

Berenike, Posthumous
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Goodman, Gena (MFA, English)

Berenike, Posthumous

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Marcia Douglas

A collection of connected short stories, *Berenike, Posthumous* tells fictionalized accounts of an actual, active archaeological site in Egypt. Through interlocking modern and ancient retellings of history and myth, the dangers and pitfalls of recording history are explored via the travails of the archaeologists and those non-archaeologists attached to this Red Sea locale.

Berenike, Posthumous

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Mark and the Arginusae

29th January, 2011

Berenike, Red Sea Governorate, Egypt

When Mark tells the new students of his time at the dig in Sidon, Lebanon and the bombs poorly-detonated hitting the sand and not exploding, just thudding, they don't believe him for a second. They're of two minds: either he's playing down the terrifying situation of standing in a war zone with a tape measure in one hand and an awl in the other, the quintessential uninterested party hiding from falling debris behind other debris, or he's playing up the floating rockets of the Middle East so as to overshadow the news reports cycling from Cairo and their respective homes. Though they're allowed only ten minutes each on the one laptop sapping the generator, that's time enough for forewarnings and an I told you so.

Emails from non-experts are easy to ignore. But then Dr. Riordan emails the dig leader of Berenike with a cease and desist, and at the very least the project operators decide to send the Vice Provost's students back to Delaware. Aloyjzy Nowak from Warsaw sends over constant updates from international liveblogs, pictures of police

batons and a watchful throng, and finally his own suggestion for suspension. So Mark and Elena send the students to pack, to roll up their socks in their shirts scattered across the tent rugs, to pick their drying bathing suits off the soil cores projecting from the packed sand. The other representatives from their universities likewise prepare to leave with their charges.

The research group in Berenike, Egypt has worked for the past twenty years with the native Ababda population, Mark reasons with them in Arabic, but they refuse to stay and watch the site while the archaeologists and project managers fly home. Either out of resignation—these sites are never let be, during political upheaval—or activism—they wish to join the protests of Luxor, if they cannot reach Cairo or further Alexandria—or the opposite of activism, whatever that is, they return home instead.

So Mark and Elena pull metaphorical straws, deciding Elena will stay behind and clear the trays of potsherds, number the inscriptions, photograph the most recent limits of the active trenches (11-72, 11-73, 11-78, 11-89), and otherwise finish or maintain the projects still in progress, prepping the site for a full-scale departure as the very last resort. Mark, being less careful around the antiquities and better at navigating Sa'idi Arabic and the dirt-packed roads along the west Red Sea coastline. He grabs his own water jug and pins his radio to his belt out of habit. The PhD candidates herd Greg, Lucien, Anna, Bartosz, and Mariusz into the van first, each too used to ferrying undergraduates not to count their heads, though the post-graduates themselves are more numerous.

Mark calls the consulate, but they're (as they say) twenty trying to recover two thousand, and place him on a well-meaning hold; he hangs up and redials. The same harried operator picks up and tells him to check with the commercial airlines, if he can't possibly wait on the phone for ten minutes. Mark hands off the phone to Lucien to wait

the five minutes and requests Anna's sat phone to call ahead to Marsa Mubarak airport. Deep in the busy season, regardless the political situation, a representative answers on the first ring. She tells him to hurry; the last four jetliners left full and only one was allowed to land before, feeling the pressure from the Luxor-area riots, air traffic eeked to a standstill. Insinuating the Americans have been in her ear or in her wallet, she asks how many seats he needs to Dusseldorf, if he can arrive in less than four hours. He wonders back why they don't request more planes from Cairo; the Red Sea tourists run the European gamut. But Cairo is grounded indefinitely, she says. Hurry, she says and taking his name hangs up.

Groups cluster on the roadside with signs in many languages. Mark can tell by the hitchhikers thumbs which are going his way. Bartosz interrupts the torrent from the radio he can't understand when he sees a stranded pair who look like the researchers from nearby village Abu Ghusun, the two Italians studying coastal erosion. Mark mentions the limited space in the van, but Bartosz starts to grow frantic and the last thing Mark needs is a student breaking down before they get through customs. He pulls over.

He's forgotten their names, but they pile in happily with their briefcases; they obviously left their clothing behind. Other non-familiar duos and trios amble toward the van, so Mark rushes the oceanographers in, saving the and where are you goings for a discussion accompanied by a running engine. The undergraduates explain the situation, talking one over the other, each spackling English or Italian or German vocabulary where overexcitement leaves holes in the run-down.

They're headed toward Cairo. They're not shouted down so much as anxiously warned down, but Mark has no intention of turning. Marsa Alam is a straight shot

north, but not far enough to hit the rioting. One oceanographer watches the short wave crests skid by, though the other reluctantly enthuses about the closer, smaller airport.

Lucien reports when the consulate returns from their silent hold, Mark tells them their developments with Marsa Mubarak, the operator congratulates them and tries to hang up again, but lingers upon hearing about the van's new European compatriots. The operator stalls and does not mention if they chartered the plane themselves, merely tells Mark to inquire at the airport before boarding himself. To which he responds I am just the chauffeur, which would have been funny in another context, maybe, but ended up merely confusing. Look says the operator you've got one chance at this, all that can be promised. When Mark tells her he left a lot of work behind, the operator says tough luck in polite-speak. Apparently, giving up one provided airbus qualifies as deserter status. Or at the very least, elected-to-stay-behind territory, which he comes to realize does not only apply to millionaires refusing to break off a promised two week vacation or camera-laden conflict journalists. Sometimes just people who forgot their field notes sitting atop a tarp in the middle of a desert. When Mark tells her he left a co-project manager behind, she takes down the latitude and longitude and repeats them back quickly. Trying to suss out the possibility of landing a helicopter on the cleared land, he mentions an abandoned military base near the dig. She clears her throat before insisting he not check in with them again except in case of emergency.

The airport itself looks like a strip-mall alone in a desert missing its convenient commuter traffic flow. A wavy roof hooks over a concrete walkway. The runway, normally crowded with propeller planes or small jets ferrying the scuba-enthusiasts vacationing on the Red Sea, holds one commercial A330. The sand lot marked out for parking is littered with vehicles, they overflow into the road. Mark settles the van behind

a soft-topped jeep and throws Anna back her phone as a hoard of pillows and backpacks tumble out of the sliding van door. No guards, but he doesn't lock up, leaves the water bottle in the cup holder and nearly leaves the keys.

Inside they haven't bothered to mask the hangar, merely planted some palm trees in a hole in the center. Kiosks ring the side, and some sensors lead to the other fenced side of the building. The lady at the Air Berlin station remembers his phone call. Hurried Arabic keeps most of the students from listening in, though when she switches to German occasionally they pick up on the problem. The passenger manifest shows some 280 names for a 252-seater aircraft. And that's before they called in the first place. Air Berlin lady claims the students have been green-lighted, but the Italian oceanographers are out of luck unless some travelers don't make it to the gate. But the blue vinyl chairs are all occupied, and individuals sitting on their rollaboards ring the pillars.

Bartosz has obviously learned enough Arabic over his three months to kick up a fuss. Dragging him by the sleeve, Mark gains a yard or two away from the oceanographers who are reasoning with the representative.

"It's not fair," says Bartosz, "that they have to stay behind."

"They're figuring it out right now. They'll either take a car to Cairo, wait for another plane here, wait for Luxor to reopen, or hell, they can take a ship all the way to Massawa. They've got a lot of options."

"I just don't think we should split up." Seeing as Bartosz has met the oceanographers maybe three times, Mark figures he's freaking out over something else entirely. Not knowing what, though, he retreats into lecturing. Something familiar.

"Do you remember the battle at the Arginusae islands?" Bartosz nods, even if he doesn't. "The Peloponnesian War. Conon gets caught up in Mytilene, which is on

Lesbos. So Greece now, but pretty much Turkey.” Bartosz watches more people file in with suitcases. The others out of Berenike have pulled their luggage over to the duty free store while they wait for news. They pull sunglasses off displays and tease the designers of perfume bottles.

“Is this the pyrrhic victory thing?”

“No, but in essence, yes. This predates that conflict by over a century. The way our man Xenophon tells it, the Athenians rush over with a new fleet for a grand rescue and almost get taken out by the sheer amount of Peloponnesian ships.”

“And miraculously pull out a victory.” Bartosz reaches for a moral, likely itching to take his bag and get closer to the kiosks.

“Ultimately, yes. But a lot of ships sunk anyway, and the captains in charge of scooping their drowning men out of the sea didn’t. A storm, and they weren’t going to risk anymore ships. They’re down seventy or something.”

The Italians are looking dejected and taking down notes on the back of an Air Berlin flier.

“So, of the eight generals who head out to save Conon, six head home.”

“What, the other two drowned?”

“No,” Mark says, “Protomachus and Aristogenes wise up to the situation, realize they’re going to be blamed for the deaths of hundreds of Athenian soldiers, and don’t go home.”

Bartosz seems surer of Mark’s motives than Mark is himself, watching the oceanographers using the corded phone at the Air Berlin desk, maybe talking to their own embassy. “It worked out well?”

“Well, it was less immediately fatal than the homecoming of the other six, likely. But I couldn’t tell you. Deserters kind of fall off the historians’ radar.” He lets Bartosz ponder for a while before continuing. “Maybe they’re better off vacationing out of the way for a while. Maybe they left some million dollar equipment back at their site, and the Italian NOAA is going to be foaming at the mouth. I don’t really think we need to rush you all off home, either. But better safe than sorry.”

Though he had been calming down, the young man stares at Mark. He does not speak, though he clearly wants to ask and assure himself that they will be on the same flight, boarding any time now, but does not want to hear bad news. The Air Berlin representative holds court over a few squadrons of travelers, but waves Mark over when she catches his eye.

She asks for everyone’s passports, processes them one at a time, trickles them through to the metal detectors and questioning agents, to guard against the en masse stampede. They hedge each other, calling each other over when one wanders. Mark doesn’t have to worry. So when he’s left, the last one of their crew at the kiosk, he doesn’t hand over his passport. She insists. He says he’s got to head back into the desert to pick up his co-project manager. The representative looks ready to curse him out in the middle of the airport. She says they’ve already sent messages to the consulate confirming his departure. She does not say there are plenty of others ready to jump into that seat, but her cinched eyebrows do. She says very clearly that no one knows what’s going on. But the one thing she does know is this is his sure chance to not have to find out.

And, well, he tells himself, he should oversee the flights and arrange a means back home from Dusseldorf for the students. And he told the consulate about her position. And he knows it well enough himself that he can make calls to the locals once

he gets to Europe again. And he can surely find his way back soon, as this inevitably blows over.

Mark tries to arrange a future flight back to Marsa Mubarak while she types his passport identification number, but she's had enough of helpful, and the stranded travelers laugh not quite under their breath.

ὁρῶν οὖν ὁ Περικλῆς περίφοβον τὸν κυβερνήτην καὶ διηπορημένον, ἀνέσχε τὴν χλαμύδα πρὸ τῶν ὄψεων αὐτοῦ, καὶ παρακαλύψας ἠρώτησε μή τι δεινὸν ἢ δεινοῦ τινος οἶται σημεῖον· ὥς δ' οὐκ ἔφη, 'τί οὖν,' εἶπεν, 'ἐκεῖνο τούτου διαφέρει, πλὴν ὅτι μεῖζόν τι τῆς χλαμύδος ἐστὶ τὸ πεποιηκὸς τὴν ἐπισκότησιν;'

Accordingly, seeing that his steersman was timorous and utterly perplexed, [*what direction storms run here counterclockwhat*] Pericles held up his cloak before the man's eyes, [*almost tipping for a finger in the tide the same direction unchanging*] and, thus covering them, asked him if he thought it anything dreadful, [*bring the rain that I may drink from the puddles*] or portentous [*bring the rain that I may be skin again not salt not starched not plank not skiff*] of anything dreadful. 'No,' said the steersman. 'How then,' said Pericles, 'is yonder event different from this, [*clouds*] except that it is something rather larger than my cloak [*only clouds*] which has caused the obscurity? [*make them rain*]

The Vacationers find the Oracle

August 24th, 2009

Berenike, Red Sea Governate, Egypt

Not often came opportunities to leave the dig. The work followed day to day shifts, some people taking the morning to sift and catalogue, shoveling in the evenings, some shoveling in the mornings, sifting and cataloguing in the evenings. And around noon no one left their tents except to run under someone else's for some cards or their half-hour slot on the one camp computer. But weeks fell away, the divisions into seven and another seven. The only hints of time passing the slow chill requiring first and extra sheet then an extra coverlet then, finally, an afghan. And the approximately thirty day tally of the dig coordinators, taking their copious notes on what shard emerged on the twenty-second, what sandstorm reburied it on the twenty-fourth, when it was rerevealed on the twenty-sixth, and who among the researchers, students and instructors and all-but-dissertations and tenured professors, was (allegedly) responsible in each event. Also, the

terse dating of familial letters, stark in the upper margins, condemning you for dawdling a reply.

So. In the between times, when sets of dusty dufflebags would leave with their people and before the new sporting goods shinies arrived, those straddling the site switch had a fierce desire to leave the skeleton crew behind and explore outside their adopted society, though having not a clue of where to go. Patrick and Lance, the men who worked the potassium vapour magnetometer, would scuba in the protected reefs until a new area was agreed upon, approved, and cordoned. They spent most of their time in the sea. They had no problem choosing a distraction.

But for many site occupants, the three conservators (Ludmila, Lavra, and Tahireh) included, exploring the protected reefs was distasteful. On their between time, they went into the cities instead, Marsa Alam or Aswan, when they could persuade one of the local drivers to escort them. But in the heights of Ramadan, all but one carless translator had gone home to observe the fast with their families. Instead, they convinced Mark Hofstra, the co-lead of the dig, to give them a ride in the one communal van. As long as the drive took less than an hour, it was negotiable. And they were only going to Zabargad.

“Just get back by Thursday and we’re cool,” Mark said. That would give them a little under a week. “I’m not picking you up, though. So don’t call.” Ludmila waved him off as he hoisted her bags out of the trunk, told him they’d convince somebody.

Zabargad’s orange domed roofs along with the sudden proliferation of palms greeted the three. Approaching from the back, the palms neatly circumscribed by stone played guard for the beach chairs with oversized grass umbrellas, a tiled blue pool in a tiled courtyard, and the glass-backed restaurant. Bob’s, the anachronistically named bar, was clearly marked beyond, though shuttered. In the front, a man with a hotel cart (he

had wrapped a towel around the aluminum to keep his hands from burning) pulled their luggage over the checkerboard grass to the red rock walkway. The massive glass doors of the lobby swung open easily. Above their heads were no lights, but a swirling ceiling fan kept time with the shivers of the indoor foliage, wide leaved ferns.

The front desk clerk had looked up as they walked in, but was now reading an article on June's Algeria-Egypt match in *Al Ahram Al Riyadi*. Ludmila had a good look while waiting for him to reboot the registration computer.

"You three again," he muttered, not bothering with the smile.

"Good to see you, too, Mido," said Lavra.

"I don't think we'll be able to get you three neighboring rooms, this time."

Tahireh, who went by Tara at Zabargad, ran her fingernails over the ceramic counter. "We'll trust you'll do what you can."

But Lavra was already trying to pull her bathing suit out of her packed bag, her toiletry bag bouncing on the floor before being stuffed back in its place. "Mido, it's way too hot for you to be full and it's way too hot to keep us standing here in the lobby playing this game when you have a chlorinated pool twenty feet away."

Mido shrugged and pulled three little envelopes, pressing in keys with one hand while typing with the other. "How many days, then?"

"Make it four and we'll see from there," said Ludmila. "Can we get the same deal with the bar tab?"

"It's Ramadan, *habibti*. Bar's closed." He handed out the keys and turned the page of his magazine. For a second, he glanced at the security cameras before pulling a scuba brochure. He unfolded it, refolded it, and pushed it toward Ludmila.

“We still don’t scuba. But thanks for the offer,” said Lavra, the pieces of her suit over her shoulder.

He pushed it further to Ludmila, who dragged it toward herself and, feeling its unnatural weight for glossy paper, took it carefully without opening.

“Just in case,” said Mido, and Tara laughed and harped it back.

Inside the glossy brochure was hid an extra key. The ladies had an idea what it was for, but decided to let it go until that night and spend the day in the water instead. Not the ocean. Zabargad had a beautiful beach and jetty, but they’d had enough of the ocean at Berenike. Besides, the water heated to a good eighty degrees in August. Not exactly a solution for a scorching day. But the pool had a shaded wading area in the center, accessible by bridge, and the resort paid probably a fortune to pump in cool water in the mornings. Tara waded in; Lavra fell face first. Ludmilla stood on the steps and felt the trench sand dissolve into the pool chemicals, sinking bit by bit.

Occasional happy shouts filtered from the beachfront, but few people joined them in the pool. A few jumped in to rinse off the salt and slivers of seaweed. Once the sun began to leak into the horizon, Tara’s stomach started growling and she and Ludmilla left to get dressed for dinner. Lavra insisted on staying until the sun was truly sunk, so they let her float.

The dining room was not an upscale affair; if only out of respect for the mostly Muslim clientele, they probably could have eaten in their beachwear: barely ten yards from the pool, it consisted of a glass front for pool-gazing and inside about twenty small tables. In the center of the room they had placed a skiff, covered with a sanded and polished plank but still obviously a boat. Almost every evening it was covered by five

o'clock with meat, rice, eggplant, an assortment of dips and sauces. Tonight they had to wait another couple hours until sundown on account of the holy month. Tara spent the time waiting chatting with the kitchen staff and sneaking sips of Karkadey from the glasses that had not been set out, yet.

When it was dark, they lit the lights around the pool and the palm trees looked like something out of the cretaceous period. Lavra came in from the pool in little more than a wrap, but other than some side-eyed glances, no one commented. Dinner was a distracted affair; Ludmilla felt the extra key heavy in her pocket. They dragged over conversation about their projects back at the camp when they ran out of interests in common, which took maybe an hour of the five they had to wait until the last of the diners decided to retire to their rooms or a nightwalk on the beach. The other four filled with Tara's discussions of India. How Mido reminded her of the boy who used to pick on her on the way to school. How much taller the date palms grew in her town than in Africa.

Once Abdullah, cleaning up in the kitchen and singing along to a clear-toned radio, made the only sound echoing off the tiled walk, the trio made for the shuttered bar. Fitting the extra key in the lock, Ludmila shooed everyone inside and shut the door before heading for the light switch. In the sudden brightness she saw an outline and convinced herself she must have seen double.

"Holy—" Lavra cut off as she fell into the stacked barstools. They thumped against the bamboo siding and Tara hissed at her to be quiet. "—did you just see?"

Tara rounded the bar and ducked down, shuffling through the bottles. She reemerged with some pineapple vodka and two Luxor Weizens, a local beer. "Looks like the ice machine's off. What do you want that isn't chilled? Should we be taking this back

to the rooms or...” No one answered her. Ludmila was watching Lavra who was dodging and ducking to look around corners and under leaning plywood. “...what is wrong with you two? You’re acting like my buddy Siya when she caught the headmaster kissing the computers teacher—”

“I just... I thought I saw someone already in here.” Lavra seemed ready to jump through the slatted shutters.

“Well, I mean—if there’s anyone in here, they’re probably just doing what we’re doing and they should probably just come out now.” Tara followed this with a long expectant pause, but nothing moved. Even the air was still inside, none of the sea breeze, and Tara was beginning to sweat. “Nah. Guess Mido doesn’t give out keys to just anyone.” She grabbed another Weizen and headed for the door. And though Ludmila meant to insist they only drink inside—and certainly don’t take full bottles—but she leaned over the bar and snatched the first bottle she touched just to feel the glass under her finger pads as a material risk, instead of this airy one.

Irritated by her companions’ sudden aloofness the night before (during what was to be a debacle to write home about, for that matter), Tara spent the day away from them, lounging by the pool on a towel, occasionally rolling in. The other two, more impressed by the air conditioning than the atmosphere, passed the day on the far side of the lobby playing checkers. Mido kept glancing over, perhaps trying to figure out if they’d indulged his offer.

“That was kind of weird, wasn’t it? I mean, there was something about last night.” Lavra wouldn’t leave it alone, even in public. She just tended toward vaguer language. Ludmila made an incautious move along the edge of the board and it cost her two men.

“It was pretty dark. Maybe someone had the same idea but didn’t want to be caught drinking during Ramadan. Or hell, maybe it was the shadow of one of the windchimes hanging from the ceiling.”

Lavra continued her domination of the game, and only mentioned the phenomena once every three turns. Once she won the fourth time, she excused herself. Alone time was a rarity at the dig. Ludmila didn’t take it personally. She retreated to her own room, another stucco exterior and a slightly domed roof. She pulled a book out of the dresser which she had packed full of her things just for the oddity, but the words of the thriller morphed on the page as she read. The dialogue seemed to stretch on forever, repeating itself with minute alterations. Perhaps overly tired, she cut a cup of rum with water, drank it, and opted to sleep until dinner.

At the dining hall there was Tara, flirting with the man carving the flank steak, but no Lavra. Ludmila scanned the other tables of families and lovers and scuba-enthusiasts, but Lavra’s stark nearly white hair appeared nowhere. The night didn’t immediately reveal her, either. After checking her room, which was unlocked, Ludmila graphed the grounds, down the perimeters and circling the buildings. Of course she checked Bob’s first, it being the fascination of the past twenty-four hours. But it was padlocked as before; the doors and windows shook but did not give. Just in case she went out for a nightswim (very unwise with a reef so nearby—silvertip, whitetip, tiger, hammerhead—it was a shark lover’s dream), Ludmila crept onto the beach. The slight waves barely covered her footfalls in the sand. She watched the jetty for anything caught on the rocks; the rest of the water so dark as to give her no chance at all. To her far right she caught in her periphery a pacing figure. Her blood rushed hot in the same uneasiness, but this time she recognized the silhouette.

Lavra passed back and forth in front of the surf shop, which was boarded during the night to keep both thieves and late-night joy riders out of the gear.

“Hey, dinner’s on. Or are you planning to see if we’ve got some sort of master key?”

Lavra twitched and put a hand to her heart in the universal sign of ‘you’re just trying to give me a heart attack, admit it.’ “Jesus, Mila.” But instead of walking back to the skiff-buffet, Lavra knelt by the locked sliding door. “Come down here and tell me if you hear anything.”

Ludmila complied, but heard nothing other than the low whistle of the wind over the water. She shook her head, to show she was still listening.

“I could have sworn... I heard this voice, it...” Lavra shook her head. “Yeah, let’s try the key.”

They did, but the surf shop, owned by the dive school itself, clearly had different locks. They went to dinner. Tara had apparently convinced a man from Brussels, who spoke no English, to sit and eat at their table. It was hard to change their lingua franca for the evening, but everyone but Tara spoke passable German and Tara spoke passable French. But when Lavra mentioned the surf shop, she did so in English, speaking around him. Tara, annoyed, said in French that she’d not been around the surf shop at all that day.

“But nothing strange?” asked Lavra.

Smiling apologetically at the man from Brussels, who waved her off with a forkful of garlic noodles, she replied: “Nothing.” But when Lavra merely turned back to her plate, Tara continued. “Well, I mean, I did see a pretty strange lady at the pool today. She stayed in the sun even at noon. It was like a feat of strength. Or endurance.”

Ludmila was ready to write it off as a particularly gifted equatorial dweller, but Lavra leaned in. “A woman? What kind of voice did she have?”

Lavra shrugged. “She didn’t exactly ask me the time. She never said a word.”

“Did anyone else see her?” asked Ludmila.

Turning to the man from Brussels, Lavra asked him in French if he had seen any strange ladies at the pool. He answered that he had seen plenty of strange ladies at the pool.

When Ludmila returned from dinner, after watching Tara go off serenaded with (French) sweet nothings and seeing Lavra to her room, her light was on, visible from outside the windows. The door was still locked. While it seemed unlikely the cleaning brigade would tend to a room so late, it was not outside the realm of possibility. Squaring her shoulders, she tried the wrong key first. She caught this as she pushed it into the keyhole because it was heavier than the room keys. But it slid in, caught the key pins, and opened. She let go of the door and watched, but nothing moved. She entered and flipped the light quickly, on and off, but no one spoke and nothing changed. Pulling off her shrug and throwing on the bed, she marveled at how quickly she could grow paranoid and with so little provocation.

Despite having napped for the better part of the afternoon, she fell asleep again quickly against the light of the room’s alarm clock.

No irritating red light and no dreaded early morning sun got her up. Ludmila woke in the dark but realized she could see through it. Her mouth felt cottoned with oversleep. She stumbled into the bathroom and jolted to a halt. A seated figure watched

from on top of the toilet tank. She found she had no desire to run but a deep instinct to run.

She hoped for another solution. Maybe it was just someone who had also found a key to the bar and used it enough to shine it silver.

“What do you want?”

To speak to you.

The figure moved its mouth, but out of rhythm, like a poorly timed voice over. It looked like chomping air, with spurts of sound between.

“I really think we should do that in the morning. Don’t we both need some sleep?”

We could, but it sounds like a waste of time.

The corners of her windows began to brighten, a crack in dawn. Unable to mark the change for what it was, Ludmila sought the next best thing: for it to stop.

“No, we can talk now. We can talk now.” Silence. To keep from the daylight, she spoke again. “Would you like to come down? There’s a chair in the other room.” And it was closer to the door out, rather than just the flimsy partition within.

No.

So move they didn’t. Instead Ludmila tried to find another advantage. “Who are you?”

Many things. A trump card. A guide. A teacher. In your mind, now, an intruder.

“But they must call you something.” The figure trickled in and out of her perception, but did not leave. “What do they call you?”

Many things. But to you, I am Egeria.

Ludmila ran it through her mind. It sounded like a nymph, but no one she had seen on a coin or vase recently. She didn't want to offend, but she was compelled to know. "Why have I heard of you?"

The myths of the kings in Italy, little dirt etcher. I called up Numa and turned him from a brute.

And into the peaceful second king of Rome. Ludmila recalled it just as she had first read it, stretched over a translation of Livy in some boyfriend's shoebox apartment. "Have you been 'calling up' my friends?"

One of them. Through the walls. Just snippets, just sounds. All day. She's about to take an axe to that structure by the water. Would you like to see?

Without a response, Ludmila looked out toward her front wall and found no front wall, though she still stood in her bathroom. The faucet collected moisture from the sea air. Lavra indeed paced the surf shop again, occasionally leveling an ineffective kick against the shack. She also, to what should have been Ludmila's surprise, held a fire axe against her shoulder.

"Where'd she get that?"

Found it leaning against the only wooden building.

Egeria's mask seemed bemused. Ludmila held out her hand to see if she could pass through the wall, as well as see through. "Will you let me stop her?"

Not now. You are nothing to her, now. But yes, you could. If you leave.

The walls filtered back into place; Lavra and her axe and her tightening knuckles only outlined against her eyelids. "And why shouldn't I leave?" But it did not answer, did not move, but only felt its form flicker. Which was an answer. Leave, and I will leave. She felt the possibility of the absence intolerable, like a stone caught in her throat. Now

that the walls were treacherously flimsy and the sun didn't follow its circuits, she wanted to know what good this thing possibly was to humans. To Numa. "What can you tell me?"

Everything.

It sat upon her toilet tank, not even illuminated by the plastic-shielded vanity bulbs, and it offered her everything. She couldn't help it. She discharged the throat-stone with a laugh. She thought of Lavra willing to level a building for the hint of an anomaly. "What could you possibly want with me?" The thing did not respond immediately, and Ludmila only realized now it had been speaking nearly overtop of her questions. It tilted its gaze but not its head.

Do I need a reason? I could go to your friend. She is zealous, like the ones I keep.

Frame after frame of faces, of the disappeared, crossed between her eyes. Many of them almost recognizable, with more time. "What do you do with them?"

I could tell you. But you would have to stay.

"Forever?"

A long night. Long enough that you would wake up to a wrecked friend and I a wrecked harbor.

Ludmila watched, in herself, Lavra level the building bit by bit. Pulling up the floorboards, bouncing unearthed nails and torn life jackets. Looking for the voice that was not a voice. The angry tenants, the call to the police, the incarceration, deportation. Maybe for herself and Tara, too, if Mido chooses to set them up as accomplices.

Ludmila was tempted to say she had other friends. Tempted to hear in response: I have other harbors.

The clock stayed dark, but the sun and the figure sat back against the wall.

Harum unam celerem demisit ab aethere summo
Iuppiter inque omen Iuturnae occurrere iussit.
Illa volat celerique ad terram turbine fertur.
At procul ut Dirae stridorem adgnovit et alas,
infelix crinis scindit Iuturna solutos,
unguibus ora soror foedans et pectora pugnīs:
“Quid nunc te tua, Turne, potest germana iuvare?
Aut quid iam durae superat mihi? Qua tibi lucem
arte morer?”

It was [*a tempest*] one of these which Jove sent
speeding down [*a sound a loud a beating in
drums beyond counting but counted*] from his
ethereal seat [*dark over bright else dividing air
as glass*], and bade her cross the pathway of
Juturna for a sign. Her wings she spread, [*first
the remaining grain*] and earthward [*gone*]
seemed to ride [*not even a sight*] upon a whirling
storm [*impermeable tide*].

But when Juturna knew from far [*green and
gray*] the shrieking fiend's infernal wing [*the
sheets like beads in a door like a smeared
camera lens*], she loosed her tresses, and their
beauty tore [*and its effects*], to tell a sister's woe;
with clenching hands [*the paddle spins in air and
sinks in water*] she marred her cheeks [*what face
this face red cheeks stinging skies*] and beat her
naked breast. “What remedy or help [*was there
no way*], my Turnus [*ever*], now is in a sister's
power [*for me to see them again*]? What way
remains for stubborn me [*rain in the trenches*]?
Or with what further guile thy life prolong [*may
the coins float away*]?

Palimpsest (What She Cannot Say)

January 4th, 69 CE

Rome, Italy.

Concerning the Slaughter of Gaius Fonteius Capito

The Daughters of Hipparinus

Where I should begin with an invocation to the emperor, I find I have none to offer to no one. May Janus lend me caution and Mercury speed for a turbulent time. For we are, honorable means by which he runs his household, I present this little known tale of a land fellow citizens, flattened under the shields and standards and stone missives of new laws dear to both of us; that is Sicily, where we have in friendly neighbor-like good feeling of six dozen 'worthy' men; a new one sails into the ports around Rome every day, the spent many seasons. Also to the emperor, that he may find in this tale, should he deign to overturn of the emperor (and more likely, the chaos around the treasuries) acting as a read it, a small insight into a little crag of his great empire.

bright flower summoning the bees. For Nero is dead, supposedly by his own hand, and

The lineage of the statesman Hipparinus, who defended Sicily so bravely his successor—Servius Sulpicius Galba—hand-picked by a supplanter who turned alongside Dionysius the Father, is said to be from the first settlers upon Sicily, those who Roman soldiers on Roman soldiers in a needless slaughter. Those civil wars from our followed Archias from Corinth. His progeny, though, benefited from his great showing fathers' fathers are so soon changed from grave markers and fitful eulogies (which cause mourner to hate their fellows, as friends or brothers were often of differing loyalties) to

against the Corinthians. For Dionysius the Father, a few years after the suicide of his first wife, Athene daughter of Hermocrates, took Hipparinus's daughter Aristomache, sister of Dion, as his wife. However, in an attempt to pacify his allies among the Locrians, he married on the very same day Doris, daughter of Euthymus.

The household was not ravaged by hate, but it was divided—Aristomache, her whole life a woman of Syracuse, worshiped Athena in the great temple still magnificent in that city, while Doris had carried over with her the habits of her people, especially the worship of Aphrodite. They did not share women's quarters in their husband's home, but each had a wing on opposite sides of their house, complete with shrine to their respected goddess. However, they did eat supper with Dionysius every night together, in one room.

Aristomache, still in her homeland, was well-regarded and visited by many of the citizens of the city. She had invitations to join eminent families in celebrating the festivals and could call upon any elder statesman in the forum without reproof, for Syracuse was laxer in its restrictions than Athens. However, Doris, half an isle and a water crossing from home, garnered few invitations and little love among the citizenry. She became so isolated as to call for her mother, Anaitis, to sail from Locri and join her in her husband's home.

Now, Anaitis did not take to her daughter's unlikely situation, that of being double-wife to the ruler of the city, as calmly as did her daughter. She rightly supposed that barring the conception of an heir, Doris could not supplant Aristomache in the esteem of the city or in her husband's eyes. Now it is claimed that Anaitis was a clever

apothecary and, knowing the proper tinctures by which to aid in births and on the other hand avoid them, aided her daughter in producing for Dionysius the first heir and would-be king, Dionysius the Son, followed quickly by another son and another daughter, Dicaeosyne. They were not born on fortuitous days—Dionysius the Son arriving in the world at the same time a storm struck and nearly sunk the entire fleet of his uncle, Thearides, outside of Motya. Dicaeosyne was born during what would have been, had she lived in Athens, the Thesmaphoria, that festival recognizing the days in which the unlucky Persephone was swallowed by the earth to be the bride of Hades, pulled from the grassy surfaces with the pigs that surrounded her. Dicaeosyne, for what reasons we shall see, was the final child of Doris.

All these children were born before Aristomache, who was the same age, had born one. Dionysius, an extremely paranoid man in regards to his family, yielded to the suspicions of the Syracusans concerning the Locrian mother in their midst, who they called Tullia in homage to that murderess daughter of Lucius Tullius, who arranged the murder not only of her sibling, but also her father, for the purposes of the throne. Anaitis unknowingly hampered her own cause in her generosity to the goddess Aphrodite, whose cult practices and ritual sacrifices were strange to the Syracusans, and quickly confused with a certain magic commonly held to be the purview of herb dealers. So it was when they saw her outside the makeshift altar to Aphrodite she had built, burning incense, they took it for a poison she set against the city and blamed every illness incurred in the

following day, including to the very old and already infirm, to the machinations of Anaitis.

Dionysius ordered the mother of his wife Doris to take her life through her own potions, expecting that she brought not only a plague on the city for his favor toward Aristomache, but also a plague over Aristomache, making her barren. Both Doris and Aristomache protested vehemently; the former out of love and the latter out of the discontent sure to rise in the household should the act be accomplished. At first it seemed Anaitis's innocence would be her reprieve, for none of the herbal concoctions in her medicine room on their own proved fatal. However, when the tyrant ordered them all mixed in wine together, one or the other did take her life.

Doris, inconsolable, did not waste time cursing either Dionysius or Aristomache, but rushed out of the city without an escort to curse her goddess, Aphrodite, at the nearest true temple, since her mother's fabricated shrine had done the woman no favors. The nearest temple was in Agrigento, which any inhabitant of Syracuse will tell you is over a hundred miles away, with no road separating the two, as most visitors come by sea.

Dionysius sent twenty soldiers to bring her back, assuming she had either ran to the piers to find a boat back to Locri or gone to throw herself off the acropolis. However, the soldier who found her upon the hills making a path to Agrigento was himself a proponent of the gods and did not seize her, but instead followed her for three days, for she would not stop for food or rest or even to take water. The guards on the walls of Agrigento could not recognize her for the wife of Dionysius, but recognized the helmet of

the soldier as coming from Syracuse and allowed them entry. The woman, now ragged, did not stop for worried entreaties, but marched further into the highest reaches of the city, where those of Agrigento kept their temples, overlooking the ocean. Doris continued until the altar, which was being cleaned by the priest and could maintain no fire. Only then, pulling herself onto an altar which could never burn her, did she collapse from exhaustion and thirst, cursing the goddess and dying in the same breath. The soldier who followed her, who had taken water and food en route, terrified that he should be blamed for either snatching the wife of Dionysius away or killing her himself, brought with him Kallistratus, the priest of Aphrodite in Agrigento, back to Syracuse to tell the tale himself.

All the members of Dionysius's house mourned upon the loss of Doris, none more so than her children and Dionysius himself, who felt a great burden through his part in her death. His grief was ameliorated within the season, however, when Aristomache became with child, and he could justify the death of Anaitis.

Aristomache gave birth to four children, three in this middle portion of her marriage to Dionysius, one while that man was cast out of the city. Her first two children were girls, the granddaughters of Hipparinus—Sophrosyne and Arete. Their names, if given by Dionysius sound laughable—he was known for neither temperance nor the kind of moral excellence implied in either—but from Aristomache, they are reasonable. There is good proof that she named her children because her son is named for her father, Hipparinus, and not Dionysius or his father. Likely Dionysius was satisfied with having named Doris's children.

Sophrosyne took after her mother in her attitude, agreeable to all and well-liked by the citizenry. She spent her childhood taught by the acolytes of Athena or in learning the lyre, having been known to write verses herself, an encomium to Arethousa, the nymph celebrated beyond all others in Sicily but especially in Syracuse; that poem is still sung on Ortygia on some clear days.

Arete, on the other hand, preferred solitude and often left her family home at night over the walls so as not to creak the doors and alert the guards. While other young ladies might use this time for mischief of all kinds, she did not visit any houses or call upon any friends—she merely walked to the shoreline, craggy as it was, to swim or to watch the ruined boards of ships, ruined near her home, sweep in overnight, trying to identify its port of creation by the tar or the paint, if any survived. On occasion a body, too, would float to shore, and these were the only nights she would reenter her house by the wooden door—surprising the guards only the first few times—to direct someone to retrieve and bury the soul, that it might rest.

They spent not long with their father Dionysius, who was often times on campaign against the Carthaginians or ransacking the nearby taverns, so they found most of their home-instruction from their mother Aristomache and, in part, with Dion their uncle, a pupil of Plato. Unlike all other girls of the city, including their sister Dicaeosyne, they learned not only to read, but to write and speak oration—Sophrosyne was known to give many speeches to her fellow women during festivals for Hera and Arethousa. Arete

tended to keep these talents to herself, but kept an intricate accounting of this era, the use of which sustains many historians speaking of the period.

Because the arguments among the Syracusans had grown so acidulous concerning To whom the blame should fall requires discussion, but first the facts: Gaius the succession of Dionysius or one of the children of Aristomache, their fellow citizen, Fonteius Capito, related to that Gaius Fonteius Capito who held the consulship with Dionysius decided to emulate the Egyptian kings and queens and paired siblings in order Germanicus is dead. He died on the land of his duty—Germania Inferior—which he to keep the peace—specifically Sophrosyne was married to Dionysius the son of Doris. governed in the time of Nero and, for a short while, Galba. It is reported that his killers He also, to regain loyalty lost from unfair dealings and suspicions towards his brothers, were Aquila and Valens, centurions in the legions stationed in his province. This is new married Dicaeosyne to his brother Leptines and Arete to his brother Thearides. information, and there is reason to doubt its legitimacy. For the accounts were, not four The careers of the brothers, being largely military in nature, lent the sisters a great days previous to his demise, that the legions had approached him in the hopes of making autonomy. While their husbands commanded the fleets, Arete and Dicaeosyne ran not him emperor. Like the noble Verginius, beloved governor of Germania Superior of whom only their households, but also large swaths of farmland and merchants owing to their the soldiers felt deprived (he had been recalled to Rome), Capito is said to have turned estates, and many times went to the forum accompanied by their slaves to meet the men down the purple cloak and clung to only the power he rightfully gained from the Senate. and women of the city and sway the public opinion. Sophrosyne, on the other hand, Or, the alternate rumor supposes, he fomented rebellion among the natives of his married the sheltered but extravagant Dionysius the Son. Once she entered his house, governed land. If this is proved true, it is more likely this assassination came to plot nearly a prison, on the acropolis she did not emerge again until he appeared to slay his outside his troops, who had recently attempted to foist him to the podium of first citizen. father. Whether she had any say in the matter, any conviction to extend, can never be known.

When Leptines was run out of Syracuse for showing mercy to the Thurians and then for marrying one of Dicaeosyne's daughters to the writer and conspirator Philistus, Dicaeosyne followed him onto the Italian mainland. Even when Leptines returned to Syracuse by request of his nephew, Dicaeosyne decided not to make herself vulnerable to

the whims of her brother any longer and settled her remaining daughters, Pherenike and Melina, in the territory round what is now Como. Leptines died at sea less than four years later.

When Thearides fell in battle, in the years of Dionysius the Father, Dionysius elected to bring his sister's brother Dion, now a close advisor, even closer into the fold.

If Capito fell in his own home to his own soldiers, the same soldiers who days before cheered his name until they had no voices, then the legions are filled with the the number of scrolls he had in his possession, which appealed to the quiet Arete.

basest of men who should never be allowed to set foot again in their homes, even less any

When Dionysius had his father killed, perhaps in part due to his fear of the money from Rome's till, nor any donatives from a leader's hand. Their standards should populace's affection for the now combined Arete and Dion, Sophrosyne managed his be melted into a set of dishes for Fonteius's widow, that she may toss them in the native accounts as well as she could, considering his largess. Though Dionysius feared her,

river or lock them in her home and make those betrayers into unsalvageable exiles. But if Sophrosyne (told the tale of poor Doris) kept her mother Aristomache with her most

Capito fell to the fears of some in Rome, that he would prove a likely successor to times, with the assumption that her husband would not move against his step-mother if it Verginius in the hearts of the encampment, those are the men who must stand trial, were in the sight of his beloved wife. Her uncle and sister, meanwhile, tried to appeal to because Capito was deprived of trial.

Dionysius's love of country in order to slow his depletion of the treasury. It worked, after a manner, until Dion proposed a war against the Carthaginians to Dionysius the Son, though Arete opposed the action, remembering well enough the loss of life at Motya, where others remembered only the silver brought to the coffers when Rhegium fell.

Unlike Leptines, who had been ordered from the city with time to ready his estate, Dion fell out of favor quickly due to the connivance of Dionysius's advisors, and Arete was left behind. For many months she attempted to find a vessel to sail her to him, on the Italian mainland, but none would tempt the disfavor of the tyrant. Even the boat which

eventually took the philosopher Plato back to familiar crofts refused to carry the wife of Dion.

Sophrosyne specifically attempted to hide her sister in her own quarters that she should not be left unguarded, putting off her husband so he would never have cause to miss the food or wine or scrolls that disappeared into the rooms he never entered. For if he had found Arete, likely he would have put her to death as a spy for Dion. However, Dionysius had not forgotten his step-sister, and when regard for Dion who was abroad was at its height, he sent for her, that she would be married to Timocrates. Well aware she would not appear without force, Dionysius surrounded her mother and sister with guards in tacit threat, though the likelihood of his actions against them can never be known.

And so, Arete, though married to Dion, married also Timocrates, friend of Dionysius. Arete sent her children by Dion to stay with her mother and entered Timocrates's house. She sent an urgent missive out to the location Dion had last been seen; it is said the fitful nature of this letter is what pushed the man to return to Sicily with the intent of retaking Syracuse, and perhaps why he—in so much of a rush—nearly lost his fleet upon Scylla while making for his once city.

When he set upon Syracuse and won over the forces of Dionysius, Sophrosyne hid herself in the acropolis with the remaining of Dionysius's household, fearing Dion would turn ill for ill in regards to Arete. But Dion, overjoyed at his return to Arete, and by the pleas of that woman and his sister, Aristomache, granted Sophrosyne leave to flee to Locri, where Dionysius had taken control by friendship and the link of his mother, Doris.

Sophrosyne took her daughters there, but Dionysius's continued cruelty grated on the Locrians, and once Dionysius left the city, they immediately killed the remaining Syracusans, having heard how their kinswoman, Anaitis, had been done a similar wrong.

Arete ballasted the power and prestige of Dion, making a name for herself as an astute woman, winning praise even from pupils of Plato. However, the mind of the citizens is winding and in time, Dion too fell into disfavor. Fearing some plot against him, Arete and Aristomache went out in their carriage to suss out the conspirators. In particular a good friend of Dion's, Calippus, pupil of Plato had been named a spy in the household. Approaching him in front of the temple of Demeter and Persephone, at whose doorstep all oaths are binding, they threatened him with all manner of dishonor and made him swear to them he had no involvement with a plot against Dion, which he did most fervently.

But that night, when all three were sitting for supper, Dion was attacked by the mercenaries he brought into the city and when they could not cower him by hand, Calippus dropped down a short sword from the roof. Though Arete and Aristomache had been dragged from the house, still they could hear the screams of triumph the assassins gave, once Dion was dead. Both the women were immediately thereafter thrown in prison; Arete gave birth to her last child, a son, there. Afterwards they were taken in by a friend of theirs and Dion's, Hicetas, but his heart too was easily intimidated. Feigning a voyage to the Peloponnese, he sent Arete and Aristomache away with prayers and celebration, though they were loath to leave Syracuse. On the way, as commanded, the

sailors seized the two women who had been watching the waves on the galley deck and threw them overboard. Their bodies never washed upon a shore, and some say Arethusa, in her rage at their betrayal, carried them into Arcadia by way of Alphaius, her defiler.

ιδόντες δ' οὖν οἱ στρατιῶται τὸ μὲν πρῶτον
ῥδέσθησαν, πλὴν ἑνός, καὶ τοὺς τε ὀφθαλμοὺς
εἰς τὸ δάπεδον ῥρεισαν καὶ τὰ ξίφη εἰς τοὺς
κουλεοὺς ἐναπέθεντο· ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐκεῖνος
προπηδήσας εἶπε τε ὅτι 'τοῦτό σοι τὸ ξίφος οἱ
στρατιῶται πεπόμφασι,' καὶ προσπεσὼν εὐθὺς
ἔπληξεν αὐτόν, οὐκ ἐπέσχον ἀλλὰ τὸν τε
αὐτοκράτορά σφον κατέκοψαν καὶ τὸν
Ἔκλεκτον.

The soldiers on seeing him were at first
abashed [*you brought me in from the storm*], all
save one [*for what*], and kept their eyes on the
ground [*to rockslide away*], and they thrust
their swords back into their scabbards [*I will
not set aground*]; but that one man leaped
forward [*some safety in the pull of the tide*],
exclaiming, "[*in no destination if youve landed
youve caught your feet in vines youve hit
labyrinth wall*]" The soldiers have sent you this
sword [*and broken your nose in process*]," and
forthwith [*boat slouched low trickling*] fell
upon him and but out wounded him. Than his
comrades no longer held [*pursuing*] back,
[*concrete fields steady concrete fields not to
step but to lay*] but struck down their emperor
[*alone*] ~~together with Eclectus.~~

The Daughters of Dion

April 11th, 1999

Berenike, Red Sea Governorate, Egypt

Maria felt Romuald, the glass expert on loan from the University of Warsaw, read her letter as it sat in her palms. He had been walking behind her, but at least caught the end, with its damning and definitely unironic “enjoy your cesspools.” And his reading English must have been much better than his spoken, or at least he could tell by her body language that she wanted to fall through the packed sand down down into the center of the earth and sleep in its molten core, because he immediately invited her to dive with he and Patrick. They had never asked before, but diving was the easiest excuse to get out of the camp for a few hours. Every other way stood miles of desert or deserted hills. So,

though decompression sickness terrified her and breathing through a tube for recreational purposes took first prize on the list of things she never had any intention of attempting, she agreed to tag along, simply dropping the

The Red Sea warmed any skin in any month, really, and that day presented no challenge in tide or plankton burst. Though frowned upon due to the great number of pricking fish, eels, the spiny-paralysis-inducing starfish known as the Crown of Thorns, Romuald and Patrick took to the water without wetsuits. Maria borrowed one of the snorkels left behind by the '97 crew and watched them floating from above. Though it was not equivalent to sinking into the molten core, her back burned evenly all the same. The tide formed little warmer eddies over the miniature mountain range of coral and cooler currents between the branches, fish cascading in little troops. They mostly ignored the researchers, acclimated to vacation divers and some locals and associated the tanks and goggles as not-net and not-hook. In that pressured silence, she watched yellow stripes dash by and into crannies of coral. She imagined them disappearing just as easily into the invisible angles of the many old shipwrecks here, like the dogs that populated the ruins in Sicily or the cats in Rome who rubbed their backs on pedestals polished into shape by craftsmen thousands of years their senior. The fish probably made feeding grounds of masts and oaring benches, which had likely lost their conspicuous color under a dark rot.

The reef predated the coins and walls she etched from their dirt encampments. It was one of the reasons she hated, well—hate was a strong word. One reason she despised all the overexuberant new researchers and bored mid-career men who came to try and

dredge the ancient shipwrecks. Whenever they got permission from the Supreme Council of Antiquities, it normally meant an expected bullion haul and a line of angry, overstepped environmentalists. And ultimately, they all ended two ways: the smart researchers would dive or pay someone to dive or simply talk to someone who had dived and discover that the wrecks were unstable or totally integrated into the surrounding reef or already picked over and then decide against the project. The second was probably self-explanatory, but it left the ocean spitting planks for weeks, the local resorts and tourist traps furious over the clouded water, and some government pencil pusher in danger of unemployment.

One of the men below—she forgot which was wearing the green swimsuit—signaled he was surfacing. She moved out of his way. It was Patrick. “Something’s got the fish in a fit. Not many sharks trawling, so we think there might be a boat coming.”

Boats were not unheard of in the area, of course. But they were usually big tankers that stayed far away from the shallows. All three of them made for the shore. Within two minutes of finding wading level, the whirring of jetskis faded in and shortly thereafter the joyriders themselves. Three of them hissed past, displacing the seawater into the sky. One must have spotted them standing thigh-deep near the shore. They headed toward them; they maneuvered on the tides like locals, but one could never tell.

“You lost, friends?” One of them yelled. “Some boat leave you?”

“We’re fine, actually. Thanks, though,” shouted Patrick.

“Can’t trust all these companies. They’ll make a buck stranding you, another from the coast guard to come rescue you.” One of them continued.

Maria shrugged when Patrick could come up with nothing diplomatic to say in response.

“How ‘bout you, friend? Take you out of the shallows. Pull up behind me, we can go check out the island, St. John’s.” They patted the back of the soaked jetski seat.

“Not interested. But thank you.” Maria chimed back. “We’re actually staying here.”

They eventually grew bored and told them to find some shade; they were getting pinker.

Maria hated Berenike. She said so, in fact, in the letter which yielded today’s reply. Among other things. In a list of archaeological projects with which she’d ever been associated, it ranked dead last. The size of the camp, miniscule. The amenities, paltry. But all of these aside, the isolation nearly left her groaning every night. The silent nights and cloudless skies, some Kumbaya notion of reconnecting with the essential humanity through nature, consumed time for about a week in an entertaining fashion and afterward in the vestibule-of-hell, flag-chasing fashion. In reality, she spent her time finding news ways to write “windblown sand deposition” and argued for new dating of gypsum ashlar just to have something to reorganize; something to speak about. She wrote home and it

felt like falling through a wormhole, writing paper letters by kerosene lamps while missing Olympics and elections and Charlie Brown reruns at Christmas.

Tomas Reinquist, this month's lead excavator while Willeke was away, stood just inside the shade line of the dining tent three hours later, after the three had cleaned and tended the gear. "Did you lead those people over here?" he asked, enunciating each syllable clearly.

Now Sicily, on the other hands, Maria adored. She had spent most of her early research years flitting about the island, never once overwhelmed with the monotony of the ocean, as she was now. Selinunte, Morgantina—but the area around Syracuse provided her favorite digs. The city had a cultural heritage office friendly for foreign crews. Besides its own pride, the city had reason from the revenues of the UNESCO-designations and encouraged new projects as long as they didn't require wrangling land from developers.

"Would someone answer me?" He implied any of the three swimmers, but had his eyes fixed on Maria. "We had three interlopers all over 29 and 31. Lucky there was nothing to see, or we might have more troubles than balk collapse."

In part, she was sure it did not stifle her because she knew, for however many miles of reiterative wildflower ridges overlooking the water, to turn back and drive maybe ten minutes would mean finding a new trattoria and some risotto alla marinara. In less than three hours, you could be sitting under the strung lightbulbs of Palermo's piazzas or counting the steps up to the Teatro Massimo.

“Look, we saw some people on SeaDoos.” Patrick spoke up. “We had no idea they were going to come up here.”

The admixture of ancient communities she researched kept her from any sense of authority on a Sicilian research site. Which meant even during the slog, the slow days of measuring and recording, the majority of the weeks in which they found nothing that made it to publication, she was refreshed by the puzzles. How can one distinguish tiles reused by conquerors? What buildings must one demolish, if overtaking a city, and which can be repurposed with a little mortar and a little iron?

“Ze mną można rozmawiać po polsku,” insisted Romuald. Tomas repeated his question in Polish after which they had a heated back and forth, pointing at the ocean then pointing to the trenches and back again.

She enjoyed the already failed project of delineating the cultures and arts of the different peoples she encountered. She sat on sea cliffs and fleshed out those names that didn’t find their way onto sarcophagi.

Shaking his hands as if to rid himself of muddy water, Romuald had clearly had enough. Patrick merely shrugged in a ‘not my concern, call me when you need my skills; which you undoubtedly will’ laissez-faire. Tomas turned to Maria, the finger which had been motioning toward the trench now in her face. “You should’ve at least warned them off. You’re going to need to clean those out immediately—” but Romuald had grabbed her by the arm and was pulling her toward dinner. Tomas’s demands changed. “—first thing tomorrow morning.”

For example, the unlucky granddaughters of Hipparinus with the really unlikely names: Arete, Sophrosyne, Dicaeosyne. Otherwise known as virtue, temperance, and righteousness. The text of origin for the names' retention was Plutarch, who in his revenant drive to recapture the relationship between Dion and Plato accidentally made the whole family into philosophers. Or, in the case of the women, abstract concepts.

Tomas followed the three to the table which was already set with fish and vegetables, the other eighteen already eating. He pressed close so only Maria could hear, shoving something into her hands which she lifted, recognizing the letter she had dropped that morning. "Maybe then you'll have something productive to write home about." he whispered. "He sounds jealous." Maria took a step back and headed for her plate.

Those ladies were carted to Italy and back on the whims of their husbands, the generals. Plutarch united them all in a common suffering, but she tried to take sides: for bookish Arete, climbing into the water and pretending to be a sea nymph. Against the quiet Sophrosyne, ambivalent toward embittered Dicaeosyne.

Maria wished, sometimes when the water glistened and reflected, to be a reflective surface, like tin or fool's gold, scoffing at the attempts of the sun and sending them right back. Or she wished to wade into the sea and float until some god turned her into a mangrove shoot for the triggerfish to peck or into driftwood or into cyanobacteria. Or maybe just into that reflective bit of sea trash for a skiff to pull up. But right now she was grounded and the sand right in front of her toes felt indistinguishable from the sand at her heels.

nympha, mone, nemori stagnoque operata Dianae;
 nympha, Numae coniunx, ad tua facta veni.
 vallis Aricinae silva praecinctus opaca
 est lacus, antiqua religione sacer;
 hic latet Hippolytus loris direptus equorum,
 unde nemus nullis illud aditur equis.
 licia dependent longas velantia saepes,
 et posita est meritae multa tabella deae.
 saepe potens voti, frontem redimita coronis,
 femina lucentes portat ab Urbe faces.
 regna tenent fortes manibus pedibusque fugaces,
 et perit exemplo postmodo quisque suo.

Inform me [*Tell me*], thou nymph who on Diana's
 grove and lake dost wait [*Egeria*]; thou nymph,
 wife of Numa [*as you intended*], come tell of thine
 own deeds [*pulling myself across the coral by the*
shore]. In the Arician vale [*crawling the sharp*]
 there is a lake begirt by shady woods [*the terns*
expect I play] and hallowed by religion of old
 [*unfearing*]. Here Hippolytus lies hid [*caught*],
 who by the reins of his steeds was rent in pieces [*I*
would gut them]: hence no horses enter that grove
 [*skip away caliper legs*]. The long fence [*soft*
sandfeather edge] is draped with hanging threads
 [*tipped in fagonbush*], and many a tablet [*the*
wadi] there attests the merit of the goddess
 [*overfull gushing rain*]. Often doth a woman [*dunk*
a mouth willingly now], whose prayer has been
 answered [*drink deep*], carry from the City
 burning torches [*neck a severed thread*], while
 garlands [*tipping along lukewarm*] wreath her
 brows. The strong of hand [*pull yourself up by the*
hair] and fleet of foot do there reign kings
 [*alternate breathing*], and each is slain thereafter
 even as himself has slain [*recoup your volume*].

Berenike, Red Sea Governorate, Egypt

August 14th, 1995

At the end of the summer, the excavation crew switches out, leaving Clara the solitary presence in Berenike. This circulating not unexpected, one project manager en route from the Netherlands, the other ferries the pot sherds, the inscription fragments, nearly all the updelved materials to the Commercial International Bank vault in Aswan for safe-keeping. A stopover at the dam and Lake Nasser and north up the Nile, they want to see, before they fly home to Delaware, the river choked with hyacinth and the boatmen raking purple flowers into mounds.

Clara calls home for the weather report, her last message for the week as she hits all the switches. Her mother says she's worried, that borders are so changeable these days and her friend from Thursday bible study says the south of Egypt is the most dangerous part right now, and Clara nods, graciously appeasing no one, saying: "I'm in a desert by a

sea. No one wants our sand in particular. For me, nothing changes.” She kneels to check the water levels in the tanks.

While the sun's still up she pulls her pet project from the plastic tub under the largest white canvas sunshade. A small hoard of Roman silvers, already carefully plotted and photographed before extraction and categorized after, the denarii were to go into the vault as well. But, the outgoing head of excavations recanted when he saw her boredom, to keep her a civil stand-in if the Supreme Council of Antiquities should come nosing around. Dragging a finger over the tightly-packed plastic coin sleeves, she siphons out the rarest, her favorites.

She,
authority

A set in sequence, trove of
some trader with a collector's spirit
and a sense of humor: the year of the
five emperors, Pertinax, severe,
beloved, and murdered by
his own guards. Julianus,
who won the auction of the
empire, and the three
upstarts with armies at their

Legend:

IMP[erator]
CAES[ar]
P[ublius]
HELV[ius]
PERTIN[ax]
AUG[ustus]



I wear his laurel, but I am CAES before AUG. I borrow Commodus's beard and my own demeanor, have you forgotten yet, I am the son of the freedman?



Die
axis: 12
o'clock

Happy times are here again, for all of us. This son of Rome was consul twice, once with Commodus, wishing him no harm.

backs: Niger, Clodius, Severus. She weighs them in a gloved hand, she puts them on the scale and watches the digits dwindle down. She speaks to the disappeared project manager, the interregnum heavy on her breath like the leftover Malbec buried by the

homestead: “I’ll keep them safe and order them and you’ll (or someone like you’ll) come back and find them eye-scoured and definitely not dropped and covered in sand.”

She,
thief

She speaks to Pertinax’s likeness: “You know, they offer me pretty pennies for the likes of you. I would never take you, of course.

But I could take you anywhere.”

Obverse legend: IMP
CAES M DID – IVLIAN AVG
(cos null)



The earth is safe in my tutelage

He is at the gate

He is at the gate

He is at the gate

She sets down the 700 USD coin, she picks up the 3400 USD coin, Julianus, worth more due to his short minting season. “I’d definitely take you if you didn’t belong in a museum.”

I am just the same. It is not that I did not have time to recast. Blink and I am Pertinax; who did I kill?



IMPCAES NVS
AVGVSTVS
VG watch my newly taken authority crash into my neck.

I am like Augustus, returned from Asia, here is his temple Fortuna Redux printed in my legend.

My promised plenty, my ship of the state, fuller and well-keeled.

To the Ababda worker, Eslam, come back to the site to retrieve his measuring tape: “I know I wasn’t your first choice to watch the site.

She, blamed

I’d forget to shovel the sand encroaching in the trenches, use my trowel as an ice cream

scoop, let a militiaman within striking distance without

noticing.” She lights the petroleum lamp to continue, he takes his tape and his level back home.

She plans her week alone, she plans her future digs. She tears through Asia

She, deceived

Minor, she tears through
Phoenician soil. She takes
inventory and another
inventory. She watches the
ships pass in the distance and
imagines an invasion and
imagines her reaction to
invasion and it is glorious. She lines the



D CLOD
SEPT ALBIN
CAES



I’m no god, bare-
headed, look at my
reason, bind me to
your cause

Offering peace, prepared
otherwise. Lugdunum has a
fantastic mint. This is as good a
place as any to die.

pegs she pulls taut the tarps she sets the computer just where she likes it. Waiting, she
talks to her mother, long off the dial tone: “We’re sixty miles from a gas station, less than
that to the gas fields. I have a clipboard full of workers, I’m sorting them into tents.
They’ll squabble and resettle and I’ll have taught them a valuable lesson. It’s changing
for me. It is.”

The dark asks her to put down the clipboard, the phone. Stowing the coins, Clara
finds her tent by the sharp stones at the edge of the path. The Red Sea hisses “shipwreck,
shipwreck,” she remembers how hard they tried to dislodge the modern schooner beached
in the harbor. There are too few hours and too few muscles to try again, in these hours
before the new slew of students, the project manager, arrive again. Their SUVs

overstuffed with the returned goods, waiting for a museum to be built and named for some benefactor.

Pertinax, by Severus.



Die axis:
6 o'clock.

ἐγγόνει γὰρ, ὥς ἔοικε, κάκείνῳ Πολύξενος ὁ τὴν
ἀδελφὴν ἔχων αὐτοῦ Θέστην πολέμιος,
ἀποδράντος οὖν αὐτοῦ διὰ φόβον καὶ φυγόντος ἐκ
Σικελίας μεταπεμψάμενος ἡτιᾶτο τὴν ἀδελφὴν, ὅτι
συνειδυῖα τὴν φυγὴν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς οὐ κατεῖπε πρὸς
αὐτόν. ἡ δ' ἀνεκπλήκτως καὶ νῆ Δί' ἀφόβως· 'εἴθ'
οὔτω σοι δοκῶ, Διονύσιε, φαύλη γυνὴ γεγονέναι
καὶ ἄνανδρος ὥστε προγνοῦσα τὴν φυγὴν τοῦ
ἀνδρὸς οὐκ ἂν συνεκπλεῦσαι καὶ μετασχεῖν τῆς
αὐτῆς τύχης; ἀλλ' οὐ προέγνων ἐπεὶ καλῶς εἶχέ
μοι μᾶλλον Πολυξένου γυναῖκα φεύγοντος ἢ σοῦ
τυραννοῦντος ἀδελφὴν λέγεσθαι.'

For the elder tyrant also, as it would appear [*stay*],
had a sister, Theste, whose husband, Polyxenus,
had [*forget*] become his enemy [*and drink*]. When,
therefore, Polyxenus was [*no one demands your
return*] moved by fear to run away [*your muddy
sand traipsing*] and go into exile from Sicily
[*youve given up your roof*], the tyrant sent [*not
your sudden sprung well besides*] for his sister
[*not for potsherds*] and upbraided her [*not stone
incisions*] because she had been privy [*not clavicle
dust*] to her husband's flight and had not told [*who
called you to collect the strewn to collared
mounds*] her brother about it. But she, [*silt sends
sleep*] without consternation, and [*seagulls quiet
alert*], indeed, without fear [*guarding their insect
ranch*], replied: "Dost thou think me [*free me from
my obligated self*], Dionysius, such a mean and
cowardly [*following the wadi for my sake*] wife
that, had I known beforehand of my [*to find oasis
cities*] husband's flight, I would not have sailed off
with him and shared his fortunes [*until they dry
and charcoal a dotted line in the desert*]? Indeed, I
did not know about it; since it would have been
well for me to be [*rest me your messenger*] called
the wife of Polyxenus the exile [*without message*],
rather than the sister and [*without caller*] of
Dionysius the tyrant."

Egypt and the Emeralds

October 4th, 1973

Wadi Umm Debaa, Eastern Desert

Mountains, Egypt

Though the guides had already been paid for a three-day trek along the wadis, thirty days of spot-checking the ground of Edfu cost most of Irving Levin's hiking companions their sense of adventure. With the exception of Abbas, the observer from Egyptian Antiquities Organization, with whom he had developed a friendship over a shared distaste for coconut drinks and American football during the month of their

The Egyptian Emerald Mines. Hermon, 31, Lingfield Road, Wimbledon. IN the paper lately published (Geographical Journal, vol. xvi. p. 357) on the Egyptian emerald mines, the author, Mr. D. A. MacAlister, owing to lack of space, was obliged to confine himself strictly to what he himself had seen and noted, and therefore to omit mention of my own expedition to these mines in 1897-98, of M. Floyer's in 1891, and of Caillaud's two expeditions at the beginning of the century. In both Floyer's and Caillaud's publications in French, the temples are illustrated and described. For the same reason, Mr. MacAlister could give no account of the mines on the other or Zabara side of the mountains, which were visited by Mr. Forster, who was in command, and which I considered the most interesting and most promising. The result of my expedition, which was made alone with a small caravan of natives, was the *raison d'être* of that in which Mr. MacAlister took part. I think the old Roman wells might advantageously be opened up by the Egyptian Government, especially on the route from Edfu, which was the one taken by Caillaud on his second expedition. I found the Egyptians made splendid labourers and intrepid miners. I searched them in the middle of the desert on my way back, but found no gems, as Caillaud did, concealed upon the persons of his Albanians. Yet the day after I quitted Aswan, as I was informed by some tourists, emeralds were offered for sale in the bazaar. A few of them were subsequently confiscated and forwarded to me by the civil governor, Au Haidar.

H. W. SETON-KARR.

acquaintance, his whole coterie had opted to spend their last week in the country directly on the Nile. But some of the local workers contracted to scope the land at Edfu (where they'd not been able to receive any digging permits for a good three decades, now) had told him just how close he was to the emerald mines in the Eastern Desert. Now, reports had been arriving since the turn of the century that claimed to have found the famous Emerald Mine of Cleopatra. Irving was not nearly so convinced Mons Smaragdus, as the Romans called the 'Emerald Mountain,' was one mountain at all, nor the mine ever a singular mine.

Which led to this climb down a granite incline and into another of the dried desert beds, Wadi Umm Debaa. The more easily accessible ones, Wadi Sikait and Wadi Nuqrus, had been picked over and analyzed already, according to his guides. And indeed, the new path looked completely uninhabited—no camel trail, no occasional shade stand—and Irving found himself watching his feet for scorpions more than the mice which populated the larger wadis. The two guides, Melcek and Fu'ad, spoke with each other in Beja as they navigated the sharp stones down to the sand.

Only his absolute fear of sand racers (which the biologists and Abbas teased him incessantly for—the snakes were never known for attacking anything bigger than a rabbit) allowed him to notice the unnatural glint by the sole of his boot. He yelled at the others to stop, bending down to observe. The sun slick in his eyes, he cupped both hands at his forehead to cast a larger shadow. It was a coin, looked to be bronze. He called to

Abbas, “It’s just sitting on the surface. How do we go three weeks in Edfu with a few potsherds and glass beads, and bronze is just here waiting to be tripped over?”

Abbas laughed. “Maybe someone planted it just for you. Fu’ad, did you drop this?”

“No. But if you don’t want it, I’ll take it,” but he had his arms crossed, obviously just waiting until they could get back to their journey.

Irving brushed it off with one finger, then dug around it with the same. It was not at all well-packed; either it was dropped or revealed only recently by the shifting sand. He flipped it over; it was extremely light. With no complaints coming from Abbas’s corner yet, he picked it up by the rim. It had an extremely uneven patina—Irving expected one side had been unavailable to the elements for a long time—and was worn down. But he could still make out a portrait on the obverse and a reclining figure on the reverse. A little of the legend could be made out—he caught a possible –RAI- sequence. He wasn’t sure if he wanted to study it immediately and more closely or look around for more, first. He wished more of the academics had come along, so they could split tasks.

Abbas threw down his own pack and pulled the camel close. “He’s going to be here awhile. Go ahead and find some shade.” And the guides moved toward the one acacia standing and hung a piece of cloth through some low branches for their makeshift camp.

Though he spent the entirety of the afternoon, until sunset at least, scouring the terrain, he found no other coins. But Melcek had been making the camp less temporary and more stay-the-night, so Irving didn't bother to cut the search short until the sand started purpling. He had marked the place he found the coin first with a shoelace from his extra set of boots, and he would give up his first glass of beer back in the States for a trowel and some averted eyes. But Abbas was nearby, looking over the revealed coin which they had set in a cloth.

"I think the reclining figure is the Nile," Abbas said when Irving gave up his search and sat beside him under the acacia. "See, this looks like a branch. Could be a reed." He pointed to what was little more than a line moving up from the figure.

"Or it could be a staff and we're just looking at it sideways." Abbas didn't have a response for that, so Irving continued. "What would that make it? Hadrian?" Irving tried to go over the emperors in his head, wished he had brought something other than a book on Egyptian mining.

"Only if they can't spell." The letters were transposed, RAI for RIA, but that wasn't impossible with a foreign minting. Irving mentioned this, and Abbas looked mighty unimpressed. "Or maybe a little benefit of the doubt for those idiots in the foreign mints? It could be Trajan." And indeed, the lettering could fit. And the smudged blob before the legible letters could well once have been a T. Abashed, Irving handed the coin back to Abbas, who packed it gently away for the evening.

In the middle of the night, it was still so bright that Irving crept up away from his sleeping companions and toed around the flatland in the middle of the mountains. He stalked back to the shoelace, but though the moon hung like a bulb without a lampshade, he couldn't make out anything with the precision necessary to tell sand-covered metal from sand. Though the possibility of hitting a scorpion, a spider, a sand racer, or even a rat in the dark was terrifying, he opted to feel around with his bare hands. He recognized it as the reckless act it was, without knowing well the terrain, fauna, or flora. But without sleep as an option, he was bargaining on some stupidity.

The sand was strikingly cool, considering how hot it had gotten in the day. It ghosted past his fingers as they hurdled the pebbles. He spent a couple minutes at least feeling the prick of these little impediments until realizing he had no way to track his motions other than muscle memory. It was like trying to paint a beige wall beige, within a few minutes of the paint drying, you slathered the same spot accidentally.

Instead, and checking for movement behind him first, Irving retreated to the shoelace. He pushed his fingers into the sand and thought to himself: "If it's something I can pull up with my bare hands, its essentially surface level." He delved, shucking sand one layer at a time, sifting it as well as he could between his two hands. He couldn't tell how long it had been, but fairly quickly he felt something cooler than the sand and smoother than the gneiss chippings slip through his hands, landing audibly in the displaced sand. He shuffled and found it again and, more importantly, found it to be rounded. Unsure how best to play off its discovery, he tried to push the sand back into its

smooth state, replacing the shoelace. He felt around with his feet for a larger piece of granite and, stubbing one, placed the new coin just peeking from the edge. As soon as he slunk back into camp, he feared he had already lost it again and spent the night tracing the exact rock in his mind, praying that it would be immediately obvious in the morning where he had hidden it.

Irving made sure not to be the first up. Once the others were folding up the blankets or pissing a few yards off, he rolled up off his sleeping bag. Abbas was eager to get up the mine entrance while it was still cool, but Irving insisted to look around once more, just to try in the morning light. He could feel the EAO observer's reluctance.

Though feeling guilty over the wasted time, Irving made a great show of scouring the area. He was distressed to see he did not do such a good job covering his tracks, but hopefully the overturned sand would appear to be a result of the previous day's endeavors. Eager to lay eyes on what yesterday he had only felt, he kept the ruse going for at most half an hour. Then he pulled it up. Abbas's eyebrows nearly hit his receding hairline.

In the light, it was another bronze. It had less of a green patina, more of a black corrosion. It had an even more obvious legend than the last, but a portrait appeared on neither side. "Is this one of your coins?" He was disappointed by the modernity. Abbas held out his hand, too eager to study the discovery to question Irving about it, perhaps. "It

doesn't look like Latin. A Greek variant? That I think could be an omega..." He pointed out a letter which looked like a W.

"Wrong on both accounts. I think I know what this is." But he didn't share, merely looked up and down the wadi in confusion.

"I'm a bit behind. What is it?"

Abbas handed it back. "A shekel."

"What the hell is a shekel doing in the middle of an Egyptian wadi?"

Abbas signaled the two guides over. "We should get going. We can talk about it on the way. If we don't get back in time, you'll miss your group."

Irving looked around, unsure how far to press his farce. "Shouldn't we look for more?"

Brushing his foot over the upset dune, Abbas replied: "Something tells me they won't be so obvious."

"Maybe it was brought as a trade. We're not so far from the Red Sea and the shipping lanes," posited Irving.

"Perhaps. But I'm fairly certain they had quicker trade routes by land."

They tread the uneven sand, the mountains now more like rows of combs than natural wonders. "Also, who's to say they had any worth outside of Judaea, anyway." Irving had been surprised at just how insubstantial the coin felt. Abbas did not comment, so Irving continued. "I mean, someone modern could have dropped it. It's not like no

one's ever been to this mine, before." Abbas did not comment, so Irving pressed on.

"Right, benefit of the doubt—let's see. It's by another bronze which may be from Alexandria," that's how far they'd gotten with the Trajan speculation, "and this one from Judaea. It's not impossible someone from Jerusalem came to the mines, either to trade or to work..." Abbas did not even look over. "...but it is unlikely."

The camel's occasional harrumphing interrupted the silence. Irving supposed the normally jovial and talkative Abbas fumed over his circumvention of the rules, but didn't know how to get back in his good graces. "The only other thing I can think of is Kitos." The trek took them up another ridge, as the wadi curved the wrong way; they'd have to pick it up again on the other side or waste an hour following along. "But that seems just as unlikely."

"What's Kitos?" Fu'ad asked. Irving nearly fell off the mountain. Fu'ad had talked to him directly once since their introduction. To be honest, he had forgotten that he spoke English.

"A war between the Jews and Rome. The Jews rebelled in the early second century in Libya; it spread through most of the south and east Mediterranean lands. One of the places hardest hit was Alexandria," Irving waved towards Abbas's pack, where the original coin was buried. "They burned a lot of it." Including Pompey's tomb, if he remembered correctly. But he didn't think Fu'ad would appreciate the comeuppance. "Then a general, Quietus, chased them all out. It's not impossible some fled south." He pointed to his own pack, which held the shekel.

Fu'ad turned to Melcek and they spoke a quick Arabic; Irving just caught "yahud." The EAO observer talked sharply to them in the same. It sounded like cursing, but the American had no idea.

"What'd he say?" He wanted in on the joke.

"Nothing important," said Abbas. Fu'ad snorted.

"What are you, his mother?" asked Fu'ad. "His shield?" Abbas had gone quiet, again. "It won't matter soon."

Now the other guide stung at him in Arabic, Irving could catch none of it at all.

"And what does that mean?" Irving kept watching his footfall; they were nearly at the peak of this hill and the loose stones crackled with every step.

"It means," said Fu'ad over his companions' shushing, "We're going to bomb them to ashes."

What can you do in response? Irving stopped and they all stopped as well, a showdown without weapons. Melcek tried to chime in: "It's a laugh. Funny. It's a laugh," but clapped Fu'ad on the back a little too hard for a shared joke.

"We should get going, if we want any more than to run by the mine in passing," said Abbas. He shooed his hands forward, as if asking the guides to continue. Fu'ad threw his own hands up as if asking for patience from heaven before leading the way, kicking away the worst of the unstable rocks as he went. Melcek followed, but Irving did not and Abbas stayed beside him.

"Is he wishful thinking, in the know, or an idiot?" asked Irving.

“A few of those, I think,” muttered Abbas. “But there is a rumor that the bases nearby—including the old Soviet ones, like Ras Banas—are emptying of machines and supplies. And heading for the border.”

Irving wondered how rampant a rumor, not how truthful. He knew how fresh in the minds the 1967 war was for all those along the Suez and all around Egypt. That was not a surprise. He had borne the brunt of some of that hostility upon entering the country, especially in the north, many Egyptians thoroughly convinced the United States had been involved in the bombings, that June. But the specificity now had him concerned.

Suddenly, to his mind, the small canyon had grown ten times its previous size. The beautiful striations dragged on. The cloudless sky too wide. He could get back, with the guides’ help, in no less than ten hours, even if they turned back now. And once they got back, what was he to do? The closest phone lines all belonged to the military bases. And who would he call? Someone in Israel? Someone in the States, just to say he heard a rumor? It sounded dangerous and not at all productive. But on the other hand, what good were the mines to him if all he saw within it was a good-sized bomb shelter?

But he had come to see the mines. He turned, alongside Abbas, to follow the guides along the hills toward the resumption of the valley. Another acacia grew halfway down the hill, its roots obvious, many above the ground. He would have time enough to warn someone once he returned.

itaque unum tantum moratus diem,
quietis eorum causa, quos habuerat
secum, itinere inde simili fugae in
Dentheletos transcurrit. socii erant, sed
propter inopiam haud secus quam
hostium fines Macedones populati sunt;

After [*familiar nonsoil*] one day in
camp to rest the [*concretebunker*] men
whom he had taken with him,
[*feetscrape sound*] he hastened into the
Dentheletic country at a speed which
[*lastlegs*] resembled a flight. This
people were his allies [*youarenothere*],
but owing to lack of food [*ifIfall*] the
Macedonians plundered them
[*Itakeyourtarmacasmymybed*] as though
they were on enemy soil
[*youmaytakemyruustedfingers*].

Berenike, Posthumous

June 18th, 2011

Arlington County, Virginia, USA

Four months into the stint, the second security guard still took Zara's temporary contractor ID back to his glowing xerox looking machine. Whatever he was doing, scanning or blacklighting or acid dripping, he always did it twice, shifting her ID like the oversized jenga block he must have mishandled at the bar the night before.

As every day previous, he would hand it back with a you-understand smile, and she took the elevator with every business-suit and uniform who swept through security no trouble. She still hadn't learned to distinguish sleeve stripes, and really had no intention to, so stuck with 'sir' whenever necessary. In her temporary office, only two visitors ever showed up: the mail cart attendant, whose name she did not know, and Tom Wisseck from the Defense Intelligence Agency who handed over the documents she had to analyze. With the surge of militarized action and diplomatic turmoil in Egypt, they'd

hired an extra fifteen or so temporary Egypt-specialists to either consult or, in Zara's case, to scan foreign documents (gathered by either the intelligence community or military) for threatening language or accounts of combat to be sent on to the military for possible censoring to guard against operation security breaches (OPSEC) or archived.

Turnover was the key, getting as many documents under as few expert eyes as possible. Zara enjoyed the reputation as the quickest of them all; having lived for years not only in Egypt but also in Sudan and Jordan, her grasp on idioms led her to recognize both local anomalies (which could spell use in code) and frequent border-crossers fairly frequently. The majority of what covered her desk today was likely banal, as with the majority of documents the overeager army sergeants bring home. She could make out already a stack of tax forms and a book within a ziplock bag, marked: "Text found 2011-06-30 at Ras Banas, the Egyptian Air Force base at 23° 58' 26.80" N, 035° 27' 37.20" E by entering American troops of USS Kearsarge."

The front cover had obviously been exposed to both surf and sand, it had been left crusted. Though she usually didn't go to the trouble, Zara grabbed some gloves to put on before dealing with the object. Hunks of compressed sand and gravel fell from the binding as Zara pulled it from the Ziploc. Peering into the first few pages, Zara could tell this was not her area. Either everyone who normally dealt with it was swamped or they'd run out of Arabic-specific texts for her and didn't want to waste a resource. It was mostly in English, though she could see some—was that Latin?—others peeking out.

She decided she needed a coffee before tackling it, so she locked her office, went to the breakroom, and got one.

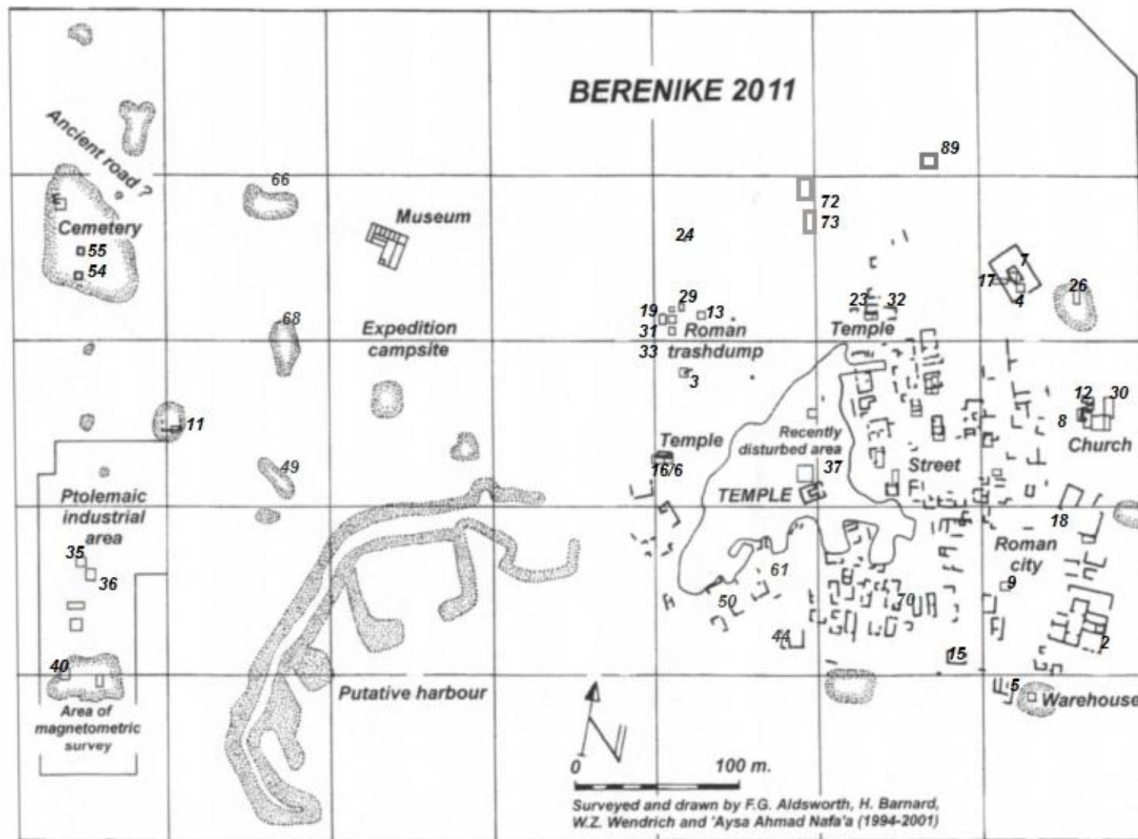
It was a field journal of one classicist, Elena Roth. She had kept it while excavating in both Alexandria and a dead Red Sea city, Berenike, apparently. The beginning looked perfectly mundane, though coded with levels, phases, loci, and inscriptions, so Zara skipped to the dated pages around the January 25th Revolution.

It began:

Note: The students left first. Greg and Lucien back to Germany; the Norfolk crew back to the States. The emails from their families had sprouted and multiplied over the last two weeks, an avalanche of forewarnings every time we allowed them their ten minutes on the laptop. But forgive me, this is off-topic. They left yesterday at five in the morning, Mark driving them in our van to Marsa Alam, which has flights straight to Dusseldorf, so they can avoid Cairo, which is apparently in bedlam.

And it contained a map updated by hand, which Zara scanned to consider later out of habit. It would likely go into the report.

She couldn't take it or any facsimile of the text home, so instead she took notes on some of the names and places that appeared frequently to google on her off hours.



Her partner hated when she brought work home, and tonight was no exception. Tonya lay across the couch dividing her attention between a DVRed sitcom and Zara, typing away at the laptop with a pad and paper beside her.

“I haven’t seen you writing with a pen and paper since uni.”

Zara glanced up and smiled out of habit. “I’ve got another weird one.”

“Let me guess, something you can’t talk about?”

Zara looked back at the computer. “A lot of it’s actually common knowledge, actually. It shouldn’t be a problem, though keep it between us.” Tonya didn’t have to nod, it was understood. “So, this lady’s apparently a pretty well-known researcher and I have her field journal.”

“How’d you get it?”

“Apparently some navy guys found it on a base near her research site.”

“What happened to her?”

Zara shrugged. “I have no idea. She didn’t exactly keep a social media presence. And I haven’t gotten far enough into the text to really guess.”

“Then you’re going in circles.” Tonya pushed the laptop off Zara’s lap with a socked foot.

“Alright, alright. I’m done. But if that thing shatters, it’s coming out of your rainy day fund.”

The first security guard did an extra scan on her pullover—apparently any jacket, no matter how sheer, was a warning flag during the summer—and the second happily went through the same rigmarole, narrowing his eyes at the ID and her before running it through his tests. She got into the elevator with the officers of unidentifiable rank (aka, sir) and back into her office in record time. The book was where she left it.

Note: I would begin to pack, in what straw and fabrics and even cloth we had left, the shards of pottery still under

analysis, but if the Egyptian Antiquities Bureau is under some duress due to the uprising, (likely), we will not be able to get permissions to take the artefacts out of the country. Nor will we be able to inter them in any of the national museums' archives. Other than maintaining personal control, the only option for storage would be the bank vaults in Aswan (Abu Dhabi Islamic) or Marsa Alam (Banque Misr). This has been attempted in the past to mixed results. None of the "Benghazi Treasure" looted from the National Commercial Bank has been recovered. In less well-known dig sites than Cyrene, local banks have regularly delayed or denied claims on deposited materials. Frankly, I don't know what kind of effect this alleged government overthrow is having on the bank managers of Aswan and I hope not to find out.

The on-site storage area, termed museum for funding's sake, will not protect the artefacts from anything but a windstorm...

...Tom stood at the door with a manila envelope. "Anything in there worth knowing?"

She knew he wanted a 'no,' because books (rather than letters and receipts) took more billable hours. But she was too intrigued at this point to let it go.

"I think so, but I won't be able to say for sure until I get closer to the end. Do you know how this ended up at Ras Banas?"

He handed over the manila envelope then tapped his chin. "Don't think so. Didn't think to ask. Doesn't it say on some manifest?"

"No, only that it appeared." He hemmed; she thanked him for his time and let him escape to his next function.

I write here the inscription from the broken slab of Trench 73, phase IV, part of which is still on a newly-dug wall. The other half I have regrettably packed with the pottery into the shipping containers filled with straw, which I also buried. I could not bear to leave their location totally unflagged, so I buried two mattocks four meters apart, their handles sticking into the air in a way I hope is reminiscent of circus turning points, so that approaching scholars will know to dig an oblong, instead of straight down. In any case, here is the inscription whole, as I don't know if the pieces will again meet together.

---TER---UM---INEN—IS—SCITUR—NDAM
PRO-----EOMNIAM-----VITE----

I am not the language guru, I don't dare have a crack at filling in the blanks. It would be a waste of energy. Mark and others handled the transcriptions and relevant translations, I wielded the pickax.

Since Zara spent most of the day reading, only remembering Tom's hand-delivered survivor accounts at 5 PM, she had to wait twenty minutes to catch the blue-line and got back in the pitch black. Tonya had gone to bed but left a pack of ramen on the counter with a post-it: for the budding classicist. It had a smiley face, though, and an arrow pointing to the fridge, which contained a plate of leftover stroganoff to be reheated.

When she crawled into bed not even a half-hour later, Tonya mumbled: "Well, what happened to her?"

And Zara could only shake her head, already pressed into the pillow. "I don't know. She had to flee her site. She left everything behind."

Tonya sleep-stuttered "must've been awful."

Neither security guard had let up, even though it was day one-thirty in the Pentagon for her. Her office was unlocked, which was unnerving on more than one level, considering how much shit she'd be in if she had forgotten to lock it the night before. But it was just Tom waiting for her.

"How's your Greek lady?" He handed her a coffee, though no cream or sugar.

She was more of a Latin lady, but that wasn't relevant. "She just figured out what a mistake taking her journal along was, rather than leaving it. I've also learned more about ancient gravesites than I cared to."

"Anything we need to know about?"

"Not sure yet."

He tapped another manila envelope against her desk. "We need you off of that. As soon as possible, so figure it out. We've got a group of people, call themselves Anşār Bayt al-Maqdis. We think they might be coding messages between Bedouin tribes."

She recognized that it took priority, but couldn't be done with Elena. "Wait, look here." She shuffled through the pages and pointed out a paragraph:

I walked further north along the shore. I don't have anything so useful as a pedometer or compass or any of those sensical things, but I guess I walked twenty miles. Considering the consistency of the sand, I think it's pretty good time, and I should make it to Ras Banas tomorrow. Already the wavering shore line and its curving dirt limits have grown too familiar. I look for landmarks and find not even a bit of flora to catch on the horizon, grow closer too, pass. Like in a garden maze where you drag your right hand against the right wall, I keep the hissing water to my right so I can't avoid hitting the military base, no matter how the bay curves.

“She thinks Ras Banas, as in, supposedly abandoned Egyptian army base Ras Banas, is in full working condition. This is late January.” She knew this would be reason enough, though she seemed overly confident in her depiction. If the Egyptians had been arming bases, perhaps in preparation for civil war, it was exactly the kind of information the DIA wanted.

Tom sucked on his cheeks for a couple seconds, then took back his manila envelope. “Fine. You have twenty-four hours.”

And Zara spent all of them scouring the text. At first she didn’t call home, but after Tonya’s unanswered texts stopped sounding annoyed (“Dead mon?” “Dead mon?” “how worried should I be about nuclear attack 1-10” “this isn’t funny anymore.” “Answer me.”) and started sounding worried (“What’s going on?” “Are you okay?” “Was the metro stopped?” “Maybe your mother’s heard from you. I’ll call her.”), she sent a message. “Big project at work gotta get done.”

The reply came through: “Don’t you greater good me. Everyone but me.” And another, two minutes later. “This better be good & not your Indiana Jones.”

Outside, too, might as well have been the ocean. If there were any more occupiers, they obviously wanted very little to do with me. In one way it relieved me; I did not know how the Egyptian air force would react to my intrusion. For someone who kept abreast of international peace and turmoil, it was rather grating to wander onto bases without intel. I had even thought I might see Americans geared up.

But what had been an operating airport if not base now
could've been the backdrop to an American western.

Zara's heart was in her teeth, gritted and pulsing. She had an hour left and no operating
military base to qualify for a delay. What's more, the narrative had gotten unintelligible.
With no supplies, Elena traveled from Ras Banas across the desert, making it to
Zabargad. She sheltered in place and consumed the resources, but for some reason, left.
The text made her seem schizophrenic—she seemed to think there was some entity in the
evacuated resort which was telling her to return to Berenike, although she had reached
safety.

Last night, lying too late by the pool, dragging my feet to
make dents in the surface of the water, I nearly threw this
journal into the deep. It wasn't that I hoped you would
never know. Never find the Egyptian homes, the pots, the
coins of the emperors, the lost synagogue of the wanderers.
I dragged the pages apart, picked two by the corners and
yanked, watched the paper binding slowly shred across the
staples. But that was not satisfying. I looked to my left,
thought to throw the flimsy thing into the pool. But I know,
with my aim and my trajectory, it wouldn't get far enough
to feel permanent and Egeria may just float it back
unharmd. I stood, dragged my bare feet against the tiles
around the pool, the alternating smooth and sandpaper
grouting. I walked to the kitchen, I started the burner.
But I'm obviously writing to you now. No means of self-
preservation. I will, after this entry, pack you away. I will
pack up the crackers, the remaining jam, as many water
bottles as will not sink me. I will set out from the beach on
one of these crafts meant for a day's distraction, and I will
return. I will uncover what I can; better some treasure
seekers pawn them off than they remain forever
undiscovered. Perhaps you can piece them from the actions,

identify the cut corners and softly tinted sandscapes and connect them to their burial site. And then you can return and piece me together, too.

**I)TER(PI)UM(S)INEN(IXU)(OMN)ISSCITUR(QUO)NDAM
PRO(UT)(FID)EOMNIAM(AERORES)VITE(NT)?**

At some point, the pious path is known without travail to all
So as, by trust, all can avoid sorrows.

Zara could identify no other rational accounts, from that point forward. Nor were the following ones even legible; written over and over again as if in a fury. About Pericles and Egeria, drowning and drinking, and Zara thought there was a story being told which she could not see, and careened into Tom's office for a change at six am, when he got in. He looked startled and took in her outfit, the same as the day before.

"Were you here all night?" He seemed hesitant.

"Did you find a body?" The other early-bird employees stopped chattering behind her, and she realized his door was still open. She shut it.

"What on earth are you talking about? What the hell is this?" He was blushing furiously.

"Someone must know. The people who found it, at least. Was the journal with a body?"

Tom gazed at her evenly, trying to reel them both in. "Why is it important? Is she a diplomat? Was she murdered, or was this simply a story of an inexperienced woman lost in a desert?"

"I don't even know if she's dead," shouted Zara. "It ended with some inscription. Here." She grabbed his fountain pen and the closest memorandum to scrawl:

**PRAETERPONTUMQUISINENERVISNASCITURUNDAM
PROLUEREOMNIAMUSSAVITEGERIA**

Except for the sea which is born without fetters
the waves wash away everything, muttered Egeria

The continued her shouting. “I have no idea what it means.”

Tom held up his hands in a way that meant to be placating. “Did she find Ras Banas occupied? Was that why she may or may not have been killed?”

Zara debated lying seriously, for a moment. “No. It was empty. She made her way to a resort. Which is why I don’t know why this made its way back to the military base. But I could figure it out if you told me whether or not there was a body.”

“You’re getting pretty wrapped up in this,” said Tom. “Is there some connection here I don’t know about?” Zara didn’t know what kind of conflict of interest he was referring to, and didn’t care to dig and find out.

“No. But it’s important. And it would tell us what to do with the document.”

“No, that’s your job.” He watched her, now fiddling with the Newton’s cradle on his desk. “Unless you can tell me right now that this relates to a security threat for us or the Egyptians, we’re putting this on ice. It goes in storage.”

“Why wouldn’t you just give it back to the university? Or the site manager?” Zara knew she was pressing this too much. She could feel as if it were her own his blood pressure rising. “She could’ve given her life while trying to get back there. And you’re going to toss it in a filing cabinet? At least give them a copy!”

“Ms. Hadari, I think you need to take the day off. And we’ll talk about your coming back in tomorrow,” he said. “And, if you are indeed right, the book is now a

piece of evidence in an ongoing investigation and, as such, shouldn't be available to uninvolved parties.”

As she watched the path to the answer gated, she grew sad, but more than sad. Indignant. She wrenched open his office door. She ran for her own office and grabbed the book, sitting on her desk. She wished she had an open window to chuck it out of, but instead, stuck it within her bag and ran for the stairs. The running, more than anything, got her. At the exit level, the two security guards had tripled and each was doing their impression of the Colossus. Though there was no way to slip past them, Zara tried.