

“I want to write the American epic.”

So began Epimetheus in his application to graduate school in 1977. He knew it was an absurd ambition, and tried to close with humor. He also knew he had to risk absurdity: A public declaration might be the only way to commit himself to the goal.

Someone had to attempt it: an attempt mandated by the Flights of Apollo and by our own Trojan War.

Epi (whose full name means Afterthought) began his first draft in 1986. In June, he fancied he was finished. In coming years, having endured countless defeats, he learned to laugh at the notion, sustained in part by hints from failed epigones. The epic is a rack that tortures overreachers. His first draft was but foundation to frame his evolving education; to stitch in parallels from works other builders can't find time to read; to include weavings of routine busyness that give rise to timeless yarns and thrills.

Falcon Will Give Birth to the Rover is a work of imaginative nonfiction, an historical 'biography driven by headlines, a collection that began with the murder of JFK. Epi, a Nobody taking notes, swirls with the times: Wishywashy Epimetheus Kohoutek, who lived in his car because he wished to be a singer.

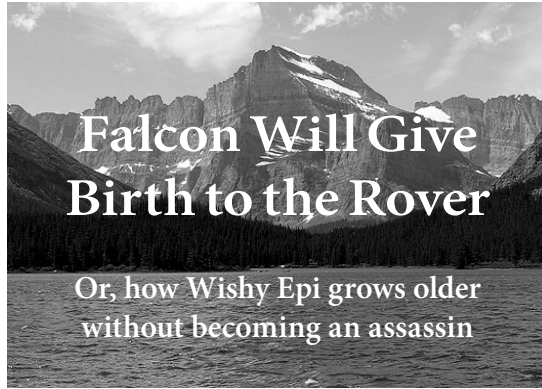
The car is a '68 Ford Falcon, payments begun on return from the Winless War. Apollo 8 sounded the call, the Delphian summons affirmed by Snoopy in Apollo 10, and again two years later by a prophet who oracled the joy of Apollo 15: “A little later, Falcon will give birth to the Rover.”

Falcon is the Quest for the Higher Self, brought to surface dreams by the Flights of Apollo: “If they can get to the Moon, why can't I fly to my own Moon?” It is the Quest for Homecoming—“re-creation,” Zeus calls it—first awakened by physical return from Winless, when Epi knew he must read the *Odyssey*. Where else can he find clues for true return? Not least the mystery of the Ithacan's ten-year struggle to find home shores: It can't take that long, can it?

A little later. In the light of eternity.

A second guide is Dante's *Comedy*, Epi's quest a journey through our Earthly Paradise, though his mind often makes it a Hell (structured here in books of 33, 33, and 34 canticles). He is sustained too by a reading of the *Aeneid*, especially, as he recalls her words, by the Sibyl's warning to Aeneas:

“Easy is the going down to Avernus; but winning your way back to the upper air, that is the labor, that the task.”



“Whoever would kill most thoroughly, laughs.”
–Sarah Cooper Nietzsche,
Thus Spake Sarahthustra

“We are in the kill business.”
–Steve Harvey to Nathan,
Little Big Shot Comedian



A study in Epi ignorance:
“What he don’t know could fill a book.”
–Old Man Soprano, I think

Keith Fahey

Go, litel tweet, go, litel myn comedye:
“Educate the hell out of my self ...”

Swiftcurrent Lake and Mount Gould:
Courtesy National Park Service, photo by David Restivo.
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(Or, how Wishy Epi grows older without becoming an assassin)

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Seeking New Yorker permission was abandoned since multiple email offers to
submit agreed sum were ignored. With regrets to the artists ...

Cover design by Scott Cruickshank and Keith Fahey,
made possible by Apollo and Hubble and Astronomer Bob Williams.

Special thanks to Monica, my first reader,
and to Susan, my second reader,
and to Joyce, who made me feel less an outcast

and to Scott, a great listener

with deepest debt to Mr. Teddy, my greatest teacher

not to forget my '68 Ford Falcon, e'er faithful all the way,
especially with the help of Jim Stonehouse,
who keeps it wired together, often at no charge

and how overlook my '98 Marin Larkspur,
the bicycle that became my main transport
in the summer of 2000 when gas first hit \$2 per gallon,
maintained with the help of John and Ray and Andreas,
bike store workers whose assistance went beyond generosity,
Andreas even rebuilding it in early 2016 after a car mangled it

And thank you, Twin Karen,
for reading my earliest and worst drafts, and
for giving suggestions whose wisdom I resisted until
time and necessity proved you right

Fragments

Amusing notion: many things that I would not want to tell anyone, I tell the public; and for my most secret knowledge and thoughts I send my most faithful friends to a bookseller's shop.

–Montaigne, “Of vanity,”
from *Complete Essays*, translated by Donald Frame, p. 750

Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested ...

–Francis Bacon, “Of Studies”

“But these thoughts
Full counsel must mature: peace is despaired;
For who can think submission? War, then, war
Open or understood, must be resolved.”

–Satan, *Paradise Lost*, I, 659-662, John Milton

The daimonic will always be characterized by the paradox ... that it is potentially creative and destructive at the same time. ... Rilke then is right: if he surrenders his devils, he will lose his angels too.

–Rollo May, *Love and Will*, pp. 163-64

So long as antimilitarists propose no substitute for war's disciplinary function, no moral equivalent of war, ... so long they fail to realize the full inwardness of the situation.

–William James, Introduction, “The Moral Equivalent of War”

We don't want them to be soldiers on the court, just following commands. We want them thinking more like special forces, generating their own collective energy and confidence.

–Travis Knight, Gonzaga basketball conditioning coach

I plan on probably hurtin' a couple a' folks today.

–Singer Callie Day
America's Got Talent, S14, E14, Judge Cuts 4

Its desire is for you, but you must master it.

–Biblical God to Cain, after rejecting his offering,
Genesis 4:7, Confraternity Translation

I am driven by a murderous curiosity ...

–Einstein, letter to Paul Habicht, 1907
Einstein: His Life and Universe, Walter Isaacson, p. 143

As a war boomtown, Hampton named its main drag Military Highway. Then John Glenn circled the Earth: *E Praeteritis Futura*: Out of the past, the future. Citizens renamed the drag Mercury Boulevard.

–*Hidden Figures*, Margot Lee Shetterly, p. 225

Doors and Windows

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Help! It's a sprawling epic!

Doors and Windows

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Sister, help to trim this book

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Hallelujah!

Prologue

He's in Hell! He's in Hell! the boy's skull screamed when he ran home after the phone-call shock of his dad's suicide.

Now bid the soul of Orpheus sing, and make Hell grant what sons must seek.

Here begins the comedy of Epimetheus, an American
by birth, but not in morals.

Book 1

Canticle 1

Tenth Anniversary of Apollo 11



Of dreams and delusions, I sing; of Epimetheus, who lived in his car because he wished to be a singer. O Cynthia, Goddess of the Moon, announce me as your acolyte: I bring news of Apollo, who loves a joyful noise. Now, Fit Reader, you who care to know the effect of the 1960s on a common youth, come participate. Now enter the ventures of Wishy Epi, who seeks safety by communing with gods. Phoebos calls him to transcend his lot: to rise above the spleen, make the descent, and return with a longing to live: no more death-wish as a better place, no more seizures to kill one's Self, or annihilate others. Now, Strong Reader, you who can set aside smart phones and remote controls, who care to know of deeds and undeeds; now center your Self in Epi's place, and orbit with him as playful spirits guide.

Come out, Goddess; recall how you helped Epi at all turns, we can make a book of it, all to proclaim your glory. Help your rhapsode stitch in songs replying to songs, your radiance beaconing thro' dark matter, rising o'er Glacier peaks, where you dance round Going-to-the-Moon, the great god-haunted mountain. Now, Goddess, grant me access to your power. Hear me! I sing the rage of Epi, born twin of Evelyn and Julian, Ktimene his wombmate: Epimetheus, quick to laugh, quicker to sulk, in turn brooding on books that freed him, then bound his brain in a box. Now, Goddess, Queen of Tranquility, let my thoughts rise with the Eagle: from gravitas to levitas, lightened by ensample of maimed Cervantes, who gave us the Don from La Mancha, and kept strong the will toward joy and impossible dreams; lightened too by fate-driven Aeneas, who trekked from Troy bearing his father, refusing to yield him to the flames. O son of Jules, make glad the song he felt so bitter!

Then those who escaped destruction were home, still reeling from heavals of the Sixties. Wishy Epi, longing for woman and homecoming, was detained by queenly Degree, bright among Goddesses, who entranced him into her smooth caves, wanting to matriculate him. But when in the circling of Moons that every year comes, so on July 20 Wishy Epi dreamed of the ecclesiastical time for true homecoming: July 20, around the ascent

of Sirios, always a time for fresh beginnings. Still in that year, with ten summers behind him, Epi was not yet free of his trials nor among his people. “If they can get to the Moon, why can’t I get to mine?” O soar eyes, a common plaint of Apollonians! Many gods pitied him, but not Poseidon Earthshaker, who remained angry with fishy Epi, who wanted to crawl up from the sea and become a man.

And now was come the tenth anniversary of Apollo 11. Poseidon was away with the far Cousteauans, most distant but reverent of men: vigorous seagoers who knew the Moonshot was scarce a blip to the Coelacanth, the enduring fossil fish that keeps its cool in deep-sea grottoes, there abiding for hundreds of millions of years. Now, tendering refuge from the madding celebrations, the far Cousteauans welcomed the sea god for a hecatune of tuna and most holy mackerel, feasts proliferating at a popcorn screening of their latest venture, *Skyfallen River*. There, aboard the far-ranging Calypso, Earthshaker popped his pleasure, most honored of gods.

Meanwhile, other divinities gathered in Leto Library, where Cynthia reigns in hallowed Mount Gould. At her call, Homer, Vergil, Dante, Milton, Chaucer, and Ariosto enter, followed by Aeschylus and Melville and other demigods too numerous to name (nobodies to most Earthbounders, it’s okay, just pretend you’re reading a famed poem where unknown allusions won’t stop you), all summoned by word that another nobody was making an epic noise. Anon, Zeus, so long silenced by dismissive mortals, is far from brief.

“O for shame, that Kennedy missed the glory of Apollo!” Zeus shook his majestic locks toward the Eternal Flame. “The son of Joseph, fired by a rocket boy in an orange suit, roused the race to reach for the Moon and return astronauts safely to Earth. He dared hard things joyfully, only to be slain by the Dragon Assassin—a crime shocking even Glacier on that Black Friday, darkness enveloping the nooning light as Dallizens welcomed him. And it all came so soon after the Saigon coup that killed the tyrant who failed to seek safe conduct! Karma Diem, some say. Yet his spirit lifted NASA through calamities, launching Saturn’s Eagle, whereby Armstrong and Aldrin touched Tranquility, roaming the Moon and patrolling, while Huckleberry Collins rattled round Selene, content in his mini-cathedral.

“We meet not to heed idlers who mumble about grassy-knoll echoes, and spout assassin conspiracies. Which way they fly is Hell, in wandering mazes lost, like dour George Carlin who longed to return as JFK’s assassin so he can write the scoop on Dallas. Let them seek the truth without us. We meet to consult on Wishywashy Epimetheus Kohoutek, son of Julian Basil and Evelyn Jeannette: Julian from the Land of Ire, Evelyn from the Way of Nor, Dionic devotees who turned blessings to blastings. College held no lure for them, their world bounded by high schoolisms and



speakeasies. In their December embrace they heard no Sterne warnings of thoughtful parenting: a lust that conceived the twin-begottens, who, wrathful from the womb, were bound at once to seek comic rebirth. In romance Julian and Evelyn were laureates of Whitey's Wonder Bar, in turn despairing of remedies: Julian swallowed a .22, splattering the Chevy stationwagon with his life's blood; and Evelyn drank till her brittle veins burst, her motherblood flooding the hospital bed, her darling daughter Ktimene helpless, rushing in as off-shift nurse. Epi longs to transform this legacy, and so renamed himself, decades before LL Cool J and Queen Latifah invoked their winsome personas. Even so, Epi took one small step in his early teens, a Timeless Divinity arresting him: *Wait a minute*. He saw mirrored an Elvis sneer, wherefore he stretched his jaws, and uncurled his lip. Anon, what makes him smile doubles his suns!

"Yet he remains convulsed by visions of Oswald, whose Gorgon lips smirked at Kennedy's exploding skull, the Furies unleashed, the world shattered by a proud aspirer: fatherless Lee, a god in ruins. Epi waswhelmed by endless flashinations. 'His infuriating smirk!'—a rage Epi can master only if he masters his work."

Athene, Goddess of Wisdom: "O Son of Kronos, lordliest of the mighty, Epi yet dares the descent. He knows nought of heralds dispatched to Oswald, whose head was filling with monsters. It was 1963, nearing the Year of the Dragon: a dragon malign, about to ravage the id across the generous Earth. Even Oswald began humbly, invoking: 'I would perform a heroic deed of unheard-of prowess for your sake.'"

Zeus: "O my prince, my captain, my Lee Harvey Bobo! Prince Likhoi longed for fame and glory, most piteous dream of fatherless sons! Apollo the Healer dispatched Hermes to stir responsibility in cause: 'Its desire is for you, but you must master it.' Hermes nudged Rimma the Guide and Translator, who 'gested the Prince read Fyodor's *The Idiot*. Anon, Atê clogged his musical gene, and Alik yielded to the noonday demon, forsaking true-bliss humor, the longing to sing high-noon courage to the masses."

Athene: "Fatherless Lee was a curious reader, by no means voracious, reading thus far and no farther. He rare sensed the comic, but was entranced by Fame with its Gate of Gleaming Ivory. He could not forgive Kennedy his happiness. He misread lyric prompts to true power, a power even in the powerless, but lay in damp, drizzly dreams with that mail-order monster, fixated on easy solutions, his final wail a gape of despair: black-hole wounds sundering like dumb mouths, his ruby lips ne'er to wrest true voice from the far-seeing Muse."

Zeus: "His will became his fate, his rage killing his song. O, it makes Norm rant! Lee could have been a poet, not a liar; a grateful epigone, not a

pretender! All his poet-tential lay thrashed in death's pallor. And streetside scandalmongers cheered news of his shooting. Even Epi said 'Good!' when he woke to see death's replay."

What happened? the bright girl asked. Nothing. Go downstairs.

The Father of Gods and Mortals paused, looking to Homer and Vergil and Pope, as if seeking wit from poets translated to this higher blessedness. They laughed. Joy filled the hall; a falcon in wingèd glide graced the Glacial air: a paper fell from its talons. Aeschylus retrieved it. It was a cartoon by Robert Leighton, sketching a fish emerging from the deeps, legging onto volcanic shores, bearing a sign: "The Beginning Is Near." Wolves howl, frogs croak round, all Nature in soft amphibial accord. One army of frogs sang *Qua*, another sang *Frok*.

Laughter-loving Aphrodite interposed: "Let us not forget Vaughn Meader, fallen in Milwaukee, his *vigahrus* comedy also slain on the day the laughter died."

Aristophanes and Jung entered; Cervantes too, with George Meredith, who palmed a small green Japanese *kaerú* or frog, as in cheer of the Egoist's evolving Self. Zeus Lykaios brightened to see Will Rogers laughing with Montaigne, whose Gasconite Muse brings joy to the dailyness of Many Glacier. All present were bemused by Epi's Quest for epic intel, Shakespeare looking on with all five wits, bemused that Epi's whole being was governed by fantasy. Cynthia, silent, stood with Dante and Spenser and Ishmael. She saw in Epi a possible intellect, a sometimes rational soul who shares the longing to evolve to a comic Self; who might yet free himself from the notion that life is wretchedness, and embrace a state of attainable felicity, content as Nightbirde, who soared to the spheres even before America's Got Talent.

"Epi's mind oft fills with monsters too: just another slow learner with a quick temper, tho' he longs for epic poise. He'll come to see Prince Lee as functional illiterate, a dyslexic whose vision was warped by glossy gun journals: heaps of arms to invert life's compass, vaunting his bullied youth to reach beyond his bounds. Lee ne'er learned the rage of Orlando, who longed for face-to-face *aristeia* as he tossed thunderbolts into the deeps."

Aristeia. Among such rhapsodes, the Goddess of Wisdom could lightly display her learning: they knew it meant show of valor. Continuing: "The Prince knew not of wrathful Ishmael, who sought comic substitutes for pistol and ball, nor was he mindful of Thoreau, who omitted the gun when walking Walden concords. In dismissing Rimma's 'gest, Prince Lee missed a chance to laugh with Myshkin, who embraced the worst that can happen: a laugh at one's self. So too Lee missed the gorgeous guffaws that lifted Ippolit, who longed to blast from his skull some mighty thought. The Prince longed to give the world something to think about, yet closed in on himself



like a clam, seeking fame beyond his scope. Now he belongs to the rages.”

Zeus: “A clam in a rush. Had he trusted Nature’s chafing ways, a brighter pearl of great price might have evolved—and might still evolve if Epi keeps his eyes on eternity, trusting in the gods’ search for man.”

Zeus blushed; turned to Athene and Cynthia, who knew his meaning, even as the Moon Goddess glanced over a ha-ha into a dark hole with a warning sign: **A Big Dose of Discord**. Zeus reified: “I mean gods’ search for ‘man’ in classic universal, inclusive of females, tho’ of course few mortals of either gender—or transgender—ascend the Madiba Heights to meet their higher Self. Why, even the malleable gods find such speech tripplesome: man, humanity, humankind: remove ‘man’ and what’s left? Hu, huity, hukind, huvanity. Change is hard!”

Athene: “Prince Likhoi was whelmed by the Dragon, blood blossoming his clothes, perishing in that ghastr Stygian pool. Into the Nothing rushed the Dragon Assassin, once-in-a-century shockwaves roiling seekers unto today, all across the long-suffering Earth.”

Fyodor entered. He’d heard the gods weave round in many voices, here borrowing, there stitching. On hearing “toxic tode,” he knew Athene meant poisonous corpse, as in Oswald disinterred, his ghostly smirk swirling o’er discontents for the century.

Athene: “Son of Kronos, O lordliest of the mighty, smirking Oswald was indeed struck down in a death well remembered. JFK’s toadies had lived haply in halls of October power, all solemn to save the world from nuclear storms—tho’ that honor goes to Vasili Arkhipov, a Soviet submariner of mindful restraint. Yet the New Frontiersmen seized the day until the monster stirred: that demon, that fiend, Envy born of Ambition, e’er haunting the moors amid whispering cesspools: a gloom so sad only Delphians can bloom in swamps where killer spirits thrive, their pitiless crimes woven into tapestries of every age. And JFK, near three winters Chief of Joy, was slain, and the world became a different place.

“Yet Oswald was not always riddikulous, linked to vile undeeds. He was not destined to become a Bobo; he was born for bliss, born to seek a higher estate. And so I speak for Wishy, who feels bereft of his moira, his fate bound by Apollo’s call: Apollo, whose essence is to reveal himself; Apollo, who calls not the qualified, but qualifies the called. Nought can crush our One-Dream Wishy if he lets joy smooth irritants into pearls. Yet you, Thunder God, send but ballooning brain clouds. Why, Zeus, are you so harsh with him?”

“My child, what blame escapes your teeth’s barrier! Who can be tough if unchallenged? See how weakly determined Wishy is! Our carefully chosen Nobody, blessed to give birth to epic renewal: Who else revives us, puffing myths beyond his scope? He is resolved to harrow the Earthbound hell his

father could not escape. His pearl will grow within his '68 Ford Falcon, serving as shell and transport. Why he's the first mythseeker in centuries to invoke the Argonauts! Wishywashy he is, a half-breed mongrel, part Irish, part Norwegian, part Nowhere at all. Of course he's troubled and disturbed! Whom else shall we send; whom else deem sufficient?

"Nay, Goddess of the Gray Eyes, it is not I who balloons Epi brain clouds; it is Poseidon Earthshaker, all tasked and heaped by Wishy's longing to become a space cadet. He sings of JFK, who inspired mortals to reach beyond their grasp, or what's this new ocean for? Earthshaker's pain convulsed the deep, awakening many dragons, one called Assassin. Then came Wernher von Braun, NASA's spiritual guide who declared the first Moon landing equal to the day aquatic life first crawled up on the land."

Zeus Lykaios: "These conceits were beyond Wishy's grape-sized intellect. Yet his sleepy brain convulsed, and Earthshaker, son of drenchyng Saturn, raged at this Noisome Twolegs. For if this spineless wonder rose from the shallows to sing on his feet, fishy schools multitudinous were sure to follow in the brit: as when Orpheus played the lyre to appease Cynthia, savior of ships; Orpheus, whose song shielded the Argonauts from swamping waves, even fishes inspired, leaping and breaching, Jason's dream their dream. Less buoyant is Wishy Epi, who, deep-sinking, darted blindly for Coelacanth caves, struck dumb by sheer lack of plans. In weary turn he returned to school in the summer of '76, invoking Apollo for guidance, dispensing his color TV to Charlotte. The Cyclops howled, as when a TV fell on the head of Joshua William Gelb while performing in his closet. Polyphemos raged to Father Poseidon that a Nobody had cracked his skull, blinding him. Yet Epi sought only to flee the cave where countless dreamers die, their brains boulderized by lost arts, a feast for the Cyclops' abominable appetite."

The gods chatted with more asides than transcribers can repeat. Anon, Zeus: "But come, Athene, let us work out Epi's re-creation, wherein his slow-but-steady quest attracts Glacial Grace. Earthshaker shall quell his anger, and wrench his will to ours, divine wills united."

"Wrench?!"

The word resounded, reverberating Glacial Halls. Divine eyes turned. It was Hera herself, Queen of Glacier and Goddess of Marriage, sprung from her throne, a divine hair disquietly falling. Her grief is sharp: "Ruler of the heavens, why are you so slow to hear me? See how Wishywashy has bypassed twice-seventy nymphs with their splendid bodies, a bachelor e'er in swoon, yet fearing their soft beauty. Avast! this ingrate dilettante beswooned in epic folly leaves me dishonored, and cannot escape his gonad fate. In his thirtyfifth year he still ignores my worship; he shuns votaries who celebrate More Babies Week, dismissing marriage as deadly



to Apolline call. ‘Another blis before mine eyes I place,’ he says.” Hera stares hard. “I will not be *ignored*, Zeus! Even single Mother Teresa hails the joys of skinful sex, inspiring Trojanless billions to proliferate trillions of followers to honor me, their Most Holy Mother. Well, bachelor Epi, so be it; if I cannot stop your Apolline Fate, I can yet make it hard, hard.”

Apollo laughed: “He who seeketh hard things shall have it hard.” Laughing too at Epi, who, inch by furious inch, shall in decades chance on the wisdom of young Nightbirde, who, without Apolline aid, released this spontaneity: “You can’t wait until life isn’t hard anymore before you decide to be happy.” The god of truth and poetry gave a cheer, and saw in Epi’s singledom not apostasy, but fidelity: Wishy loyal to his lifemare, oft sinking to doubt, yet invoking the lights of eternity.

Eftsoones, swift as thought, Hera stood beside Eros, who was playing with erectile bones. “Cupid,” she said, “rile Epi’s discontent. Betroth him to disquiet. Fill wanton Wishy with lust, as when wild mustangs, longing to be bold as Bucephalus, warhorse of Alexander the Great, morph instead to fearful mice. If Wishy will not woo Earth’s celestials, then wrack his days and nights with frenzy of the Pubic Wars.” Eros grabbed his quivers of lead, and was gone.

Cynthia looked from Sterne to Vergil, who whisp’ed to Sterne: “Love of sex keeps war in war, and the Hero Heavens near-empty.”

Zeus reached for his chalice, the gold cup that stands filled forever. Gonymede advanced to top the Thunder God’s cup with gleaming wine, a nectar sweetened with grapes from the generous Earth: food not of gods, yet accepted so.

Eftsoones, a soft voice filled Many Glacier Hall.

“You’re forgetting something.”

Canticle 2 Dionyzeus



All Glacier turned. It was Dionysos, the roaring god, who entered via the Backbone Cove where he parked his ET bicycle, up from the Land of Ire where he is hailed in pubs as Dionyzeus the All-Fulfilling. All-Knowing Zeus stopped in mid-quaff. “Who let you in?”

“You, Your Grace, when you raised your cup to Gonymede. So seeking to lift your spirits, you hailed a power greater than yourself.”

All-blushing Zeus: “What do you want?”

Lights flickered, dimmed—restored eftsoones by lightningbolts from Estcheemah’s Native Glacier Solar Source.

Saith Dionysos: “Epi must learn, in the fullness of his grape-seed wit, that he wants initiation into my Bacchic rites.”

“He wants nothing of the kind,” Cloud-Gatherer stormed, missing the nuance, mayhap skewed by the earthbound mix. “He wants to flee alcohol’s *penthos*, the grief his parents knew; to repair in himself the ruins of his parents’ fall.”

Dionysos, whose Triune Nature is rare understood (the Divine, the Humble, and the Slowly Ghost): “Wants as in lacks; Epi lacks initiation into the rites of re-creation. He will go mad with rage first.”

“You will incite this?”

“He incites himself. He rants that I’m parental destroyer, but merely tears himself apart, as a thistleball sunders itself from the aridambar tree, and falls into the street to pierce my bicycle tires. He must till his own mounds before founding his own home.”

Zeus: “You know Epi abstains; he scorns booze as Odysseus spurned the lotus, having but one drink since ’69, and that a black Jack Daniel’s, a lapse he rather regrets. (True repentance is hard, hard.) Still, he scorns your joys as delusive: not stimulants, but depressants, sapping true powers.”

“More will be revealed, even unto you, mighty Zeus, and especially unto Wishy, who in time will celebrate Farrar Elementary, where tadpoles arm themselves with books; in time cheering too Aristophanes’ Frogs, whose



descendants arm themselves with laughs.” The vine god gestured to the Vision of Apollo. He traced a finger round the Canosa bowl, wherefrom Glacier water-drinkers fill carafes of joy. “Some communal spirits delight in abstinence. As I freed Aeschylus Amphibial to sing his *Oresteia*, so the Furies are now treated with respect; and as I freed tree-climbing Euripides to sing of Pentheus, who hated my worship, so can I free Epi to—”

“What about my mysteries?”

It was Ares the Bloodstained, jolting Glacier anew. The divinities turned to see the god of war near a tapestry spanning the library wall, just unveiled by Athene, who placed it beside weavings of Troy, her hint of passing things. Cynthia stepped up, her glance bright as the Full Moon, beaming on the woven scenes. In the center, near a map of Dien Bien Phu, stood Hera, the Strongpoint Goddess, drawn to the Orient when French troops invoked Juno, her Roman name. Now, from atop a towering limestone in the Tonkin Gulph, she beholds the night-gray sea and Shen Lung Descending: Shen Lung the Spiritual Dragon, who stirs up Tonkin Spooks for bright-eyed sailors who want to play at war. Shen Lung breathes, and luminous mists creep low round a wraithful PT boat called the *Tantalus*. Pictoscripts hint the Year of the Dragon, when half a continent was loosed from its moorings, careening into Ha Long Bay amid Iliadic bafflements. Here a hugeous nation is dwarfed by Laughing Dog Wall and a stone forest of dragon spires. Blue threads weave a profile that rears o’er a warrior nation, a giant brute dead-set in its flawed ways, flailing mitily. In the upper right is all-present Hera, watching tanks rowling from the Ho Bo Woods, some troops waving socks, laughing, all eager to take Sighgone, thence renaming it Ho Ho Ho (Chi Who Enlightens).

Ares strode by the tapestry: “Epi is shamed by doubts of cowardice, having no *aristeia* in the Footnote War. His resolve: ‘I will not let this stupid war kill me.’ And so he sulked in bunkers as battalion RTO, scorning the war as insult to his intelligence. Yes, he survived, an Achilles of the Antipodes, who still sulks isolate a decade later, dying megadeaths daily from fear of trifles. His days as jawb-slave are far from over.”

Dionysos: “*Sulks*. Yes, that ‘tired witticism,’ as our good friend Caroline the Great sighs. Come now, Ares. Epi too has his courage. He was called to war by commanders who knew not their warring. Living a war is different from fighting one. Recall too the battlefield bliss of your beloved disciple Greaves Zagreus, who enlisted to flee the writer’s lonely call. He loved physical bravery; loved the camaraderie of the Rangers amid hellish fire for a brotherly cause. He scaled the cliffs of Normandy, undaunted by D-Day terrors and wounds, all for his team and generations unborn. The glad

warrior learned to love blasted trees, seeing each branch to best advantage, the fierce fires of fragging steel less terrifying than his unvoiced dread, going alone to his room to write: alone because he forgot to invite the Muse. Yet, by grace of a brotherly gift, a book of essays by William James, Wishy Epi now seeks ‘the moral equivalent of war,’ slowly learning that all life on Earth is warfare. He sometimes ‘acts as if,’ invoking the gods for wits to tame his wrath, to live manfully, mastering rejections and inertia: inertia, the despair that powers everything to seek its essence. Even unto you, Ares, Epi’s *aristeia* will be revealed.”

Just so Glacier learned of the Roaring God’s loving search for Epi. The gray-eyed Goddess rejoined: “O brother kalypsoed, hidden god of Wishy, by some called the Crushing God, it shall be done: Epimetheus of the clumsy designs shall find re-creation, he shall carve a comic trail: 1969 will be another great date in moral-arc history. On the others—1619, 1776, Juneteenth, 1893 the Year of Mourning, 2019—Citizens of the World served, and shall be asked to serve again. Let us dispatch Hermes to Washington State, to convey to lovely-haired Degree our absolute purpose, the re-creation of Wishywashy Epi. And I shall go to Pullman to stir up confidence in him.” The gods raised their cups, and left the hall united like soldiers in a campaign—all except Ares, who clanged from the hall. He brushed by Socrates, who’d been asking Thomas Mann how mortals distinguish dreams from reality. Thomas: “What’d we miss?”

And Dionysos who suffers, the god who dies and rises again, dispatched Hermes Argephontes: “Announce to lovely-haired Degree our absolute purpose, that Wishywashy Epimetheus shall come back; he shall return to the City of Charlie’s Angels. And Epi, who seems alone in his ’68 Ford Falcon, shall be chaperoned by *entheos*, the Many Glacier Gods within, who animate laughs at himself. There too he reads Jax Myth, who raises tequila toasts to Mr. Gomez as builder of mansions, and teaches Epi a sense of deeper play.

“Sing too, god of running luck, that readiness meets opportunity. Remind Epi of C.G. Jung’s aphorism: Reprobates are the chosen ones. Hint runes of Neil Diamond; sing of playful stones, of frogs as kings: Hymn buoyantly, as when Euphemos sang water-walking lyrics the reader is forbidden to see. O, those copyrot gawds: Before Neil, I am!” He said.

The Vine God turned to Cynthia, no pallid nun of heaven, but a Goddess who can battle Poseidon strength for strength and not brag about it. Cynthia joyed to see an end to the old outrage, the endless dashing of Apolline hopes. She cupped the chin of the Vine God: “Now, Dion, Epi begins anew: Nothing sustains Tranquility more than a steady purpose in life.”

The Crushing God to Hermes: “Wishy shall again lie in the Falcon, gathering stony seeds, glad to refrain from embracing. There too he sees the Vision of Apollo and its harvest, Demeter divinely granting. Revive the call of Apollo 15: ‘A little later, Falcon will give birth to the Rover.’ For it is fated that Epi shall find re-creation in the land of his unborn sons.”

He spoke, tapping the Quick-Minded God with the thyrsus, allowing him to improvise. Hermes soars from Glacier in fair sandals; he carries the Caduceus, the staff that dims eyes with sleep, or wakes the sleepers. He detours to ponder the silence in the Saturn sphere, therefrom viewing the Earth’s solar eclipse. Here Saturnalia Sylphs weave deep space purple to lighten dark matter, interlooping platters of rings with fingers of light. In the far distance he spots a dot of blue: the generous Earth, so much more than a pooling patch of tears. Anon, he alights in a wonder: spring in the Palouse. He sips from his flask, and wings to Ovary Hall, where shining Degree in highest faculty knew him. She notes his crimson flush. Wishy is at the swimming pool. The Slayer of Argos saw him arc a jackknife off the three-meter board, ease to poolside, there to sit and moan, all a-gloom on unfilled dreams. Hermes laughed. The shining Goddess in her cups:

“What’s up, Hermes? What brings the Glacial Messenger to our blue-skied vale, white clouds e’er wafting o’er fields and evergreens? Want some coffee and doughnuts?”

She spoke, and on a glassy table displayed her fare. The Courier God declined, sensing in the air a welcoming jest from Raphael, who loved to discourse on food for hermits and the ingrateful.

“Goddess Drusilla, since you ask, Dionyzeus sends me. You have the demitode who wretches himself beyond measure, still torn by the Winless War: the demitode who winged his way reluctant o’er paddies and jungles near the City of Ho for a 362-day tour. And in the fifteenth year, Ho’s Trojan tanks and troops sacked the embassy and sent the dark ’vaders fleeing, dust whirling rooftops amid rushing feet, mothers with babes jostling, in frenzied flight to the fleeing ships. The blissful gods watched as Darwin Judge hoisted three-year-old Becky, running, thrusting her aboard a fleeing plane; the gods watched too as John Riordan carried onehundredsix souls on his back. Abandoned Viets wept, mourned their luck, and finally went home, to await their destiny to come.

“O’er distant battlefields two spirits rose: Mike Hendrickson in the North, Glenn Fish in the South: Epimethean schoolmates whose shades sear an age stalked by loss: Mike in the class ahead of Epi, Glenn a year behind. The blissful gods stared with glad mirth-marks as helicopter lifted off, winging to a host of ships that blotted the horizon. There, with no room,

and nowhere to go, their purpose mouldering, choppers were pushed off, splashing into the sunset of the South Viet Sea. On return to the World, many veterans offended Athene by profaning *entheos*: homebounders who abandoned inner suns to black-hole glooms. As they perished in glooms of dead-end jawbs, the hollowing Winds swept Epi to Pullman, where the gods taunt: *What are you building?* Now Dionyzeus who suffers and rises again, calls you to dispatch Epi with all speed. His fate is bound by the Song of Apollo: ‘A little later, Falcon will give birth to the Rover.’”

The Goddess Degree answered in wingèd words: “So now the gods resent my keeping the demitode whom I saved when he failed to heed the warnings of Aeolus, and the Winds blew him to Pullman. Here I welcomed him to Caves of the Classics, willing to make a scholar of him—not grand as Northrop Frye, who loves to talk on Milton, nor bold as Gilbert Highet, who missed a thing or two on Beowulf, but whose unconquerable grind inspires Epi as heir to Mr. Teddy, who so gladly learned, and gladly taught. Now Epi abuses his tailbone, insulting Apollo with endless odes to dejection, e’er moaning his metempsychosis as glacial. Phoebos knows I tried to wake him. Yet self-governance remains alien to his nature. He still resists the wonder of his Nobodiness, metaglooms from the unbuilt House of Julian, Furies hard to wrestle down. Why even in his mid-thirties Epi read Hardy’s *Jude* most obscurely, not seeing a whit of the Oresteian parallel! And he just couldn’t get Stendhal’s Julien. More, he types odd papers, besot by leaden lustfoolery, e’er swooning to straddle maids beyond brace of his small-stepping thighs. Fie! Let his Falcon find the way on the cougar-killing roadways.”

“Dispatch him,” said Hermes. “His essays are but the chaos of dancing stars. He must learn from Jungian reprobates, from the runes of Neil D., and heed the call of Apollo 15.” The god of wingèd sandals was gone.

Canticle 3 Tailboning



Epi was tailboning by the Olympic poolside, the joy of life draining from him. *I am nothing! I am nothing!* The Goddess stepped near:

“Epi, cut the sobs. Stop wrenching ado. Good ol’ Pioneer Wishy, still wanting something for nothing, your grandiose dreams over seventeen and a half Apollos high. And you can’t even build a publishable essay! You mustered a pass on your orals, a nod on your written test, wherefore we freely release you, amazed that the gods cheer you for their sport. And I was first to see your loss affects joy on Earth! Put your stuff in storage, load books and basics into the Falcon, and return to ’Gonia and your quest, since the gods insist. In the City of Charlie’s Angels you will muse on reprobates as the chosen ones, tadpoles as evolving royalty, Beëlzeflies as food for cats—and by the way, your father Julian Basil was named both for a believer in Olympian gods and for a papist hermit who taught heresies, not to forget Julian of Norwich who inspires mortals to believe all shall be well, all shall be well. Yet your father retained a fatal disposition to get married, turning from the single life, meaning you’re a mistake, unreal, impossible to mythify. O Epi Transcendent, ye shall be as todes! Ha!”

Like a lazy waker drifting back to his dream, Wishy Epi got lost among frogs and flies, distracted by incidentals, especially when, in mid-harangue, the Goddess gave him a small green frog fashioned from dense glass. She pointed to Japanese cryptographs, *kaerú* and *káeru*: “The first means *frog*, the second, *return*.” She turned, her scholarly smock trailing an afterthought: “To be recalled in future scenes: *ú* equals frog, *á* equals return. *Qua Frok*. And give some study to Dionyzeus.”

She said. And Wishy of the Wailways shuddered, listless of afterthoughts, transfixed by the frog, bright-shining by inner light, beaconing hopes for a transforming return, by some called *nostoi*, the Homeseeking Cycle.

I must venture.

Wishy dreaded return to ’Gonia, a sprawling megalop that whelms todes in arid immensity. Nearby is Death Valley, land of the bottomless

pit, landscape lovely to the knowing, to Epi a Waste Land Burning, as in dreadful Eliot wise: Here red sullen faces sneer and snarl from drug-cracked houses. *If there were water.* Here spellbound castaways spawned Chuckie Manson, the singer of self and fatherless wretch who in his raging Ruin became a wild-eyed killer, raised by his rebellion to the cover of Life. *If there were Vater.* In turn Chuckie spawns furies and glooms, his spirit moldering, leading the uninitiated into slothful desponds, adown hell's bluffs to the bottomless pit. Epi gloomed: Yet once more I must descend, my descent in its tenth year: still seeking the auroral lights of a small round opening, wherethrough gleams a gate to the upper air.

*O Dis obedience! Easy is the going down to Laistrygonia; all day and all night the freeway stands unbarred; but winning your way to the upper air, that is the labor, that the task.**

Epi spoke: "Oh Goddess, thank you for easing descent to Phlegra, heatful land of beauty and horror; yet what you say is dangerous and hard. My Falcon has served me well, but my U-joint recently dropped out, and the mechanic says other parts are aging. Dreadful too is the inflational horror, gas prices soaring to a dollar a gallon, up from an already ghastly sixtyseven cents; long lines again circle gas stations, many drivers in a homicidal snit. And can the palegreen really make it to and around the City of Charlie's Angels yet once more?"

"So say the gods," the Goddess said. "Remember Apollo 15: The Falcon will give birth to the Stover. And your bike will fit easily onto the palegreen's trunk rack. As your Burbank bike helped you transcend the first gas crisis, when gas leaped to fortyfive cents, so your lightweight bike will ease return to Hesperia. But don't load another U-Haul. Take your epic spurs, including Campbell's *Goddess With a Thousand Graces*, Mailer's *Of a Fire on the Lunes*, and C.G. Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Deflections*. As Apollo's errant, you must return from the wilderness by trusting redundancy, as in having a Plan B, etc. Yet once more you'll be a solo seeker until dreams are wrested to life; yet once more trudge the travails of testy temp jawbs, e'er seeking joy in less glamorous toil. But beware: The Winds you long for blow you from yourself."

Epi fearly smiled, knowing as solo he was unfit to live with, painfully dissolving before female charms, yet dismissing the Windy warning. "Goddess and queen of collegial life, be not angry with me. You are immortal and ageless, but what I long for is homecoming on shores of the Laistrygones: Better by far to live near the Ocean of Storms. O Winds!

*Cynthia note: Wishy thinks there's only one gate to the upper air. *Thinks.* He is not ready for thought.



If you batter me into the void, I will steel myself to endure it! Already I live the heartless immensity; already I know the dread, yet feel warmed by chill uncertainties, fired by solar instinct: the moral obligation to be optimistic. So let this adventure follow.”

He spoke. That night the Goddess and Wishy curled on the couch, reading *The Faerie Queene*. They were in the home of an English prof, away on sabbatical with wife and daughter. The trusting prof: Want to live rent-free for a semester? *Sure!* Epi showed Drusilla his thesis: “Guyon in Manson’s Bower of Bliss.” The Goddess yawned, hoping his final draft would be a bit more scholarly. Eftsoones, as when Vergil lay in the lap of sweet Parthenopê, enjoying studies of inglorious ease; and, as Raskolnikov lifted Nastasya to joy with the wealth of thought in his work, so Epi lay back to laugh with the brain-surgical genius of Mork, who marveled at the quaint ways of alien Mindy.

Meanwhile, the lord of barren dreams stirred up spirits vacui, who hailed their god Maya. To Archimago this plan seemed best: to pose as Ark-Ranger Bagriel, and bring this message to Epi from the Blisseful Bower: “Hail, and thrice hail! To every fling there is a season! Take out an ad! Tell the whirld you’re coming! How lucky, how more than lucky, to know your happiness! You’ll soon be rich and famished, acknowledged Zinger of Apollyon at last!”

Thrice-eager Wishy proclaimed his coming, and sent a check: over four hundred bucks, the no-talent rate. On discovering the sting, Epi affirmed his talent. The agent hemhummingly agreed, but—the talent refund ne’er came, wherefore Archi joyed to see Wishy in gall. *He’s living the dream!*

Athene observed these follies with interest, but was blocked from granting counsel. Unless Wishy asked, what could a goddess do? Lachesis, disposer of lots, was present at the twin conception when Jules and Evy sought warming bliss, both blind to Sterne truths; wherefore Epi swirled in wombling wrath, furies intensified in the orphan years, simmering in juvenescence, oft erupting when girls rejected him, tho’ all, all was rent asunder on that dreadful Dallas Friday. How the Dragon Assassin stunned the sojourners of Goshen, abject and lost, under amazement at their hideous change! *Sing, sorrow sorrow*. As the nation, so Epi, seared by a furious howling woe: *Why? Why would anyone kill our lovely JFK?*

The Glacial gods laughed: Ask and you shall receive. Anon, the query began its slow singe, a great beaconing fire igniting the Arachnaion heights, speeding tirelessly to the secretory organs of Epi’s blackening brain, thence to the sympathetic system, wherefrom some gossamer thread was flung from Verrières to Covent Garden and Gryffindor Tower, searing o’er the Brown House Millstone to Old-Grove Grace to Liberty Lady, there

entrancing the Towering Cathedrals in the world's Celestial City, at once shadow-casting from the Johnson Space Center to the Moon, and back, zooming to Cholon, and on to Grizzly Bear Heart, thence to the gloom-closet on Mildew Lane, eftsoones uprising o'er the Field of Doves, a-down to the deathly hollows of Carlinite Hell, where a stymied comic seeks the jollies of conspiracy lore. O Hekate, you with power to hearten mortals in trouble! Multitudinous styles nod across millennia, now crossing the Sardonic Gulph where a Sirius shape uprears, and—laughs. *Cry, cry for breath.* Now Epi recalls the Eternal Flame; now the fluttering ankle-high flame leaps range on range, fire to fire, answering from melting Glacier Grinnell to the screes 'neath Devil's Ladder, so piercing in its brightness it seems flung from the blissful gods, drawing Epi down, down, to basest Parnassus, that he may humbly accept the call, and the work expected of him.

I'll do it! I'll do it! By Grove, I'll do it!

Thither Epi 

The Singer of Apollo: He felt it, felt it. *Lead, then!* It might break his heart, leaving him with nothing but ambition to cling to, yet this Apolline summons, his call to a higher life, remains his most loving spur. Apage!

O ye mockers, ye killjoys, ye sad and sour spooks: *Begone!*

And so Athene Parthenos, drawn to bounders, appointed herself Epi's protector: heralding the Gigglemesh of Epi, or the Epi of Gigglemesh. He called on her seldomly, but the Goddess of Exploding Skulls stands e'er ready with amused wit, poised to serve as graceful prompter, e'er glad to help the foundling roused by the fires of oh so potent Apollo.

Natheless, thithering Wishy embraced small joy in the journey, raging at every setback, averse to polishing talents in a burnishing pause. Back to the eggshell life! *A young toad went looking for the easy ride but couldn't find it anywhere.* Epi's singer ad was silly, it was dumb, it was foolish—but as he neared his thirtysixth year, hysteria whelmed reason, as when Phineas Gage had his skull and frontal lobe impaled, yet stunningly survived, tho' ne'er the same, all reason unbalanced by feeling: Wherefore Wishy unripe longed for instant at-one-ment, and set out for Hesperia. Athene of the Glaciers knew her powerlessness: When divine favorites mispray, the gods can but laugh, and stare.

In turn, the Goddess: "Who challenges the Dragon must be foolish as well as wise; enraged, yet restrained, the better to feel, then transform the assassin's fury. Nothing great is accomplished without rage." As when George C. Scott, playing Bert Gordon, taught Paul Newman's Fast Eddie to hustle Patience and Character; or when Una pursued the Redcrosse Knight to plead her kingdom's deliverance from the devouring dragon: so Athene



seeks Epi, awaiting his call for strength and sane thinking. Verily, as the Dragon flared forth near-daily, so Epi learned to cry for endurance, many battles belatedly seen as comic trifles. *Cry, cry for breath.* O Cynthia, the crispiest battles are always yet to come!

If there were water.

O, make it rain, make it rain!

On the morning the ad appeared, the Glacier Goddess observed Epi's fearful faith: Yet once more he fancied life on edge of Apolline turnaround. 'Twas a hypo spring day, pale blue filtering thro' an arc of reborn leafy trees; a robin, singing and snacking in choreographed hops on the front lawn; a few white clouds sailed o'erhead, casting shadows on a blue-velvet worm burrowing near a crocus. Here, musing on his Apolline fate, glad to be so disordnary, Epi sang "It's a Most Unusual Day."

Yet he gave no thought to Demeter, goddess of fruits in their season, who sang anew this glad mystery: "Go with gentleness in your heart and a steadfast spirit. And be not beyond measure despondent ..."

And so the Gray-Eyed Una Balmer gave Epi his puff, and Wishy saw his Dantean future: e'er seeking a small round opening wherethrough he can see yet once more the stars. Anon, the Goddess hailed Green Cottenham, a freed man trapped in twentieth-century slavery: forced into the South's darkest pits in 1908, where he glanced back to see the last flash of stars not as beaconing, but as farewell. As Hekate braced Mr. Cottenham, so she fortified Epi, whose heart quavered, but whose abyss was freely hopeful: "Courage," she said.

In turn Epi fled anew the broad way, accepting the fond and narrow call to Harrow Alley, his Falcon dreams tied to epic canon, tho' for the nonce he forgot hero Myshkin, who embraced the laughable worst. *I have dreams!* He chain-locked his bike to the rafty trunk, cycle wheels soon blowin' in the wind. O gracklin' posey! Find us a dream that asks great questions! *The meaning of my existence is that life has addressed a question to me.* His heart sank, seeing only the Mansonian wilderness, wherein insight into dreams must be converted into ethical obligation. *Failure to do so imposes a painful fragmentation.* Epi had a dark-crystal foreboding of more long years estivating in the desert: as a waterless lungfish, longing for rain and lakeful mountains, no mudskipper, all dry-muddled, bound to suffocate if he did not seek Apollo in the upper air. O Phoebos! How many years, how many more! *In the light of eternity.* Wishy had sought a crossway in the wood and all he got were circles and spins and multitudinous conjurations whirling his course. His eyes bittered fear and frictional faith: some joy, more rage: The Glacial Gods still give no guarantees.

Give us a sign! Give us a sign!

O Hekate, who can ope brain cells to see beyond desire and fear? The Divine Silence was a gag, disposing Epi not to knowledge of right action, but to flashes of sullen fury: *As you sow, so shall you reap*. The meditation sined Wishy anew, warrior dubious, who knew his wasteland might prove eternal. *If there were water*. O Goddess! such the chains of heritage weighing Wishy down, yet drawing him on! He seeks the smallest sign, wherefore in light of Falcon maternity, Phoebos brings forceps to aid parturition: to lift a thought like a boulder from the mud of the mind, as when three Kittridge second-graders—Kyra, Celia, and Alex—saw a tiny rock in the Massachusetts schoolyard and decided to dig it out: a teaspoon-excavation that became the greatest epic in schoolyard history, spanning o'er half their teachable years, mostly digging on the sly, e'er discouraged and disbanded and dispatched to detention because that's what teachers do—stifle all rebels who persist in noncurricular escapades—but then a new principal came along, and lo! he gave the Seekers support and tools, and the tiny rock was midwifed as boulder: a boulder that became the favored seat of outcasts, who soon found themselves no longer sitting alone. O the joy!

Such glad musings were decades beyond Wishy Epi, who in '79 brooded fearly and darkly, roiling that he must master his furies if he hoped e'er to rise in Nature's withering bloom.

* * *

In Many Glacier, Diotima laughed at Wishy's enslavement to fears and furies, bemused by his distorted views of Nature's fruitful ways; Diotima, disciple of Metis and Athene, who has instructed Seekers for centuries on the mysteries of work-love, and the vast sea of beauty that beckons all who nurture a boundless love of wisdom. Yes, Diotima smiled on Wishy, who had not even reached the shore of initiation; this Wishy, who knew nought of her (having skimmed over her name in Rollo May's *Love and Will*), this Wishy, who had not yet glimpsed a vision of the Single Science, the science of beauty everywhere.