularly large dust motes. He'd like to be caught in the flow of something non-sentient with enough power to bend even Zeus to it just by *being*.

He might be a little afraid of how much he wants to be powerless.

insanity » eris

content warning: blood mention

Break, break, break.

Blood that slips, slides, is red and strong. Blood that flies and blood that falls and blood that smears. Bright eyes, brighter teeth, sharper hands. Whisper here, whisper there, yes brawl, yes hate, yes plunge the sword through your neighbour.

Break, break, break.

Dance, dance and dodge and jab and hate. Be angry, be swift, be persistent. Fuel the fire, fuel the screams, fuel with blood and pretty words of honour and pride and revenge and rights fulfilled. Muffle their words, ignore the pleas, loosen their hold on their sanity. Forget, make them forget. Do, and do, and do, and do not think. Bad, bad and worse, drink it in, soothe not but broil longer.

Be afraid and fear not, go on, because you want to, go on, go on, *go on*.

mischief & challenge » hermes & apollo

Hermes likes Apollo, and nobody quite knows why. They think, perhaps, that Apollo is much too staid to amuse the mischief god, too much a god of herding with patience, too melancholy and blighted in love, too frustrating in his meandering foresight and after-sight and side-sight.

Hermes though, Hermes appreciates Apollo. They are partners. Hermes is the deliverer of Apollo's madness to his mortals (Dionysus only understands madness without reason; while Apollo's madness is clothed in purpose). Apollo loves music and creates it and inspires it, and music moves mortals and immortals and gods alike to do so much, to be so much, to *want* so much.

Music is the language of wit, which Hermes can understand the way he cannot understand rules or boundaries or hierarchies. Music is a kind of trickery, in its way.

Apollo fools everyone but Hermes, fools them into believing he is not chaos, except his arrows are, and he is not madness, but clarity, and that he is only unfortunate in love, surely he doesn't *mean* to undo what he craves.

If Hermes were a mortal, Apollo would be his patron god. This is, perhaps, because Hermes challenged Apollo once, and won. He had been too new, then, for Apollo to see as swiftly as his arrows flew, but eventually...

The thing about Apollo is that he is so bound that he obsesses over freedom, and Hermes is so free he craves, in a secret part of himself, to be bound. They find balance in each other, (as balanced as gods can be).

light » asteria

content warning: non-explicit references to assault, predatory behaviour & coercion, drowning

Never forget who you are, her mother had told her when the children of her uncle began the war that would destroy the order that had been all Asteria had known.

Later, when Leto welcomed Zeus, who assured them that there was room yet in the universe for them, Asteria heard her mother's voice: *Never forget who you are*. Her sister did not listen. Leto wanted so desperately for her light to not fade away as her parents' and uncles' and aunts' had that she would lie with Zeus the deceiver, the usurper.

Asteria turned away, and watched her own light fade, while her sister's grew and doubled, nay, tripled. Leto told Asteria that she would bear Zeus's children, his bright, bright twins, and they would be safe, finally, safe and ever-bright.

Never forget who you are, whispered her mother, and Asteria would not forget that before them there was Gaia and Ouranos, and before *them* there was Nyx and Tartaros, and before, long before, there had been nothing, and from that nothing Asteria became what she is, and to that nothing she will return, as all will.

When mortals forget, gods fade, but Asteria will not forget who she is. So when, inevitably, Zeus turns from Leto's heavy, growing light, turns to her sister in appraisal, Asteria knows, and remembers who she is, and remembers who Zeus is.

Zeus may pretend, may forget, but he is the son of Kronos who aggrieved Rhea, and the grandson of Ouranus, who tore at Gaia. So Asteria runs, and she does not forget, not when she's tired, not when she's alone, not when Leto wails her birthing pains and realizes how small a place in the heavens she has, and not when Zeus chases and chases and *chases*.

Then Asteria sees the ocean, and she sees freedom, and fading, and the end of pursuit, and she drowns, but she does not forget who she is.

I am Asteria, daughter of Phoebe and Coeus, sister to Leto, and I will not forget who I am.

love » leuce

content warning: non-explicit references to predatory behaviour & coercion

Leuce loves the river Lethe the most, but Hades will not let her near it. Hades loves her; she sees it in his solemn, enduring gaze, and his solemn, enduring, *encroaching* hands.

She used to be free to encircle all the life of creation, to caress the Mother of mothers with joyous devotion, before she was taken. She cannot swim, anymore, nor dance with her sisters, nor laugh with her Mother of mothers, nor submerge herself in anything so wholly unrestrained as the realm of Ocean.

She could, if she let herself, submerge herself to the persistence of Hades, but she will not. He will not let her go, he will not let her swim in Lethe, he will not let her *be*, so she will not let him *have*.

Leuce becomes just another river in Hades' underworld, to accompany the rivers of pain and hatred and wailing, and is desperate only for oblivion.

Fire is the only river she wishes for Hades.

dark » athena & medusa

content warning: non-explicit references to rape/sexual assault

She prayed to me, I think, as I watch Perseus atop their sister's winged son fleeing the Gorgon's grief-fueled pursuit. I remember Medusa's prayers, constant and desperate. Make them stop watching, make it dark so they cannot see me, I don't want to be beautiful, I want to be strong, make him stop, make him stop, make him stop.

Over and over and over.

Poseidon dared to desecrate my temple with his despicable act, and Medusa prayed and prayed. I gave her what she wished for, though perhaps not in the way anyone had expected. They think, the men in their arrogance and jealousy and inability to understand, that I punished Medusa, my beloved, desperate, beautiful disciple.

No. She wanted darkness to swallow her beauty, to free her from their petrifying stares and hands and weight. I gave her the gift of bestowing darkness on any who transgressed the right she was owed (autonomy, bodily sanctity, freedom). Medusa understood. She needed only the love of her sisters, the quiet of the caverns she dwelled in, and the ability to wield a different kind of strength.

Men were foolish, men pursued her even when the legend of great Athena's wrath had spread, and they reaped what they tried to sow. So she adorned her home with their visages, and they met the dark of their petrified bodies.

But the Fates have destined this course for Perseus, and Zeus is lord of Olympus, and I have my duties, but even so...

When Perseus escapes, I descend upon the wailing, spitting sisters. "I will honour her. My father raises his gloried warriors to the heavens, but I will keep her with me, always. She will be honoured, she will be a symbol of my power and my wrath and my justice."

The Gorgons concede, as I knew they would, and I take Medusa and I make her a part of me. No one will ever forget my Medusa, even if for the wrong reasons. That is the way of wisdom, it's a gift not given to all. For those who are wise, they know what Medusa means, to me, to women everywhere, to herself.

introduction » ares & aphrodite

content warning: ableist language, non-explicit references to rape/sexual assault

When Aphrodite met Ares, it went very simply in her mind. She wanted him and therefore she would have him. She emerged from the sea fully formed and more beautiful for her creation from the savagery of her grandfather and father and its union with the wild and tempestuous sea.

She never thought she would meet anything like herself (a thing, always, was what she was taught to be), nothing so passionate and unrestrained, and it was only when she was wedded to Hephaestus the cripple that she met Ares.

He was gore and glory without façade, and while *she* was seen as a child, ill-tempered and willful and to be appeased, something to be admired from afar, *he* was seen as powerful and proud and rightly the god of war, rightly the father of chaos and destruction and torturous battle.

She almost hated him; but love was a hate beyond dislike and disgust, love was a hate to *consume*. She wanted so viciously to consume Ares and his status before the gods, his visceral brutality and joy in destruction, his abandon, his fearsomeness, his freedom to be what he was, that she *almost* understood the brutality of Ouranos against Gaia.

That Ares could pursue and crave her like he craved bloodshed, yet she was not to reciprocate what the foam still in her veins surged for because she was *wedded*, was what she truly hated.

As if vows meant anything to gods.

As if the goddess of love should or could be restrained.

Aphrodite met Ares and it was as violent and inevitable as the crash of waves upon a shore.

rules breaking » ishtar & athena

Wisdom and war, is Athena. Justice and civilization, too. But Pallas, oh, Pallas she kills cowardly from behind the God of Thunder as Pallas is frozen in fear.

Athena, Athena, I tell her, this foreign mourner who weeps without tears, *Athena you don't belong here. There are realms that must not be crossed. Do not reap mistake upon mistake.*

I do not understand these goddesses and gods, strong and powerful, yet all too willing to succumb to their failings. *Embrace this, Athena*, I tell her, but the warrior-queen heeds me not and pulls me into her stoic fight.

I laugh, and fight her, and forget the boundaries. *Just this once*, I tell her, *I'll break the rules that govern, I'll join you in their usurpation.* She looks unimpressed, grey-eyed and thin-lipped, but fights me nonetheless. I know, from her expression, that she knows some little of the retrieval of my consort and the boundaries that I crossed then.

I laugh and dodge. War and warring is an act of love as much as anything else, and I am the goddess of both.

I do not understand these frail-seeming rulers and their frail laws and the regret they sow and reap as though it, and not ambrosia, is their sustenance. But I understand love and grief and warring against rules, and I understand Athena. So I laugh and beckon and fight her and let her break between our realms.

War can be healing of great wounds, sometimes.

starvation » hera & zeus

Do you know what it's like to be starved? A goddess should never, yet I, a goddess, have. I have tasted the loss of my mother in the bowels of my father. I have tasted the dearth that abounded when my brothers and sisters fought the Titans for rule of what was rightfully ours. I have tasted Demeter's grief for her daughter, for humans will die without sustenance, and humans without sustenance thus neglect their gods.

This starvation I have suffered is unlike what I have suffered since the beginning of the creation of those wretched humans I call mine, and I suffer it at the hands of my husband.

I have been starved of his love, of his care, of his affection, and more importantly, of his respect. It is made worse by the fact that he is not incapable of any of those things. No, but he bestows it on unworthy beings, human women and immortal women, brave and courageous men, and their children, and always, always someone other than me.

The mortals laugh, you see, and praise Zeus for the bestowal of his honour and attention on their pitiful race, laugh at the great goddess who must lack something if her own husband abandons her and desecrates any honour she held again and again.

I punish them, I show them that they should be afraid to transgress on what was never theirs, but Zeus defies me over and over, dishonours precisely what I represent, and I begin to wonder if I should give in and give up on holding him to what he owes me.

But I am the goddess of marriage, the goddess of the women he leaves me for, and the goddess of the women who pray to me, and should I give up and give in, it will prove me weak, and it would be a disservice to those who come to me for ease in their marriage, or help in their marriage, or safety from their marriages.

I will not. I will fight, and I will hate, and Zeus's transgressions will *never* be safe from me. I will survive on nothing. After all, starvation is the companion I wish Zeus would be to me; persistent and loyal and ever-present.

Starvation is *mine*.

waiting » the muses

We are always vehicles for more

(ignite us, they beg, set us aflame, let us burn so that the smoke from our souls streaks across the
skies, make us more than impressions in sand eroded by time)

What's in a name, is it us, are we our names?

(mortals, they all want more, always more, they can't help themselves. impermanence is as a part
of them as 'man' is of the word)

('mor' begets 'mortal', 'mor' means death, and mortals pray to stave death off, ever)

(are we the thing named or the name of the thing?)

Pride yourselves on our naming

Recite our names tripping across tongues in fleshy caverns

Slipping between lips that feverishly beseech

Name us and our names are our chains

Make us chime

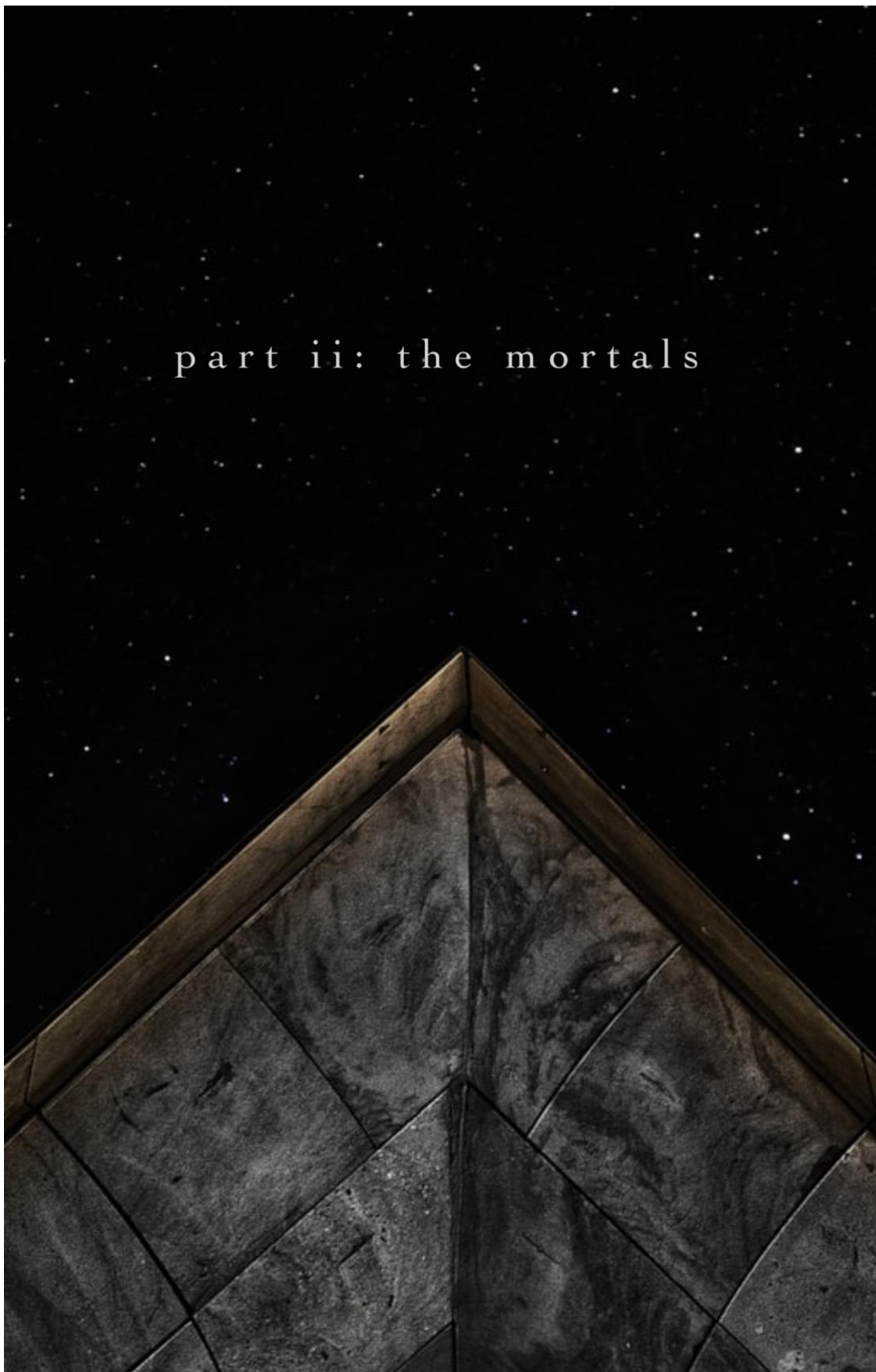
(are we more than our names? or are we nothing but the bearers of our names, a tack to hold up
the sounds that identify. are we only language, sounds strung together like the beads of pleas that
spill from your mouths begging for more?)

(we will wait for the answer)

Mortals are not the only ones who want

m o r e

part ii: the mortals



illusion » andromache

Illusions are layers of veils that mislead, and who wear veils better than women?

Pity was and remained the gift most offered to the Queen of Thebes. Pity for her loss of her kingdom, pity for her loss of her father, and her brothers (all seven), pity for her mother who died of grief, an illness virulent as any other.

Pity the queen who lost her queendom.

She was the perfect wife, was the Queen of Thebes, served loyally and lovingly. (Not like Helen who rebelled and loved as though she were Aphrodite, not like Helen who doomed a thousand ships).

Praise the queen who grieved with such fervour that the gods remembered her, blessed her with longevity after they sent her trials on the heels of trials.

(Grief, like pity, is another veil, less soft, less pretty, a striking mask).

Pity her son, who fell as Troy's walls did and left his Queen mother alone.

(Loss mingles with grief and pity to obscure as deftly as layers of silk).

There are layers and layers and layers to Andromache, layers that hide her canny mind and her war-hardened gaze, layers that hide her design as she laments the assassination of her second son, layers that hide her lure to complacency in the guise of a body meekly given and taken, layers that conceal and confuse and misdirect.

Until men die and children die and husbands and lovers and angry wives die, and all that is left is Andromache, who lives, and sheds layers of illusion as she lives longer than the brash and the passionate and the warmongers and the pitying and the grieving and the praising.

Until Queen of Thebes she remains, without need for crown or Thebes or King.

questioning » atalanta

I am abandoned, squalling and red, and a bear nurses me, raises me with strength and ferocity and power. It is a masculine power, not clothed and illusory, but aggressive and confrontational, and why not? I was not raised to be a maiden, and my father should not complain so.

I hunt with the men and draw first blood of the Boar, and men's pride is skewered as surely as the goddess's trial. If Artemis hunts, why mightn't I? If Artemis you revere as worthy and dangerous and skilled, why not I?

Why should I marry a man who only wants to tame what has become wild? The milk of a bear in grief for her cubs strengthened my bones; I want nothing less from any partner of mine. Why shouldn't any man who deigns to attempt to defeat me die for his greed? A woman says no, and a woman is thus ignored, so why should I not threaten with death those who only hear 'yes' no matter what I say?

So I run, and they die, and then. Well, you see, a man prays to a goddess who meddles without care (as most do), and she makes apples of gold, and I pause just long enough for him to race by, and I am trapped by my oath (I should've seen the loop-hole, the one he flew through, the one that should've said 'no aides allowed', but I didn't).

So I am won, and I obey, and I marry, and I am bred. My son is my own, and I will raise him to fight like animals do, without conniving but with skill and honour and cunning. I will raise him to hear a woman's 'no' even when she can't say it. Why should I carry him for nine months and birth him screaming only to have my husband rear him to be less than I?

Don't forget those golden apples, because men are foolish and forgetful, and my husband did not learn from the Boar, and forgot whom it was that made winning me possible. He is turned into a lion, and I with him.

But why am I written as punished? I am free, I am powerful, and my 'no' is a roar and claws and a jaw that can crush skulls, and I drink the blood of those that would win me. Aphrodite does not know, she cannot, she is unable to see anything but soft curves as the best weapon against men.

But I was never raised to see myself that way.

misfortune » tecmessa

content warning: non-explicit references to rape, blood mention

Atë flits with her light, sharp steps across the world and upon mortals' heads, pausing only long enough to step punishingly deep with every footfall as she pleases. She came to my birth, on her way to Leda, and pricked her heels on my mother's heart so that it failed as I wailed my first breath.

It was she who stole a glimmer of Aphrodite's beauty and fed it to screeching Helen still red in her mother's blood. It was she who turned Agamemnon's head towards his future bride, and then turned Paris' head too. Helen traipsed into Paris' arms with hardly more than a glance from Atë's sharp eyes pale as newly honed steel, and Troy fell as she danced 'round the city with a smile that cut wide.

With her farseeing, scheming mind, Atë dashed aside all harm for Ajax and let it fall wherever else it might. It was she who buzzed around him and with quick pricks led him incensed to Teuthras, where at her crow of delight he killed my father.

Amused, she spun and revealed me from where I hid so that I fell before the great ox of a warrior. She pierced the memory of his wife so that it withered and died, and fuelled his desire as though she waved a flag red before the bull.

He stole me away and at last she flew for Odysseus, so easily is Atë's whimsy stirred. (For ten years she toyed with him, though she loves me longer it seems). Achilles is slain when Atë rides Apollo's arrow with glee, and my then husband leaves me heavy with his child to retrieve his body from the Trojans.

It is she who sparks the feud between Odysseus and Ajax, and steals the title of 'unconquered' from my lord (it always was hers anyway). He follows her home, and with a sigh of pleasure, Atë holds the sword he falls on so that his blood washes my feet just as my hands fly to stop him.

The last I see of her, she presses a kiss to my swollen belly that is as light as a breath and pierces deep as an adder's poison.

I scream.

seeking solace » niobe

Pride ruined you, and you will suffer for it. Yet the gods are not ignorant of mercy, nor wholly cruel. Amusingly enough, our mercy can cut deeper than our wrath.

You, Niobe, boasted to a goddess of your progeny, which was foolish of you, true. What was worse was that you boasted to *me*. My twins are the most hard-won and precious things I have born.

(Did you not recall your own birthing pains? Did you not ever wonder what it would be like to be unable to deliver your children? Had I been mortal, my children would have died, and I along with them).

You were a fool and so you lost your children, casualties of your pride, and you lost yourself.

Your pride will be worn away, as you weep. Water erodes even metal, and you are now only stone. Your only solace will be that the grief will end when all that is left of you is a tiny fleck of sand, when you are so insignificant that to have any notion of pride would be impossible.

The gods teach lessons in their cruelty and wrath and mercy. You have been given a punishment and a blessing.

Remember this.

blood » briseis, achilles & patroclus

content warning: blood mention

He flowed like water, she says, he flowed like water, like blood, and no one could stop him, no one could catch him. Not Aphrodite vengeful and terrible in her beauty, not Ares the lusty slaughterer of hundreds, and not any man on that terrible day.

He was lost, so very lost, when Patroclus fell. Achilles lost his pride, his sanity, any care he had for anything besides retrieving him. He would have slain his own comrades, were they not wise enough to steer clear.

Did he weep? I ask.

Not even when Patroclus' pyre was lit, she answers. I stood beside Achilles and a great heat poured from him as though it was *he* who burned. Any tears he might have wept were burnt away, and from then until Apollo's arrow struck him, his blood boiled too, like the river that was ancestor to Troy boiled. There were three great loves of Achilles, she tells me, his pride, glory, and Patroclus.

Not you? I ask.

She does not smile, she has not smiled since Troy burned to be nothing but memory, but there is a spark of something in her eyes. Not I, she says, for he left me to Agamemnon even when the great king begged, and he left me to bury them both when all was said and done and I had nothing but ashes and bones.

Did you not mind? I ask.

No, she muses, I would not and have never wished to be loved like that, as though my breath was all that kept one in the shape of a man. It is what comes of being born of a Nereid. No, it was not Achilles that I loved.

Patroclus? I wonder.

She turns away. Kind was Patroclus, even to a young girl who had lost all her family and all her agency, she says. His kindness did not temper his skill in war at all, for his great tenderness, made him all the more terrible in battle, more so than even Achilles.

I don't understand, I tell her.

Ah, she says, but you have never loved like Patroclus did, you have never loved with all your heart *and* mind. It was his mind that made him formidable, his clear thought and clear sight. Achilles loved as the tide does, surging and consuming and untempered...

forlorn » ariadne

author's note: i originally wrote this as a fill for a Fictober 2019 prompt. you can read it in that collection as well

She should have realized, that night, when he asked her. They had been sitting a little apart from the others and their campfires and their laughter and songs and merrymaking, the sky dark and wide and spangled with many-storied stars, and she had never felt more alive, more vibrant.

"Can you wait for me?" he'd asked, his eyes flame-bright. "Could you, if you had to? Would you?"

He had been uncharacteristically grave then, much more like the Theseus of the labyrinth, the Theseus doomed to death and afraid and trying not to be, the Theseus she had first seen and loved and mourned, all the glow of victory, triumph, and escape smothered, for the moment.

She should have realized what he'd meant, but she hadn't, had only laughed and kissed him and felt secure with his strong arms about her. She had only said, "Of course, my hero, of course I would."

And she had fallen asleep, in a cradle of sand and his cloak over her, exultant and revelling in her freedom and her love, and woken up—

Alone.

Trapped.

Forsaken.

There had been no sign of his having been there with the fourteen damned youths and maidens and sailors and traitors, as though Theseus had been an apparition, and like her mother before her, Ariadne woke from a dream to a reality worse than any nightmare.

As though she were cursed by the Fates for her betrayal of her father, for the murder of her monster half-brother, to taste freedom only to have it torn away. Only to leave her suffering and utterly alone, lamenting the cruel whims of fortune, the falseness of men's hearts, and the malediction of her bloodline.

And lament she did, wandering the isle like a wraith, her eyes turned ever upon the horizon for sails that never appeared. Nothing but the gulls returned her forlorn calls, until she

began almost to forget the sound of human voices, and became drowned in the crash and sigh of the surf and the mocking laughter of the birds and the furious howl of the winds at night, and all her hope dwindled and turned to utter despair.

Can you wait for me, he'd asked, and her answer now was *no, I cannot, no, do not ask this of me, no, please come back, no, I cannot bear it, no no no*.

Ariadne lost herself, but it was then that she was found.

Not by Theseus, betrayer and deserter, but by another. He appeared as a man but he was not of mortal kind, for he was beautiful and terrible in his beauty, the colour of him so rich it caused all else to appear faded before his glory, his form so striking as to cause all else to appear indistinct.

And his voice, when he spoke, was the voice of those crying out in ecstasy and madness and love in shadows deep, a voice that seemed to her ears to have the undercurrents of raucous laughter and the baying of hounds upon the hunt, of exultant sighs and oaths unbroken and damning and true, for all that they promised calamity and blood and glory, glory, glory.

"Enough," he said, soft and sweet, though his words seemed to pierce her very spirit and shear away the veil of misery that had ensnared her.

"Enough," he said again, "Orb-weaver, labyrinth-breaker, I have heard enough. Your sorrow is such that would make stone weep. Cry out no longer, sweet one, lost one. You are not alone."

And she looked into his eyes and thought them dark and devouring and ruinous, and thought also that she was already devoured and ruined and eaten up by all her pain, and could not be afraid, though she knew she should be.

And he smiled at her as though he knew her thoughts, and his smile was as sweet as honey and intoxicating as wine and so mournful that she thought her heart would break twice over at the sight of it, and he held out his hand to her.

"Enough," he said, "You need wait no longer. Will you come with me, sweetheart, and find solace with me? Will you come with me, clever daughter of a foolish king, and be held by me? Loved by me?"

And she said *yes, I will, and yes, I am yours, and yes, I am with you*.