

## hidden islands

the boughs of mourning olives heave gentle groans with the rising wind; twisted roots find their way into crumbling stone, moss-covered, their worn curves concealed beneath creeping green. the double sound of water penetrates the heavy morning; first the clear thread of an island stream, then far away, a rhythmic assault, the voices of nereids in the salty breakers.

time has swelled into its own wave, cresting into the clouds. it has not yet descended but rushes on, growing, bulging, the foam-spattered peak bright in the spreading light of rose-faced dawn. the broad base of dark water is crushed by the future it carries. atlas trembled only beneath the world; this wave strains beneath the weight of all unheard stories as it rushes towards the still island.

so easy to sail past a speck of sea-caged land; if you cannot see it, what could convince you of its existence? swallowed in swollen sea, how does an island make its voice heard; how loudly the people on those islands must cry out, and still their voices fall back upon the silence they have melted into.

women once walked the wet sands on these sun-warmed islands. the barren rock, the sea-breeze bent cypresses and olives, these wave-hidden places were their sanctuaries, their prisons.

there was an island that moved with the sea; she drifted, content in her meandering existence. she rocked with the water, rocked with the sea.... and then a titaness stepped upon her and she was not one but three. a mother gasping to bring into the world her children and no land to offer her a resting place. but delos is a placid-natured island; she goes here and perhaps there and is welcoming to passengers. she'll get them where they want to go, eventually, eventually.... they mustn't mind if they arrive a few decades late... an island is not like a floating bubble spinning with the wind, and now she is carrying not one immortal but three.

perhaps she should not have been so hospitable – for out of the titaness springs a huntress goddess and following is a young god with golden hair, humming to match the drone of late-summer cicadas. delos, they say, what a beautiful place you are. no need for you to keep wandering about as our mother did, look at how tired

that made her, how weary you must be. time for you to rest, no more drifting about....

anchored to amphitrite's dark sea bed delos remains today, still, stationary. overgrown, consumed by the sea. why remember delos now, just another island, just another unmoving piece of land.

instead sweep south with the currents, to brilliant naxos, with sanded beaches, narrow forest paths. and by the sea, knees drawn up, chin resting upon her folded hands, the sister of a roaring bull remembers her horned, snorting brother, who has become nothing more than an echoing voice in a dark maze, buried, reverberating only deeper into itself.

years, what aching year have withered away since then; the voice of that creature, drowning out the laughter of his sister, has itself been lost, lost, until one day a starch-collared fellow leaned over and said to another, no man can be an island, not truly, no matter how monstrous and forsaken he may be. he must not have been thinking of women when he spoke; always some part of a woman that she keeps hidden in the sea of herself. once you've touched her there, her alluring gaze dims, her mystery fades. she's no longer a moving island, enchanting, singular. she's been bound down, ground to a halt.

turning away, the destroyer of her brother sailed on, leaving ariadne tangle-haired and thoughtful, spent of tears. a woman who thought her life would lead beyond the bronzed sea, moored now to an island who never dreamed of drifting.

upwards swells the still-rising wave, and upwards lies another island, whose name is grief, a wail, the voice of abandonment that should have belonged to naxos. the sun drives fire-eyed stallions over that island every day, but no chariot returns to bring back the daughter to the house of helios.

time is nothing to an immortal; the injustice of being trapped has long faded, aeaea is no longer a prison to be prowled in brewing resentment; new thoughts and schemes are mixed there these days. aeaea. aeaea. it is a chant, a summons, a whisper across the shuddering waves that beckons all. the home of a woman reconciled in her exile, who revels in the sanctity of an island. her pens full of pigs and lions before her door, a smile

curving her mouth, hair brighter than the chariot she came in, and a name to be heard from afar. circe. circe. another chant, another spell. a name that drifts across the water, reaching many errant ears, calling. a goddess all on her own, have you heard? all alone on that island of hers, say you we visit? circe, circe, a woman from where there is no return, her name a cry that is flung out across the rippling sea –

and far, far away, forgotten island, survivor of the earliest dawn who will endure beyond the labyrinth of human memory. so small, so quiet, home to a wayward nymph with long dark hair. as secret as her island, the knotted shrubs wound about her nest with herself at the heart of it. buried within the tangling trees and shadowed caves, her passing barely noticed, her existence unobtrusive, her secrets unknown. few come this far from their home hearth, to the borders of their world. ogygia is met with blank faces, calypso merely a name like any other, meant to slip away, out of the mind. visitors come only to leave, nymphs are as common as greening leaves and like leaves, they can be found everywhere. why journey to the balanced edge of the sea for what you can find in the mountains of your own homeland, away from the drowning depths of a woman's eyes?

hidden islands, hidden faces, so many in the void of waves, sunken away, no longer remembered.

these waves that hide islands, swallow them, how large they have become. here is the one rushing towards the moss covered stones, the aged olive trees. still cresting, still rising, bursting over an island that clings to the warped floor of the sea. how worn these olives that cannot cling to the dry soil, born away by the sweeping water. the moss ripped from the stones, the trickling freshwater spring now as salty as the sea, all gone, carried away.

and when this wave has swept past, is sucked back into the sea, the water seeping away, draining back into the encircling ocean –

the stones of antiquity are laid bare, white in the sun, cracked and chipped. the engraved names worn away, lost at sea.

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