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## Mythologies

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# Mythologies

## I. Waiting for Venus

You stand on a carpet and wait for your feet to sink  
Into the pile. You look at the artwork placed there  
And there like quicksand. Venus lifts a garland to the sky,  
Her eyes fixed on some god-awful horizon. She seems  
To have a purpose. Her hair, sliced into her back  
And shoulders, curls on her neck and molds itself  
Around your ears as you stand. So you blink, and walk  
To the next room, where you hear chanting and smell  
Incense. Your body opens, breathing in sandalwood  
And honey. You have to go back to her. Her waxy  
Gray skin is the color of your bones, and its chill  
Corrupts you, so you fall to your knees and conjure  
The Lord to heal her. She falls lightly from the pedestal  
And your arms surround a statue. Water condenses  
And yields over her solid eyes, rounded torso, the stony  
Tips of her breasts. And you pray that Venus has  
Broken her marble cage and is free, you lying on your side  
Next to an empty pile of shards, she a soaring blaze,  
Intact and unshed in your veins. But you know the  
Difference between life and dreams. So you shake her  
Water from your body, wipe lamb's blood from your eyes.  
And you leave that place of imprisoned, powerful ones  
Whose bodies fit into your hands as if shaped for you alone.

## II. Pallas

Every day is a rebirth of the one before.  
Grass shivers. Atlas blows clouds over the sun.

He sees the world gravely. With her body  
Athene circles me three times

and we fight, a dance of metallic clash and breathing,  
there an angry roar, then we love.

With every cut of her knife I further swoon  
to death. My skin slips off, an outgrown tunic.

I lie, loosen my blood to a carpet of earth,  
while she wears my empty shell like a vision.

The sun finds every exposed nerve. Burning,  
I watch her planets in the sky, spinning.

### III. Psyche and Eros

Her skin shines in the moonlight as if spun from gold.  
She twists her hair all the way around her neck until it's  
all there is. The gods talk about splendor: look here. She lifts  
her head, straightens her shoulders: the stars are your eyes.  
She rubs her lips with oil, goes home to dream of you.

She sleeps: eyes turn into your face, submit with a smile,  
your neck slopes to shoulders with arms cut into the sides.  
Your fingers grace her body. Speak into her mouth, forget  
about prophecy. Remember the danger of beauty without  
love, and then dream only with her. Don't worry, Eros,

she could fill the box with a pyramid of wax, a mound  
of earth, tiny chunks of myrrh. You could wed under the sea,  
two fragile fish like the swimming ornaments in her hair.  
Fall into her now as into blackest night, and stay, immortal,  
while she lifts the lantern to your face, to see how

you change into ever-lovelier shapes under her fingers,  
while your eyes are jewels under the lids, perpetually  
growing. She will find you. The moon shines purer  
than skin, even colder than the dreams of her god:  
if this were not true, you would never have woken.

### IV. Achilles Speaking to the Nereid Thetis

The day falls like rain under your grief.  
What are the tears of a nymph  
But a mere wet breaking of the old  
Gray clouds on this ground of war?  
Remember how falling, screaming,

(I stub out a cigarette  
to watch it  
scatter  
exhale a last blue  
cloud of smoke  
I'm dead  
warm  
I walk to the door  
and open it for air)

Huge, I tried to be born of you,  
And how these fists held air  
Until you grabbed my fat limbs  
Like fruit and I choked and gagged  
On water and life. Mother,

(in the silent urgency  
of late night I am  
enchanted by the  
sound of dead leaves  
in the wind  
I think no longer of loving  
it never even touched me)

Lover, destroyer of faith and men,  
The water of Nereus eats stars  
Like dates, then glows in the black  
Black of a destroyed sky. This is  
Why one waits and sees.

(sunrise  
a hot star coming  
with easy regularity  
encroaching on a body  
that will not await  
a new rebirth  
of wonder)

Howling to be made a man on this  
Stretched, war-littered battlefield,  
Bitter and mottled as the old  
Gold filigree on my royal chariot,  
I surrender to your immortality.

– Kristina Kruse '93