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2024**

**Special
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English Break



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نشانی: تهران، میدان ونک، خیابان ده ونک، دانشگاه
الزهراء (س)، واحد نشریات

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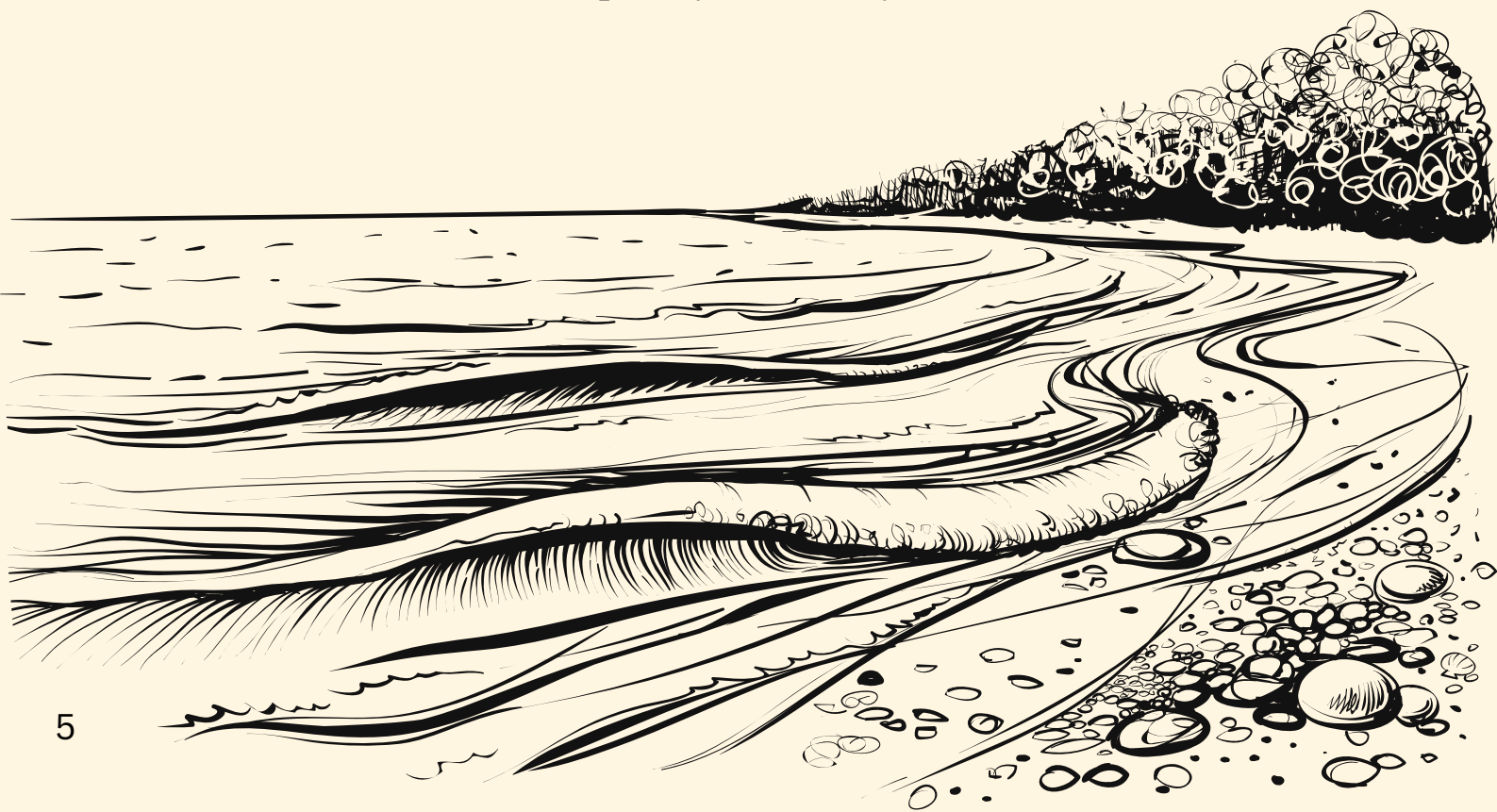
The Liquid of Remorse

By Ilgar Mahbooby Bonab

I await;
All the things I could devour.
Someone's late.
Their sweetness of melting,
Their solidity of sour.
I stay,
For the cry of greed.
They give birth and they kill,
No blooms, they breed.
Do I remember,
The mercy of The sun?
Did he surrender?
Or towards me did He run?
Does He cry?
Or are these the depth I mostly forget?
Did I even try?
Or for his presence,
My kindness I neglect?
Let's embrace the mistakes.
The flying,
The anathema only I know.
In this unity of misery,
We partake.



But only wailing and scars we show.
Get ready for His arrival of pride.
Get lost if you shall disagree.
You did, he did, I did, we all tried.
But now he lies, deep in the sea.
Oh,
What a hypocrisy!
Come rest on my stream of possession, my child.
Come put your dying wings on my undying wins.
What a composition!
This melody is a bride.
This string takes away your flesh.
This willow dances for you,
But these branches stay blue;
As I do.
You're as old as your father,
But to me you're fresh.
I've been waiting to love
The most intertwined complexity of eternity.



My fish for you I turned to a dove.
This chaos I soften to serenity.
Forget the sun, it's now just a hidden shade.
Forget the humans who couldn't stop you
from evading.
Remember me.
For even if you do I won't and shall not fade.
Remember the fish,
The shark,
The vague sky of crusading.
I awaited.
All the things I could own;
but now I sit on my bitter thrown that I created
of the melting wings.
All alone.
I'm stuck now.
It's been years and streams and tears and dreams and years again.
I don't know but the massacre took place somehow,
But I hold the memory of you.
The Boy of blue.
At last,
For you
Nobody but me cares again.



Sour Spring

By Yazdan Khoshsiraf

right to left from write I words
Words of all my stolen rights.

Cause my world's now upside down.

Light.

From

Escape

Here

Days

Even

under the world that beings be

I write my words in Pomegranate blood, as the red floods into my
veins used to be the tree sticks flourished with fruits and flowers
now next to the river Styx I sit and I write of all the nothingness I
bare foot on the lost souls, lost life lost.



Oh mother, Oh friends,
I miss your joyous laughs
No mother, No friends.
this Un-being I can't last alas as much as I scrimmage the past,
I'm stuck here to be the queen of no one and nothing.
Living is what I'm good at, not being the queen.
Oh mother,
I feel your wonder and how you wander around Every step
you take a pomegranate falls down
up from below.
I miss the tenderness of your sweet touch
Oh mother, Oh gods,
save me from Hades' clutch.



Apple Tree

By Zeinab Moradzadeh

Everywhere is teeming with apple orchards. Everywhere you look, they spread out far and wide, even if you haven't planted them yourself. This has been the state of the earth as far back as I can remember.

In the books, it is written that it has not always been this way like this. The earth had different features, some lands were devoid of trees, while others were submerged in water. People could eat things other than apples. There were many things, but not everything was great back in those days. How could it be, when there were no apples around?

It is written that the water slowly disappeared, and so did the apple trees. Birds left the earth when the fish were already dead. Some creatures still crawled on the ground, and eventually, they left as well. To where? No one knew. The day lost the sun, and the night lost the moon. People started to die and resorted to eating each other, and anything else that remained.

In the end, only thirty people remained—the last people on earth who realized that they would not survive much longer by killing each other. So, they gathered in a deep valley. Day and night, they began to pray to anyone greater than the dead moon and sun for help. They asked for a second chance. As they grew closer to death with each passing day, their pleas became more desperate and hopeless.

After three days, two of them died. The remaining twenty-eight mourned at their graves, as if they had lost a loved one, even though they did not know their names. None of them bothered to learn each other's names, since they were all destined to die soon.

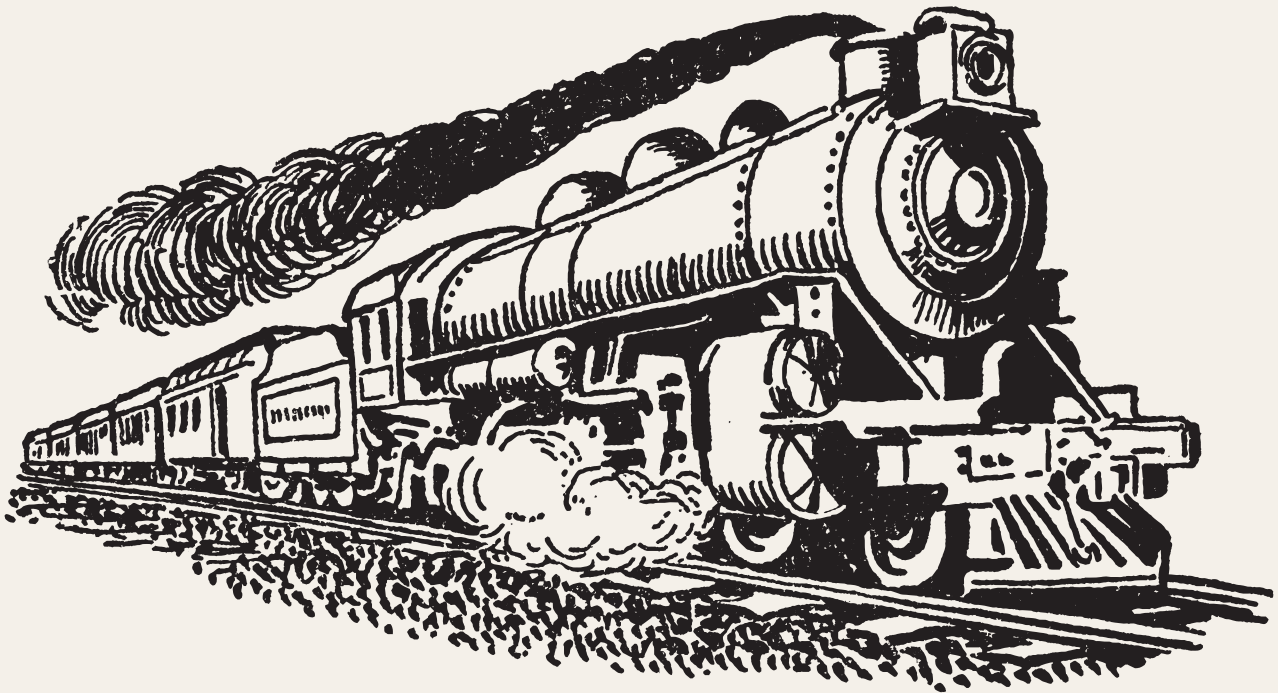
On the fourth day, one of them grew scared and lashed out, killing another with a big stone. The rest, also fearful, retaliated and killed the killer. By the fifth day, twenty-six people were mourning at two graves, feeling that both the murderer and the murdered deserved more than what they got.

On the sixth day, more people died, and the survivors lacked the strength to bury them. Instead, they left the bodies under the shadows of a rainless cloud in the sky. They huddled together and tried to remember every dead member's smile, vowing not to forget anyone.

The rest of the day was spent trying to recall what it was like to breathe in the old days, when the sun shone and the moon gleamed silver or blue. No one could remember the moon's color, or when water still flowed.

They struggled to remember the taste and the feeling of drinking water when they were truly thirsty.

They were trying to remember their relatives, their children, who died at the very beginning. One of the women was old enough to remember the last child born, named "Hope" by the world, hoping he was not the last. He was. One of the men remembered trains, their shape, and their speed, and how they were always crowded enough to make him swear. As he thought about this, he cried a single tear, which he quickly wiped away with his tongue. Then, he died happily, as it had been a long time since he could cry.



On the thirtieth day, the last person on earth was a seven-year-old child, who was also dying. His bones ached, and his muscles could not move. He closed his eyes and wished to die before his organs began to rot. Looking around at the now-quiet earth which he never felt peace on, the child thought that if there was a creator for this world, they must be really sad. It is hard to witness the crumbling of a castle you built with your own hands.

The child filled his fist with some pebbles and put them on his heart; wanting to die, but unable to steal the last minute of humanity's existence on earth. He simply laid down and pressed his cheeks to the solid ground. His skinny face was scratched, and a drop of blood fell.

He touched it, and that red sat on his index finger. The child felt blessed because he was lucky to see a different color than the color of death.

As the child opened his mouth to say his last words, he could only say: "Forgive us." And he was forgiven, along with all the people. The boy did not understand at first, waiting another night to die, but then he stood up, because he felt he could rise. The blood on his finger had dried, which was strange. It had been years since something had dried, and even longer since something had become wet.

The boy looked at his index finger and put it on his heart. The beat of his heart was completely clear through his thin skin—very calm, very tired.

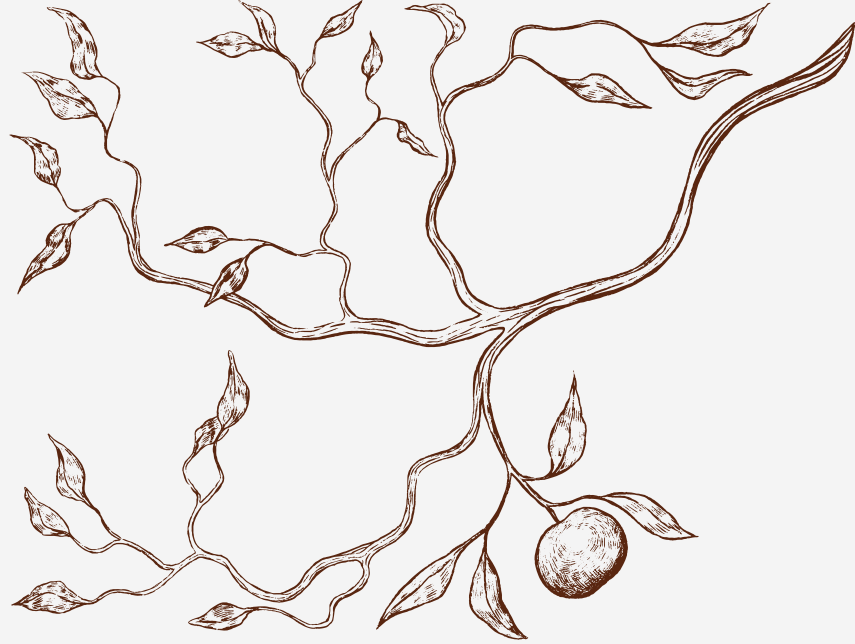


His other fist was still full of pebbles, and that was where everything came back; a little child's fist. Among those dirty pebbles, he found a coffee-colored seed, the first apple tree seed. The child put it on the ground because he did not know what to do with it. Only in his heart did he feel the need to protect it with all his broken bones.

Kneeling, his knees scratched by the harsh ground, the blood obediently flowed onto the seed. Afterward, he stood up and ran; something he had not done in seven years. Looking at the men and women around him, killed by their own hands, he scratched their hands, letting the blood flow towards the seed. All the blood in the world for all the life on earth. A wide smile brought his wounded gums to light, and he lay down next to the seed, wrapping his hand around it. The blood-soaked seed was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen, and the lonely cloud in the sky agreed with him so rain began to fall. The first drop fell on the seed, and the second on his painful cheek. The boy did not know what the rain was either, but he could understand it. The child was dead enough to recognize life.

For three days and three nights, it rained, and the first apple tree sprouted. It had a color that the child did not know but could not stop his tears upon seeing it. The child looked at the departed and wanted to scream for them to get up; “we had been given a second chance”. But his heart knew they had gone to where they had been dreaming of, where clouds rained, and young blossoms were everywhere.

After a year, he saw the first blossom on the sapling, and placed his red index finger on his heart in gratitude. The blossom quickly turned into the first green apple; green because the world was painted enough red by its loss. There was no need for more. The boy ate it, and the sky turned blue again. The second apple brought back the sun, and the third, the moonlight. When he picked the fourth apple, the ground became softer, and the tree grew magnificent leaves, spreading shade for him to rest under.



Every evening, he would lie under the tree, thinking of smiles, trees, apples, and their unknown colors. The boy grew taller every day, just like the tree, strong, young, beautiful, and alone. He knew the day would come when he would rest his head on the tree for the last time. Who would take care of the tree then? Pick its old leaves and eat its apples?

Caress its trunk and smile under its shade? So, he put his index finger on his heart one more time and asked the rain sender a companion, not for himself but for the tree.

And he was answered one more time.

So, it was that all the apple trees came into being. From each apple seed, ten trees grew with green and sometimes yellow apples. We, human beings, live alongside them, with our index fingers stained with blood from the moment we come into the world. No one cuts down the apple trees, because apple trees do not die; they just fall and slowly disappear like men and women. If we are afraid, we go to the rock next to the first apple tree, where the child is sleeping. And then we remember everything and calm down.

We garden apples and eat apple jams. The earth is filled with apple trees, and the sign of our humanity is the trace of blood on our fingers.

Yours Truly

By Hanieh Zare Soheyli

In the tranquil realm of Asgard, bathed in the warm glow of a serene sunset, all seemed to be in perfect harmony. The gods revelled in a peaceful existence, thanks to the exile of Loki. Perched above Bifrost, Loki gazed upon the gleaming towers of Valaskjalf, anticipating an evening of the divine assembly he was deliberately excluded from. Heimdall, ever watchful over the nine realms, was trying hard to dismiss Loki's lamentations and discontent.

Loki, enraged and drowned in jealousy, stated: "Look at them, Heimdall. The favored gods, gathered for another grand celebration. And here I am, banished to the periphery once more."

Heimdall, in a disappointing attempt to take over Odin's fatherly role, said: "Such is the way of things. You've brought this upon yourself with your malicious antics."

Loki became even more frustrated with his condition: "Spare me your moralizing. You know very well that my pranks were nothing but harmless jests."



Heimdall laughed: "Harmless jests, you say? Let me remind you of the time you mocked the gods with your cutting words, or that one time you pilfered Mjölfnir. And who could forget the audacity of shearing Lady Sif's golden locks!?"

"Ah! The Sif incident. But fret not, my dear watchman. I made amends for that little mishap. I sought the craftsmanship of the dwarves, remember?"

Heimdall sighed, of course he remembered.

A moment of silence hung between them as Heimdall's gaze shifted towards Midgard, sensing an unsettling chaos. Based on experience, he could say there was a storm brewing on the horizon, a war was on its way, a big one.

His gaze was still focused on that little city when he said: "Loki, you may possess great power and cunning, but you lack the wisdom and restraint that befits a god. Perhaps that's why Odin left you in my care."

"Left in your care?! Unbearable! Stripped of my rightful place among the honored ones, forever overshadowed by the boisterous Thor and his incessant claims of worthiness!"

"Thor has earned his place! Through valor and nobility, things you seemingly know nothing about! All you want is to disturb others and feed your adventurous spirit!"

For a moment, Heimdall felt sad for the poor lad, although he brought this disgrace upon himself, he had a good heart, Heimdall hoped. His attention shifted back to Midgard, driven by a sense of duty to interfere in human matters to stop the disaster he expected. Observing Loki's idle presence, Heimdall recalled Odin's helplessness, having failed to instill morals into him. At that moment, a plan took shape within Heimdall's mind.

He will bestow upon Loki a mission.



Series name: Loki

Berlin, Nazi Germany, 1938.

With the Nuremberg Rally just a week away, the town was a hive of activity. Soldiers marched with exaggerated precision, practicing their parade moves like synchronized penguins, while civilians scurried around, dutifully attending to their assigned tasks. There was a sense of harmony in that chaos, because everyone had an equal role in messing with everything!

Joseph Goebbels, the minister of propaganda, clutched the latest edited version of the speech he had meticulously crafted for Adolf Hitler in his hands. Deep in thoughts, he couldn't shake the feeling that something was missing from the lines. To relieve himself, he assembled his invention and rose to approach Mr. Mastermind to seek help.

Goebbels, his short leg causing him to waddle like a duck, shuffled awkwardly toward the room where Heinrich Himmler, the SS leader, was lost in an overcomplicated web of paperwork.

As he approached the door, a cloud of smoke billowed out, making Goebbels cough. He entered the room without any protest, hoping his wrinkled nose conveyed his disgust. The thick cloud of smoke engulfed the room, a perpetual fog of Himmler's questionable life choices.



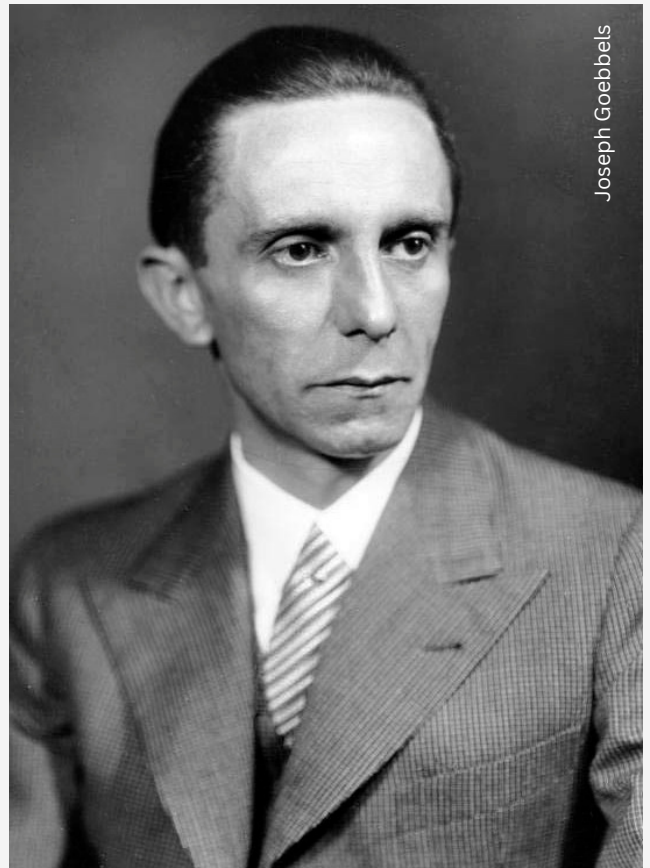
German troops
marching in Berlin

Goebbels looked at the mess of a desk in front of him and decided to spare his paper the grace of being lost in Himmler's messy notes.

Himmler took a long drag from his cigar and looked over his glasses: "I was starting to think you found another counselor, Mr. Perfectionist. To what do I owe the pleasure of this invasion?"

Goebbels sat on a chair, looking at his creation: "I need your input on this speech."

Himmler crossed his arms and leaned against his chair: "Go on."



Loki felt like he was falling for eternity. He stood on his feet, trying not to stumble. He was in a garden, he assumed. But not a typical Asgardian Garden. It was strange and unfamiliar, with barren trees and a chill in the air. As he started wandering in the mysterious tumult, he struggled to piece together how he ended up in this place. His last memory was a petty discussion with Heimdall, and he knew something was not right. Loki was disoriented and confused, and he could not shake the feeling that he was in for a fight he never saw coming.

Throughout 1200 years of attention seeking, Loki never felt this many pairs of eyes on him. People looked at him like something unearthly, which always made him proud. As he glanced at a group of people with similar uniforms, he figured they were surely the king's guard. He approached them, trying to assert his royal authority.

"Hey! You there! Where is the palace? I demand your humble cooperation!"

The general, taken aback by Loki's boldness and unconventional appearance, initially thought he was either an actor or a foolish clown.

"Can't you see I'm busy!? I have no time for your nonsense, leave us."

With that, the general dismissed Loki and walked away, leaving Loki stunned by his reaction. Loki began to realize he is not known in this universe and that the situation is far more complicated than he had imagined.

He continued his quest only to find more enigma and discrimination. He decided to give himself a second chance as he observed another group of officers engaged in a discussion. He could not resist the temptation to make his presence known. With an impish grin, he moved

towards the group, catching the attention of the tall, blond officer who appeared to be their leader.

"Hey! The tall blondie!" Loki called out; his voice laced with a hint of mockery.

Reinhard Heydrich turned sharply; his piercing gaze fixed on Loki. Anger flashed in his eyes as he closed the distance between them, his voice dripping with disdain: "What did you call me?" He demanded, his voice cutting through the air like a whip.

Loki, though inwardly feeling a twinge of unease, maintained his playful facade. He looked up at Heydrich, his eyes twinkling with a mixture of amusement and caution.

"The tall blondie, of course." Loki replied casually, his tone carrying a sense of sarcasm.

Heydrich's face contorted with fury; his jaw clenched tightly. The officers around them watched, unsure of how to react to this audacious stranger who dared to mock their chief. But Loki, ever the master of wit, held his ground, refusing to be intimidated.

A nervous energy filled the air as Loki and Heydrich locked eyes, each assessing the other's resolve. The trickster, despite his bravado, could not help but to feel a tinge of fear at the intense presence exuded by Heydrich.



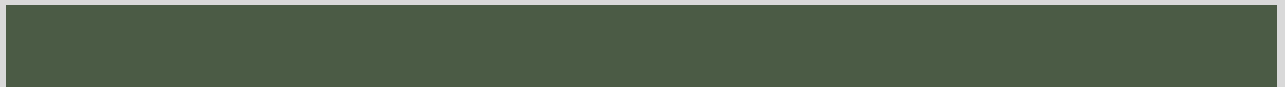
Reinhard Heydrich

The tension lingered for a moment before Heydrich's stern expression changed into something more perplexing and somewhat sinister.

"You have a sharp tongue," He grumbled. His tone was laced with a mixture of irritation and curiosity. He continued: "But be warned, mockery comes at a high price here."

Loki's lips curled into a sly smile: "Oh... I am well aware, dear blondie."

At that moment, Loki realized he wanted to know more about what was going on, and to gain insight, he knew he needed the supreme power to talk to, so he decided to play a little mind trick on his dear angry blondie.



Himmler stood behind the large window of his opulent office, overlooking the grandeur of the approaching rally. His gaze was fixed on the figures of Reinhard and his men, not paying much attention to the peculiar guest they were escorting. Little did he know that Loki had manipulated Heydrich into seeking an audience with his superior.

He whispered: "Do you think it will be the same?"

Goebbels, interrupted by Himmler's nostalgic tone asked: "What?"

"This rally; Will it match 1934's glory?"



Goebbels looked up from his papers, his eyes narrowing: "Heinrich, did you hear a word I just read!?" He asked, a hint of exasperation in his voice.

Himmler turned around, his face serious: "What we need is blind obedience and unquestioning loyalty..." Himmler walked towards his desk, thinking deeply as he adjusted his glasses.

"The speech lacks the conviction to make people believe that our Führer is a divine being and that national socialism is the only hope. Read it again, louder."

Goebbels started reading a revised version of it, only to be interrupted by an excited Himmler.

"Louder Joseph! Let me feel that sense of pride and honor!" Himmler proclaimed, a wry smile playing on his lips.

As Goebbels raised his voice and recited the words, Himmler perched himself on the edge of the desk, listening intently to Goebbels' amplified delivery.



"Yes, that's it!" Himmler exclaimed with enthusiasm as he finished.

"Thank you, Heinrich! You're a national treasure!"

Himmler chuckled, a rare moment of levity between the two men: "I never thought you'd be like them."

"Like whom?"

Himmler wrinkled his nose, showing his aversion: "The "Oh, wise and mighty Reichsführer, God bless you" them."

Goebbels laughed, and just as their conversation seemed to settle, a knock resounded on the door. Heydrich, looking visibly shaken and nervous, approached Himmler. The unease in Heydrich's demeanor caught Himmler's attention, and a sense of curiosity crept over him. He stood and crossed his arms, trying to hide his concern: "Reinhard, what is it?"

Heydrich hesitated for a moment before finally speaking: "There has been a... situation that requires your attention, Herr Himmler."

Himmler examined his inferior's expression: "Okay."

For a moment, Himmler thought Reinhard was possessed by a magical force, a concept he had studied and even, to some extent, believed in.

As Heydrich hurriedly left the room to bring the situation to his superior, anticipation was hung heavy in the air. Himmler's mind buzzed with the possibilities, wondering what could have possibly made "the man with the iron heart" go crazy.

As he entered the room again with four cadets and a man with a weird outfit, Himmler frowned, his curiosity mingling with annoyance. He stared at Loki with a fierce gaze as he adjusted his glasses once more: "What is this? Do you need my insight on mythological matters?"

He stepped towards Loki, his footsteps echoing against the marble floor: "Is this some new addition to the rally that I haven't been informed of?" He touched Loki's collar and whispered: "I almost gave up replacing Christianity with Germanic culture."

Heydrich interjected: "Herr Himmler, he's not a part of the rally, he wants to know what's going on."

Himmler, finding the matter quite unimportant, got back to his messy desk, trying to find the note he was working on previously: "So do I." He turned back to Heydrich, this time clearly displaying his frustration: "Reinhard, am I to be bothered with such trivial matters?"

Before Heydrich could answer, Loki let out a chuckle which fueled Himmler's anger. He commanded Loki to answer the question he asked with his eyes, and Loki, enjoying this game, cooperated: "It's just that... you don't look like leaders. You're more like a schoolmaster."

With that, he started laughing. Leaving everyone in shock and terrified of what was coming. Goebbels backed off, not having the guts to face the consequences of incurring Himmler's wrath.

Enraged, Himmler had reached his breaking point: "I'm done with this fool." He furiously slammed his hands on his desk, causing some papers to flutter to the floor.

"I will have you killed for such insolence!"

Loki, undeterred, replied with a taunting smirk: "You can't kill me mortal, besides... Heimdall is watching me."

Himmler froze, a flicker of fear crossing his face. Suddenly, the realization struck him that he might be under surveillance. Panic welled up within him as he frantically questioned: "Who sent you? France? Britain?"

He did not allow Loki to talk, ordering his arrest as his paranoia took hold. He even suspected "Heimdall" was another spy, present in his office. In a dramatic display of rage, Himmler accused everyone of being traitors and ordered the arrest of them all. Heydrich followed the order and shouted at Loki to follow him who decided not to make a scene, realizing he had underestimated Himmler's instability.



Himmler stormed off, making his way to his secretary, determined to contact Führer about this offensive act and the possibility of exposure of their plans. His mind raced with thoughts of conspiracy and betrayal as he prepared to report the incident to the highest authority. However, instead of writing his statement, he requested an audience, not trusting anyone at this point.

In his private room at the Kaiserhof Hotel, Adolf Hitler was lost in his artistic world, focusing on his portrayal of Reichstag. As the news of Himmler's arrival reached him, Hitler swiftly hid his painting under the sofa, not wanting his private passion exposed.

Himmler entered the room, his demeanor reflecting the tension and discomposure that had consumed him. They exchanged greetings, and the conversation quickly turned to the perceived conspiracies of foreign enemies. Himmler wasted no time in sharing his encounter with the spy who seemed to possess the ability to extract information from the look in their eyes.

After a moment of silence, Hitler said: "How much do you think he knows?"

Himmler confessed: "It's hard to tell, my Führer. I have personally interrogated him and so far, he's..." Himmler paused, frightened to admit his conclusion.

"It's like... he knows our deepest fears. He should be eliminated. There's no room for negotiation, my Führer."

Hitler, with a calculated calmness, considered Himmler's suggestion. This mess had to be dealt with immediately, regarding the gravity of the situation they were in: "I will personally speak to him before feeding him to my dogs. I need to know if he's playing the mastermind, or if he actually knows what we're up to."

The room was dark when Loki sensed a new figure behind him, his mind barriers much stronger than those of other mortals. He turned, only to see the live version of the man they worshipped and called the Führer. He was fierce, strong and powerful, a tempting combination for Loki to follow. The tension in the air was palpable as their gazes locked in an unspoken battle of wits. Hitler, intrigued by the mischievous trickster before him, could not help, but be drawn to Loki's air of confidence.



With a sly grin, Loki responded to Hitler's inquisitive gaze: "Finally, the great Führer himself. So curious to know who I am, aren't you?"

He smirked and whispered: "I can be so many things. Whatever you desire, I can become."

Hitler finally sensed what Himmler had warned him about, the chilling feeling of being mesmerized and not being able to do anything about it: "So tell me, whose side are you on?"

Loki's smirk widened as he leaned in, his eyes glinting viciously: "I'm afraid I must disappoint you. I serve no master but myself."

Hitler was attracted to him. He was playing this dangerous game perfectly: "What is it you seek? Power? Control? The admiration of the masses?"

"Oh, I know very well that you have them all. Tell me your plan and I'll decide what to be here."

Hitler knew he had no control over his mind. He needed to leave, but he found their conversation quite interesting. So, he stayed, cautiously exploring the man who knew everything.

The night was boring, especially because Loki knew there was a party at the Kaiserhof Hotel. As Loki found himself under the watchful eyes of the soldier assigned to guard him, he seized the opportunity to play with his desperation. Knowing that the soldier longed to participate in the upcoming rally despite his poor health preventing him from doing so, Loki crafted a compelling offer. With his persuasive power, he weaved an intricate mind trick, promising the soldier that he could grant him the wish. The soldier, overwhelmed, succumbed to Loki's manipulation and freed him from his confinement.

As Loki stealthily made his way through the hotel, he changed his mind. Instead of ruining the party with his interruption, he decided to feed his curious spirit. His nature drove him to explore the private lives and secrets of every special guest. However, He almost ran away from Himmler's room, since all he found was a collection of glasses, cryptic scribbles and indecipherable symbols.

He continued his investigation, reaching Führer's room. Once inside, he stumbled upon a surprising find; a collection of personal belongings that hint at the presence of a woman in Hitler's life. Loki could not help but giggle at the discovery, relishing the opportunity to uncover hidden aspects of his persona.

As he delved deeper into Hitler's room, his attention was diverted by a necklace that slipped from his hands and fell to the ground. Bending down to retrieve it, he noticed a series of captivating paintings under the sofa. Loki dragged them out, contemplating the idea that these masterpieces deserve recognition and a grand display rather than being hidden away, gathering dust in a hotel room.

It was after midnight that Hitler got back to his room, finding a letter on his desk; a letter that changed his perspective and plans completely.



Dear Adolf H.

I know you will not believe it if I say my name, or where I come from. Even your mad schoolmaster did not. However, allow me to introduce myself as someone quite familiar with failure. Throughout my existence, it seemed that success had eluded me at every turn. Yet, here I stand, writing to you, a man who has achieved great heights in the eyes of the world.

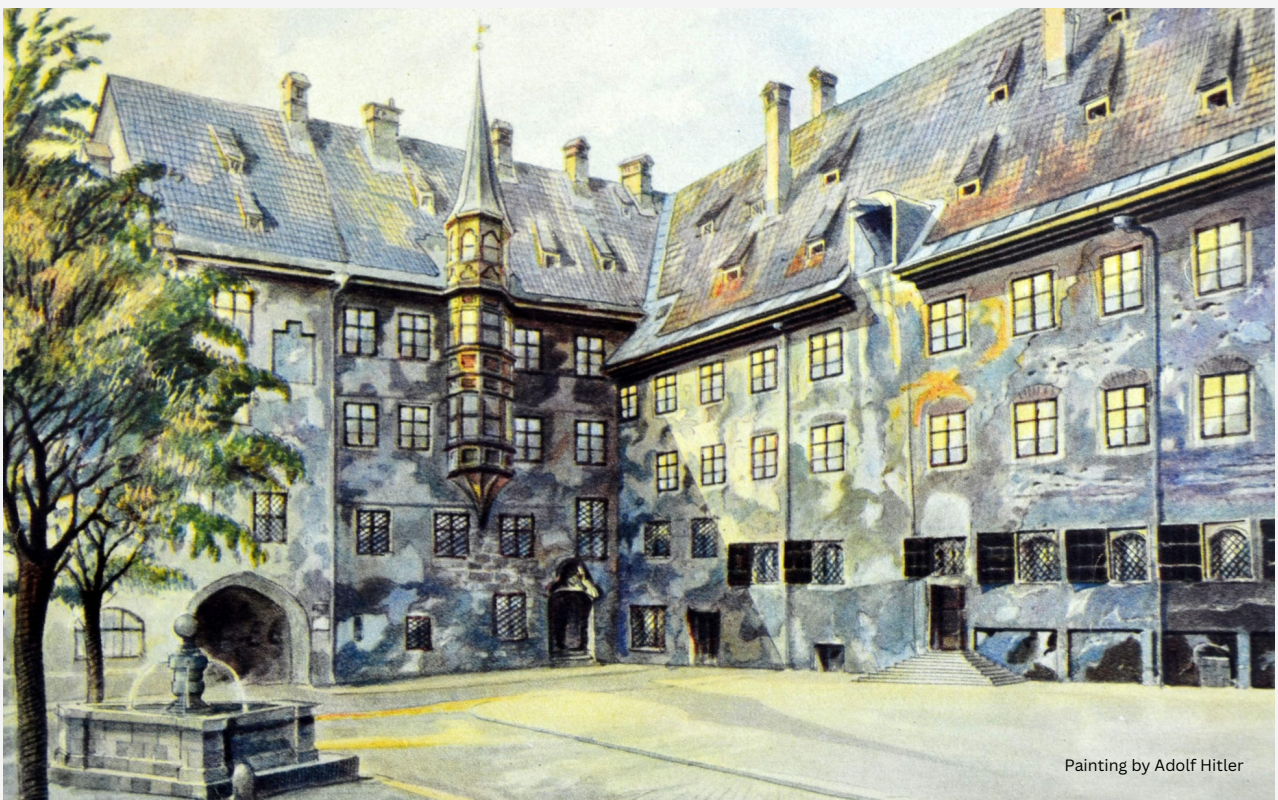
I must confess, I have never been satisfied with my choices. The constant search for power and domination left me unpopular and disqualified, because I always failed. In observing your comrades and their complex web of mistrust, I cannot help but feel that the impending invasion plan may encounter obstacles. If you are wondering how I know about your plan, I should say I read the schoolmaster's mind when I met him. It may not be an appropriate time for invasion, but it is the perfect time for painting. Allow me to be the one to confirm what you already know deep within your soul; You will be a successful painter.

Also, I could not resist the elegance of one of your paintings, and I took it with me. Think of it as a souvenir given to a wonderful quest. I assure you; it will be appreciated.

I will be there when you have a proper plan, I cannot dismiss a good war.

-Yours truly.

A few months later, as Heimdall was satisfied with the temporary peace settled in Midgard, Loki was walking in the hall of Aesir, getting ready for a feast he was invited to. He crossed the painting hanging there, with the name “Adolf H.” signed below the beautiful building painted.



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Cursed



By Negar Geliyerdi

Troy, the ever-illustrious city, favored by the mighty Zeus himself, the unbreakable city that held against the Achaeans for ten excruciating years, is burning. Despite the smoke that clogs throats and covers tongues with its greasy soot, the night sky is a thick reddish gold as if brightened by Helios' chariot.

Screams and shouts rise from every corner. Soldiers, boys really, for most of the men had perished in the last ten years, clutch their swords and later, their intestines as the Achaeans withdraw their swords and move on to the next prey. The women, in turn, clutch their children and infants as they run for the temples in a futile hope for safety, clinging so tightly they might as well melt into each other.

And they might as well do, it would be better to jump into the fire, to allow their flesh to stick like tar. It would be the only way to stop the Achaeans from ripping them apart when it's all over.

Cassandra stands amidst the carnage, frozen solid. No one comes to her. No one sees her through the smoke, and if they see her, they don't approach. Even amid the bloodshed, everyone knows there is no salvation for a creature damned by the gods.

Her city is...

The sharp sting of her mother's palm brings her back to the present. Her cheek burns but the far greater fire in her throat tells her that she must have been screaming. Her mother, Queen Hecuba, always so regal as far as Cassandra could remember, looks like a shade from Hades. It is as if she's aged a hundred years since Hector died, skin and eyes grey and sunken, like the corpses of the Achaeans in the days of plague, when Apollo had yet to abandon them.

He'd abandoned them long before then. The moment he had spat in Cassandra's mouth and cursed her words to seem like the ramblings of a madwoman. He had doomed them all into ashen graves right then and there.

Her mother eyes her for a few more seconds to make sure of her silence before moving away to where the other women were seated. She never had much patience for Cassandra's ramblings and even less so after Hector's death. Brave Hector,

gentle and noble Hector, who never had anything cruel to say, even to his mad sister, slain by Achilles' hand, dragged around the walls of the city like an animal.

Sing oh muse". Most people know how it starts, but not how it ends. It ends not with the death of the swift-footed Achilles, the wooden horse, or the burning city, but with the funeral of Hector, tamer of horses. Troy might as well have held its own funeral that day.

Her mother sits by Andromache's side. Her sister-in-law holds her nephew to her chest, trying to drown out his wails by a lullaby.

Astyanax, Hector's last remaining legacy, falling, her small nephew hitting the ground in a sickening splat, the ground tainted red, the crunch of broken bones...

Cassandra bites into her tongue and swallows her screams alongside the blood. This is the problem with her curse. She does not need to observe the flight of birds or the entrails of animals. For her, the future is as clear as a recent memory. Oftentimes, she could not distinguish nightmares, visions, and reality. She sees the fate of every man and woman in the room. Here, a man trampled by an Achaean horse, there, a woman dragged onto an enemy ship. She sees their destinies as if she's sitting in the same room as the three fates,



Achilles dragging Hector's body in front of Troy., Hector Smith



Bronze Age Greek Mythology Trojan War

watching them weave their tapestries.

Her eyes dart across the room, checking for the dead, the soon-to-be dead, and the missing. She can't see Helen anywhere, but that's to be expected by now. Her name is no better than a curse these days, said as if being spat around on the ground.

Oh, how Cassandra had screamed upon seeing her brother's new bride. How she'd yelled and clawed at her golden wail, at the face that would soon launch a thousand ships. She often wonders if it would have made a difference. If she had managed to ruin Helen's pristine face, would Paris have grown sick of her? Would he have returned her to her rightful husband, sparing them from those years of misery?

They had allowed Helen to speak at Hector's funeral. Not Cassandra, his sister, but Helen! It's a stupid thing to hold a grudge over. Soon, all will be lost. Soon, she will be taken to Mycenae where she will meet her demise at the end of an axe, but she knows she will take her last breath bitter at this robbed goodbye.

Her father is not in the room either; perhaps he is still outside, watching as the men drag the wooden horse inside the city walls. Oh, how she'd begged and

pleaded with him to heed her warnings, to no avail.

Men spring from the horse's gut like ants. Her father lies at the feet of the son of Achilles, the boy's hair as bright as the fire raging outside.

Her city is burning.

Cassandra takes a large gulp of air and thanks the gods that it is not smoke yet.

Helenus is not in sight either. No one but Cassandra seems to have noticed though. Perhaps they think he is at the temple. Perhaps they think he is wallowing down in Hades's realm while his body rots under the sun somewhere.

Cassandra knows better.

Isn't it funny? Her twin had slept in the same temple as her. His ear had been licked by the same snake that gave Cassandra her sight. Both of them had been given the same gift by the same god. It was only Cassandra that was hailed as a madwoman.

Yet it was Helenus that had betrayed them all.

Her city is burning.

Cassandra walks slowly. Why rush? She already knows where her doom lies. No one, neither Trojan nor Achaean could change it. Nothing can doom her more than she already is.

So, she marches on. Her steps, heavy as though she is carrying Atlas' burden with her. Perhaps she is. What burden heavier than an entire city? heavier than the legacy of thousands?

Will the poet know? Cassandra can see him too, asking the muse Calliope to sing of the rage of the son of Peleus. Will he know that his words will hold what once was Cassandra's entire world? Perhaps he would have cared to mention her more if he did.

But this story is not her story. It starts with an Achaean man and ends with a Trojan one. It holds no space for her.

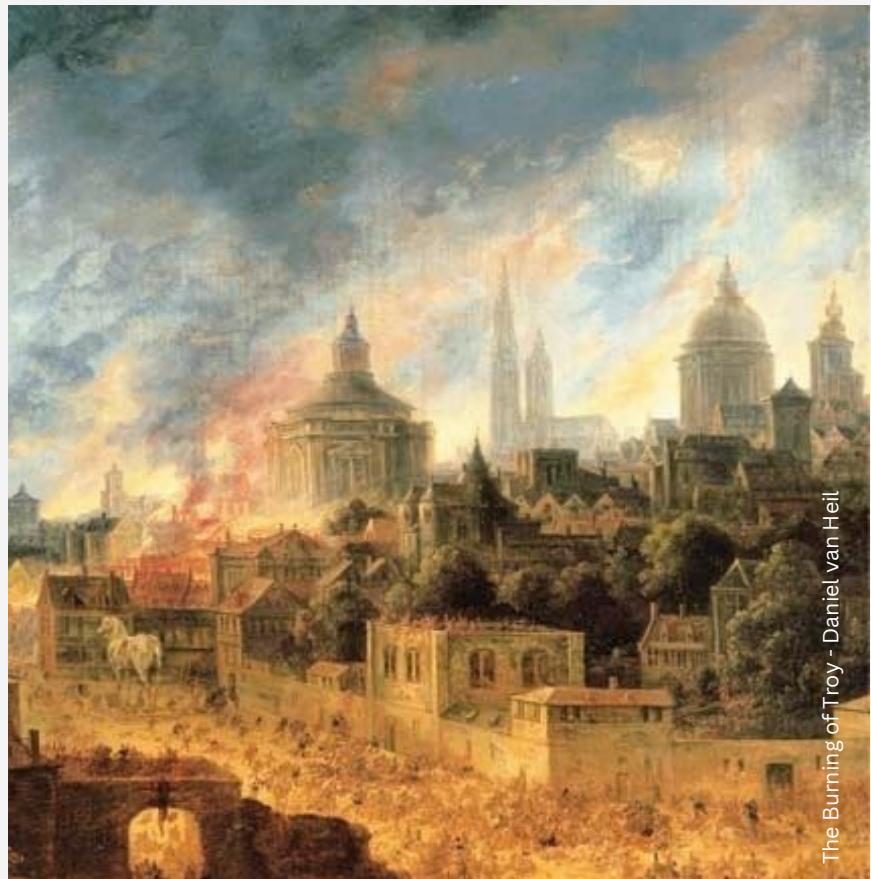
Her city is...

Her breath catches in her throat and her feet stop in their track. There it is; the place that might as well be her tomb. For she knows that the Cassandra that will be taken to Agamemnon's ship will not be the one that enters this temple. Behind her, she can hear the trudging steps of other women, hoping for the protection of Zeus's daughter.

But there will be no respite. The goddess had chosen the Achaeans the moment her brother had wounded her pride. There would be no saving grace, only the sound of screams as the Achaeans barge in. There will only be Ajax and then...

Her city is burning
and she might as
well burn with it.

Cassandra knows
that she cannot
begrudge the poet.
Men all want to
hear songs of
bravery, of great
heroes, and greater
wars. No one wants
to hear of the
women and their
suffering when men
wage war.



No one wants to hear of what will happen in this temple. This is and
has always been Cassandra's burden alone.

Cassandra glances at her city, still burning away. She turns; wind
tugging on her hair as she walks.

Up ahead, Athena's temple awaits.



The Legendary Iconic Hero: Arash the Archer

By Arefe Amini Faskhodi

We all may have heard of or read about the mythological character, Arash the archer, the Iranian symbol of heroism and zeal. However, to me, his story is always new!

The story refers to the Iranian Army's defeat in the last battle of a fierce, long-running war between Iran and Turan, the result of which was nothing but the death of a considerable number of people. Having consulted their advisors, Turan's king and the council forced Iran to accept the devilish peace offering made by Turan. The news was soon broken to everyone. To define the border between the two countries, Iran had been ordered to fire an arrow, and consequently, the destiny of the border between the two countries depended on the point where the arrow would land.



On the due date, silence reigned on the battlefield. Unsurprisingly, everyone was fearful of what the probable upshot would be! Undoubtedly, it was Arash, the most powerful archer in the Iranian Army, who was selected by Sepandarmaz, the guardian angel protecting the Earth. Only in this way, could Iranians reclaim their motherland. Arash accepted the challenge, albeit he was aware of his tragic fate. While being determined to accomplish the mission, Arash was expected to climb Mount Damavand, frequently featured as a mysterious place where myths and folk stories have occurred, reach the peak, and shoot the arrow.

What distinguished Arash from other soldiers was not only his dignity, but also his unique arrow and bow, the gifts from Sepandarmaz which, on the way to the peak, were preserved from harm by the angel of the wind. After reaching the peak, he aimed his arrow and pulled the bowstring with all his superhuman strength. Having been united with Arash's body, the released arrow flew 2250 kilometers on the bank of the Oxus River. Eventually, the arrow landed by the Amu Darya River which remained the boundary between Iran and Turan. Never could one find Arash's body. There are still stories in this regard according to which travelers getting lost on the mountain have been guided by Arash's voice to find their path. No matter whether one considers this as either a myth or reality, Arash the Archer will surely remain an eternal legend for the next generations.

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Wolfwalkers

By Hannaneh Safari

Wolfwalkers is a 2020 independent animated movie by Cartoon Saloon, an Irish art studio based in Kilkenny. Rooted in Irish history and folklore, the narrative revolves around Robin Goodfellow, who accompanies her father to Ireland with the intention of hunting the remaining wolves in the country. The Lord Protector, who rules the city, wants the wolves eliminated in order to expand the city to the countryside.



Animation: Wolfwalkers (2020)

During her journey, Robin encounters Mebh, one of the inhabitants of the forest. Mebh possesses the ability to shapeshift into a wolf. Robin finds out that Mebh's mother is missing so she unites with Mebh to find her mother and protect the forest from deforestation. Their bond forms the emotional core of the film, as they complement and support each other in heartwarming ways.

Shapeshifters are a recurring theme in Irish mythology, and this film delves into the rich mythology surrounding the man wolves of Ossory, an ancient sub kingdom that transforms into the present-day Kilkenny. Set in the year 1650 in Kilkenny, the film explores the existence of Irish werewolves during the 17th century. These werewolves, known as Wolfwalkers, can be seen as a unique interpretation of the traditional werewolf concept. In Irish folklore and mythology, Wolfwalkers are depicted as highly intelligent and benevolent beings. They serve as protectors of children, lost souls, and the wounded. The term used to refer to a wolfwalker is "FREEBIRD," spelled as "FAOLADH" in Irish. The tale of the wolf men of Ossory dates back centuries, even before the arrival of Vikings in Ireland.



There are differing beliefs regarding the origins of this myth. Some speculate that it was inspired by actual wolf attacks that occurred during that time, while others view it as a symbolic representation of the primal nature inherent in humans. According to *The Wonders Of Ireland* by P.W. Joyce, it was once believed that the people of Ossory possessed the ability to transform into wolves, leaving their physical bodies behind as their souls assumed the form of these creatures. In their wolf form, their human bodies would appear lifeless, resembling death. If their wolf bodies were harmed and they were unable to return to their human forms, the injuries would appear in the same places on their human bodies and eventually kill them.

Gerald of Wales, an English Archdeacon who wrote *The History of Topography of Ireland* in the 12th century, provides one of the oldest sources of information on the mythology surrounding the wolf men of Ossory. However, it is important to note that as a religious writer, Gerald of Wales held a bias towards the "pagan" beliefs associated with this myth. In his account, he describes the transformation into a wolf as a curse that fell upon a couple in the city every seven years. If the couple managed to survive seven years in their wolf form, the curse would then be passed on to another unfortunate couple.

The opening scene of the film depicts a powerful image of an ax swinging and cutting a tree. This initial shot sets the tone for the movie, showcasing both the fantastical elements and the central conflict. The woodsman, who initially finds himself surrounded by wolves, is surprised to discover that Mebh and her mother possess the ability to heal his wound. The presence of a flyer pinned to the trees, offering a reward for capturing wolves, further emphasizes the aggressive approach of the colonizers. The conflict portrayed in the film is not only physical but also ideological, highlighting the struggle between man and nature. The introduction also introduces the concept of healing powers and magic, which play a crucial role in the plot and are derived from mythology. The two main characters, Robin and Mebh, come from opposing sides

of the conflict. Robin feels pressured by societal expectations and longs for adventure, desiring to hunt rather than conforming to domestic duties. On the other hand, Mebh exhibits reckless and rebellious tendencies, endearing her to the audience. Initially appearing fierce and independent, she later reveals her vulnerability and loneliness.

The animation and style of the film effectively represent the nature of the characters. The producers highlight how the characters' individual personalities shine through in their first meeting. Robin's movements are subtle and delicate, while Mebh's actions are more forceful and energetic. The animators have also incorporated animalistic behavior into Mebh's mannerism, further enhancing her character design. With her soft and approachable appearance, Mebh, whose last name "Mac Tire" means wolf in old Irish, symbolizes the coexistence and interdependence of wolves and the forest, reflecting the relationship between man and nature. To get this theme even more incorporated into her character, her last name consists of two words: Mac which means "son" and Tire which means "land" in old Irish.

This film also incorporates actual historical elements by featuring the lord protector, also known as Oliver Cromwell, as its primary antagonist. The setting of the movie takes place during a crucial period in Ireland's history, specifically in 1650 after the conclusion of the 11-year wars.



These wars originated from the Irish people's decision to resist the English colonizers, but unfortunately, their uprising failed, due to the defeat of the confederate capital of Kilkenny in 1650, following two English civil wars. The central focus of the film revolves around the catastrophic consequences of the Cromwellian government and colonization on Ireland's natural environment. Oliver Cromwell was actually sent to suppress the Irish uprising, and his actions during the war were believed to be justified by God. Interestingly, Cromwell even offered rewards for hunting wolves, which led to a large number of people migrating to Ireland in search of a living through wolf hunting. This, coupled with deforestation, ultimately led to the endangerment and eventual extinction of Irish wolves in 1786.

Tomm Moore and Ross Stewart's *Wolfwalkers* is a remarkable and gorgeous animated masterpiece that will reintroduce you to the era of beautifully crafted 2D animation. *Wolfwalkers* conveys messages of harmony and compassion towards animals, while encouraging individuals to break their boundaries and experience the world from a fresh perspective. From start to finish, this film offers an enchanting and visually unique journey.



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