

THE ABYSS STARED BACK

By

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(Script Frenzy 2007)

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EXT. VILLAGE IN GERMANIA - NIGHT

A PEASANT runs along a muddy track into the middle of the village shouting between ragged gulps of air, his eyes wide with panic. Distant hoof beats approach.

PEASANT

They're coming! They're coming!

Faces of women and children appear at windows. Men carrying pitchforks, clubs, knives and axes run toward the shouting peasant.

Riders sweep into the village, two abreast, with swords drawn. The LEAD RIDER rides past the peasant and with an uppercut of his sword beheads him, silencing the shouting.

LEAD RIDER

Legionaires, hear me! The iron fist of Rome can and will crush this uprising. Leave nothing alive!

MOUNTED LEGIONAIRES

(warcry)

INT. VILLAGE IN GERMANIA - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

A MOTHER and her CHILD are pulling at furniture trying to get to a particular patch of floor. Steps are advancing outside. SUCCESS! A trapdoor is exposed.

MOTHER

Carl, hide in here. Whatever you hear do not come out. Understand?

CARL

Yes mother.

The child, Carl, jumps into the space and pulls the trapdoor closed as his mother pulls the furniture back into place, moments before the door SPLINTERS and a legionaire steps into view, his sword dripping with blood.

INT. CELLAR - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

The young boy sits shivering in a closet sized dark space.

MOTHER

(Muffled, coming from above)

By the gods, no! Get your hands off me! No!

CARL  
(Stifled fearful whimper)

EXT. VILLAGE IN GERMANIA - NIGHT

The Lead Rider dismounts and pulls off his helmet as he surveys bodies and burning buildings. Slowly two dozen legionaires return to the middle of the village.

LEAD RIDER  
To me men!

The soldiers form up into military precise lines. The Lead Rider stalks to and fro across the line.

LEAD RIDER  
Decurion!

Two better equipped legionaires step forward.

LEAD RIDER  
Select two each from your octets,  
we ride, they stay.

The two legionaires pause to scan the lines and pull four men out of formation.

LEAD RIDER  
(to the four men)  
None must survive this  
night. Dispose of any who return  
here, follow us in two days.

LEAD RIDER  
(to the troops)  
Tonight we sent them a  
message. Tomorrow we rejoin the  
century, and prepare for their  
response. We ride!

The Lead Rider mounts his horse and turns for the road out of the village, his troops rapidly following him, leaving four men and horses the only visible sign of life in the village.

EXT. VILLAGE IN GERMANIA - DAWN

Drifting smoke blurs the outline of ruined buildings. Three legionaires sleep beside a low stone wall, while another scans the road and buildings for signs of life.

A small shape, looking more like animated smoke than the naked young boy that he is, moves through the vegetable garden on the other side of the stone wall. His body is smeared with ash; camouflage patterns drawn with charcoal on top of random patches of grey. In one hand he carries a butcher's knife, with his teeth clamped fiercely onto the blade of another, smaller knife.

He freezes, pressing himself low against the ground, as the guard scans toward him. Once the gaze is lifted he inches forward to the wall. In a flash he's over the wall and the butcher's knife SLAMS down into the eye of a sleeping soldier who dies without a sound. With the smaller knife the boy CRUNCHES through the middle finger of the soldier's right hand taking both the finger and the silver ring it sported.

In silence he slips back over the wall with his prize and heads for cover.

EXT. VILLAGE IN GERMANIA - MIDMORNING

Flies are buzzing around the corpse of the dead Roman soldier. Then remaining soldiers, CRISPUS (the guard on watch when he had died) STEPHANUS and ALERIC are arguing.

ALERIC

Could have been me. Did you think of that?

CRISPUS

Gods above and below Aleric, dont you think of anyone but yourself? Is is any wonder they left you behind?

ALERIC

What?

CRISPUS

Think about it moron! Three octets of trained legionaires dispatched to wipe out barely armed peasants. We're not exactly cream of the crop. Then they leave us behind to deny us the glory of the upcoming battle, and we still manage to lose one of our own.

STEPHANUS

Arguing wont bring him back. We have to think what to do.

ALERIC

Yeah, think. I wasn't paid to do that.

ALERIC

(imitating a commanding voice and putting on a swagger)  
Hey legionnaire, carry this. Go there. Do that. Die horribly.

Both Crispus and Stephanus laugh.

STEPHANUS

No-one will know what happened here.

CRISPUS

What? Four of us left and three return.

ALERIC

Two.

CRISPUS

(turning to Aleric)  
What did you say?

ALERIC

Two. Two will return. I'm not going back, not to die. There's plenty of stuff in the village, I can set myself up as a farmer. I'm not going back.

STEPHANUS

Fine. Two return. Same problem just an octet of extra lashes when they beat us for our failure.

CRISPUS

What do we say, Aleric deserted and spirits came in the night?

STEPHANUS

Spirits don't carry knives. Or take fingers.

CRISPUS

Then what? Decurion was right, leave us here because someone would return.

ALERIC

Right or wrong, Im not going.

Aleric starts stripping off armour, then walks off into the village. A few yards from away he pauses to pick a straw hat off the ground, dusts it off and puts it on, then resumes his walk toward a new life.

STEPHANUS

We stick together. Aleric and whats-his-name ...

CRISPUS

Nicolas.

STEPHANUS

Aleric and Nicolas were killed in a fair fight while we were searching the village, two-by-two. We came on their bodies, found the killers and dispatched them.

CRISPUS

OK. Sounds plausible. You're trying to cover for Aleric then? So he wont be hunted down as a deserter?

STEPHANUS

Got it. We still have a problem of who killed ...

ALERIC

(shouting from some distance away)

Crispus! Stephanus! Come quickly!

INT. VILLAGE IN GERMANIA - MIDMORNING (CONTINUOUS)

Aleric, now dressed in plain peasant garb, is eating a freshly baked raisin cake. Behind him a fire is burning in the hearth and water is heating in a pot. The rest of the raisin cakes are on a table next to him.

Stephanus and Crispus arrive at a run with swords drawn.

CRISPUS

You called us here to cook us breakfast?

Aleric, finishing his cake starts into another and offers one to Crispus and Stephanus. Crispus reaches for one only to have Stephanus SLAM the plate out of Aleric's hand, scattering the cakes.

STEPHANUS

Fools!

CRISPUS

What?

Aleric goes to speak and only offers a strangled gasp. His eyes widen and he drops the remains of the raisin cake. Without a sound he falls to the ground and begins to twitch.

STEPHANUS

Fool. Idiot.

CRISPUS

Poison? This was a trap?

STEPHANUS

Exactly. Whoever killed Nicolas laid the trap, and Aleric was fool enough to fall for it.

Aleric lies still on the ground. Stephanus stalks angrily around the room searching.

CRISPUS

What are you doing?

STEPHANUS

Who are they? Is there more than one of them? Did Nicolas' killer lay this trap?

CRISPUS

I dont care. Let's get out of here.

Stephanus reaches the pot of water, now boiling, on the hearth.

STEPHANUS

One. We're dealing with one killer...

With a spoon he reaches into the pot and lifts out Nicolas' severed finger.

STEPHANUS  
 ...and he left this as a message.

EXT. VILLAGE IN GERMANIA - AFTERNOON

Crispus and Stephanus are searching house to house in the village, looking for the killer.

STEPHANUS  
 Did you hear something?

CRISPUS  
 No ... I mean yes ... I dont know  
 what I heard.

STEPHANUS  
 Sounded like a cry.

CRISPUS  
 (pointing)  
 I think it came from that way.

Both men ready themselves to face the killer then stalk along between buildings. They pause before walking into the open.

STEPHANUS  
 (whispering)  
 Do you hear?

CRISPUS  
 (whispering)  
 Its a man, yes. Who is he talking  
 to? Do you understand the gods  
 forsaken language of this country?

Both step out into the open with a warcry and charge the frightened peasant standing in a nearby doorway. The peasant drops the club he's carrying and turns to run, and is cut down by the soldiers.

CRISPUS  
 We got him. Now ... who was he  
 talking to?

Crispus steps into the building warily to see a young boy crying and holding onto the body of a dead woman. The child, Carl, shrinks back as he approaches.

CARL  
 (in germanian)  
 Dont hurt...

CRISPUS  
I dont understand.

CARL  
(in broken latin)  
Dont ... hurt ... me.

EXT. VILLAGE IN GERMANIA - LATE AFTERNOON

Leading one horse each, Stephanus and Crispus prepare to ride out of the village. Carl sits in front of Stephanus.

STEPHANUS  
Ready?

CARL  
Yes.

They begin to ride at a reasonable pace, to catch up with the rest of the soldiers. Unseen to Stephanus, Carl grins as he feels wind in his face, and Nicolas' stolen silver ring bounces at his neck on a long leather cord.

MONTAGE: INT. A TENT SOMEWHERE IN GERMANIA - DAY

Stephanus and three other soldiers bend to enter the tent and start pulling off armour. The pieces of Stephanus armour are roughly thrown at Carl.

STEPHANUS  
Clean those.

MONTAGE: EXT. A CAMP SOMEWHERE IN GERMANIA - NIGHT

Soldiers sitting around eating, joking and drinking from a wineskin passed from hand to hand. Carl is creeping up to the fire and steals a piece of bread and is cuffed around the head for his trouble. He retires to the tent with the bread, wearing a look of triumph.

MONTAGE: INT. A TENT SOMEWHERE IN GERMANIA - VARIOUS TIMES OF DAY

Stephanus pulling his armour on, adjusting buckles and straps, nodding to himself. Carl watches.

MONTAGE: EXT. A CAMP SOMEWHERE IN GERMANIA - DAY

Soldiers returning from battle, Carl sees them and ducks into the back of the tent. Stephanus and another battle weary soldier both toss their armour to him.

MONTAGE: EXT. A CAMP SOMEWHERE IN GERMANIA - NIGHT

Joking around the campfire is muted, men eating and drinking, gaps in their ranks. Stephanus looks over to Carl who's hiding in the shadows and tosses him bread.

MONTAGE: INT. A TENT SOMEWHERE IN GERMANIA - MORNING

A soldier has died in his sleep. The DECURION and Stephanus are looking down at the body. In the shadows, Carl is hiding a small bag of herbs, trying not to be noticed.

DECURION

A good man, and a loyal  
second. We've lost too many to  
this war, may we return home before  
Winter comes to claim any others to  
herself!

STEPHANUS

Aye.

DECURION

(turning to Stephanus)  
Until you're killed, or I find  
someone better, I'm making you my  
second.

STEPHANUS

(surprised)  
Thank you, sir.

In the corner of the tent, Carl smiles triumphantly, eyes fixed on the DECURION.

MONTAGE: EXT. A CAMP SOMEWHERE IN GERMANIA - DAY

Carl finishes cleaning and sharpening a gladius (Roman short sword) and hands it back to Stephanus blade first. By instinct Stephanus knocks it out of his grasp and cuffs the boy angrily.

STEPHANUS

No! Do you wish to kill me?

CARL

(eyes blazing with defiance  
but speaking deferentially)

No sir.

STEPHANUS

Turn the blade, offer it hilt  
first. Show respect to the blade  
and its wielder.

CARL

Yes sir.

MONTAGE: EXT. A CAMP SOMEWHERE IN GERMANIA - DAY

Carl hands a cleaned and sharpened gladius back to the Decurion, hilt first and dipping to one knee. The Decurion nods.

MONTAGE: EXT. A CAMP SOMEWHERE IN GERMANIA - NIGHT

Around the campfire there's talk, rumours of an end to the campaign. Stephanus tosses meat to Carl who's hiding in shadows nearby. The Decurion sees him and cuffs Stephanus roughly, then beckons Carl to join them at one of the empty spots, vacated weeks before by a dead soldier.

MONTAGE: EXT. A CAMP SOMEWHERE IN GERMANIA - DAY

Tents are being broken down, commanders are directing troops to load wagons and start the a long march. Stephanus divides his gear and tosses a pack to Carl to carry.

MONTAGE: EXT. ON THE ROAD SOMEWHERE IN GERMANIA - AFTERNOON

Stephanus finishes up shaping a stick into roughly the shape of a Roman gladius short sword. He tosses it to Carl who fumbles the catch. Picking up his own wooden sword, Stephanus advances and delivers a couple of stinging blows.

MONTAGE: EXT. A ROAD SIDE CAMP SOMEWHERE IN GERMANIA -  
EVENING

Carl catches the wooden gladius when it's thrown. He parries a series of blows before Stephanus manages to disarm him and land a stinger of a blow to his rear-end.

MONTAGE: EXT. ON THE ROAD SOMEWHERE IN GERMANIA - DAY

Carl is marching alongside Stephanus, wooden gladius hanging from his belt mirroring the real soldiers. Stephanus glances down, smiles and ruffles his hair.

EXT. FARMHOUSE IN ITALY - DUSK

With a spectacular late-summer sunset in the background Carl is playing at swordsman on the flat roof of the farmhouse with APOLLOS, son of his Greek tutor. Stephanus is walking up the track to the house leading a donkey laden with farm implements and bundles of harvested vegetables. The joy of the moment is broken by an angry cry from the roof.

APOLLOS

Ouch!

CARL

(laughter)

Ha! Keep the sword up.

More blows are exchanged and Apollos finally tosses his sword aside and charges at Carl, wrestling him to the dust of the rooftop. Wriggling free, Carl RACES for the discarded wooden gladius, SCOOPS it up and TWIRLS one sword in each hand. As Apollos charges him, Carl laughs, delivering a pair of stinging blows and steps out of the way.

APOLLOS

Cut that out will you?!

CARL

(mocking)

"Cut that out will you?!"

Apollos charges again, and this time Carl dazes him with a blow to the back of the head. Apollos lands on his face in the dust.

STEPHANUS

Will you two cut that out before  
someone gets hurt?

Carl walks to the edge of the roof and looks down.

CARL

Yes sir.

Behind him, unseen, Apollos shakes his head throwing off the daze. His eyes BLAZE with hatred and he rises and THROWS himself at Carl. Apollos jumps and plants both feet in a KICK to the small of Carl's back, sending him arcing over the edge, and Apollos onto his back on the roof. Carl lands face down on the ground near Stephanus, with a sickening CRUNCH of breaking vertebrae.

EXT. A ROAD IN ITALY - DUSK

A HEBREW Priest sits in the dust a few yards from the intersection of a farm track and the road. He occasionally glances up the track that leads to Stephanus' farmhouse. Finally he sees Stephanus running toward him, and he gets up, dusts himself down and starts walking along the road, clearly aiming to intersect the path of the running Stephanus. The two men collide in a tangle of limbs.

HEBREW

(wind knocked out of him)'

Oommf!

STEPHANUS

Out of my way stranger, I'm in a hurry.

HEBREW

The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness, but everyone who is impatient and hasty heads only to poverty.

STEPHANUS

I dont have time for riddles. Out of my way.

HEBREW

Then, perhaps, you might have time for a healer?

Stephanus looks at him in shock then grabs his collar to drag him up the farm track.

STEPHANUS

The gods be praised!

HEBREW  
 (smiling like the cat who got  
 the canary)  
 Indeed.

INT. FARMHOUSE IN ITALY - NIGHT

Carl's body lays on a large wooden table. Stephanus and the Hebrew are nearby.

STEPHANUS  
 He's dead. Gone.

HEBREW  
 I will need to examine him before  
 making that decision.

STEPHANUS  
 I've seen enough death. Killed my  
 share of men and boys. I tell you  
 he's dead.

HEBREW  
 My order has healing power that can  
 still reach him, but you will need  
 to leave me to my craft if you wish  
 me to access the deeper magick.

STEPHANUS  
 You're like no Hebrew I've ever met  
 - they shunned magick in all its  
 forms.

HEBREW  
 Do you wish me to continue, or  
 not? Every moment we waste lets  
 his spirit drift further away.

Stephanus leaves the room.

The Hebrew leans close to Carl's still form, rolls him over  
 and tears his shirt open to expose his spine.

HEBREW  
 (whispering)  
 Long have we waited for another  
 Watcher. Fear not little one, you  
 will rise from your slumber soon.

The Hebrew begins to pray and pulls a ceremonial knife from  
 his robes. Reaching the apex of his prayer he slices into  
 his palm letting the blood run freely, directing the crimson  
 flow across Carl's neck and back.

In places the blood pools, at the sites of broken vertebrae it's absorbed, hungrily, without a trace. He concentrates the blood flow on those locations.

CARL  
(barely audible)  
Where ... what ...

HEBREW  
Dont try to move little one.

The Hebrew takes a cup and fills it partially with blood. From his robes he takes a small pouch and sprinkles white powder liberally into the cup.

HEBREW  
Drink this.

He turns Carl, supports his head and puts the cup to his lips.

HEBREW  
(quoting)  
"For the life of a creature is in the blood..."

HEBREW  
I give of myself, that you may live little one.

CARL  
What?

HEBREW  
You come to us from a distinguished line. I had to step in, I couldnt see the line falter, not after so long.

CARL  
Everything hurts.

HEBREW  
Well, yes. To the eyes of mere man you were dead, yet you were not beyond reach. Your true nature sustained you. Of that I cannot talk, you must seek another for the answers you crave. Get up. You have a long journey ahead of you.

HEBREW  
 (calling to Stephanus)  
 You may enter.

Stephanus enters and shock gives way to a smile as he sees Carl is alive.

HEBREW  
 Who else witnessed the incident?

STEPHANUS  
 The son of the Greek tutor. Why?

HEBREW  
 None must know he still lives. You cannot remain here, in this place. Your life here has ended as surely as his did when he hit the ground.

STEPHANUS  
 What are you saying?

HEBREW  
 (quoting)  
 "The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly."

HEBREW  
 Your boy died today, in the company of others. They will tell of a resurrection if he returns. To all others he must remain dead. You must leave this place, seek answers, and never return. Take new names. Live a new life.

STEPHANUS  
 Answers?

CARL  
 I seek another Watcher, one who lives far from here.

HEBREW  
 You seek the hermit of Qumran - on the north shore of the Dead Sea. More than that I cannot tell you. He will answer your questions.

MONTAGE: INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Stephanus and Carl packing to travel. Carl moves with obvious pain.

MONTAGE: EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Carl riding the donkey, between bulging bags, Stephanus leading the way.

MONTAGE: EXT. ROAD IN SOUTHERN ITALY - NIGHT

Carl and Stephanus have set up camp and are roasting a rabbit over the campfire. Carl moves without pain but wears a sombre, haunted expression.

MONTAGE: EXT. DOCKS IN SOUTHERN ITALY - DAY

Stephanus and Carl survey the available ships traveling East along the coast. Several conversations later, people pointing them up and down the dock they finally find a ship. The CAPTAIN is missing his left forearm.

CAPTAIN

So, just you and your son making the voyage? I need names for the ship manifest. The harbour-master is clamping down.

STEPHANUS

My name is Bastian, and this is my son Car...

CARL

...Cartaphilus, of Rome.

CAPTAIN

(nodding, sagely)

Well Bastian and Cartaphilus, whoever you are, so long as your silver is good I'll give you berth on board. You'll need to pull your weight - I'll have no freeloaders on my ship!

Stephanus and the Captain shake hands.

MONTAGE: INT. SHIP - DAY

Carl and Stephanus man the oars alongside the rest of the crew as the ship navigates out of the harbour.

MONTAGE: EXT. SHIP - DAY

Stephanus is ill, not found his "sea legs" and throws up over the side of the ship into the ocean. Carl sits nearby laughing at his misfortune.

MONTAGE: EXT. SHIP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SEA - DUSK

Carl is talking to a sailor who is pointing out features of the ship and naming them in Latin, Greek and his own (Phoenician) language.

MONTAGE: EXT. SHIP AT SEA IN A STORM - MORNING

Stephanus is sleeping, Carl is talking a badly woven mix of Latin and Phoenician to a sailor who is teaching him knots. A sailor calls that land is in sight and points.

MONTAGE: EXT. SHIP - CLOSING IN TO PORT AFTER THE STORM - AFTERNOON

Sailors are getting the ship ready for dock, stowing ropes and other tackle. Others are below in the hold sorting trade goods. Carl is speaking to a sailor in Phoenician. An atmosphere of relief to be out of the storm and almost in port pervades the buzz of conversation.

Behind Carl two burning arrows SLAM into the wet deck, and a third strikes a sailor the the middle of his back. The sailor goes down SCREAMING and WRITHING, his back a mass of flames. A bucket of water is tossed over the flames but there's no saving the sailor. Carl scrambles for some cover at the ship's rail.

Three more non-burning arrows land, one missing the ship having gone over Carl's head, one hitting the deck near him and the third impaling his right calf. Around the ship sailors are a frenzy of activity, turning the ship and running for open water. Their swift response causes the next volley of arrows to land in the water to the stern of the ship.

Stephanus rushes to Carl's side and examines him, the eye of a trained soldier.

STEPHANUS

Hold still. This isn't the worst I've seen. It's gone right through and into the deck. This is going to hurt, ready?

CARL

(nodding, grimly)

Yeah.

Stephanus breaks off the arrow as close to Carl's leg as possible. The boat pitches and rolls causing Carl to shift, the arrow anchoring him to the deck causes him to cry out. Stephanus pauses then grasps the boy's ankle and knee and nods.

STEPHANUS

Count of three.

He nods to Carl.

STEPHANUS

One.

Carl closes his eyes and grits his teeth. Without warning Stephanus lifts his whole leg, sliding the broken arrow right through. Carl SCREAMS then falls silent. Stephanus binds the wound.

STEPHANUS

There's a healer on board. I'll take you to him.

He lifts the boy and takes him below decks, casting a glance at the arrows, at the path the volleys had taken and where Carl had been hiding. He looks down at Carl with a questioning look.

INT. SHIP'S HEALER'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

Carl is laying with a dirty, blood soaked bandage on his leg. Sweat covers his brow. His eyes are closed tightly. The HEALER and Stephanus are talking in hushed tones.

HEALER

It was a clean wound, and your battlefield medicine should have been enough.

STEPHANUS

They were trying to kill him.

HEALER

Who?

STEPHANUS

Whoever it was firing the arrows. I didnt see the ship they were on.

HEALER

Pirates, after our cargo, that's my guess.

STEPHANUS

No. It was more than that, there were two volleys and the target each time was in a different place. They were aiming for him.

HEALER

From that distance?

STEPHANUS

Archers from my unit in Germania could take a running rabbit at that distance. Would pirates have that accuracy? For that matter, how could they see *him* at that distance?

HEALER

Whoever hired trained archers probably used a seer to guide their hands.

STEPHANUS

(frowning)

Magick like that and military grade archers wouldnt come cheap. Who? Who has resources like that to squander on a mere boy?

HEALER

If they were trying to kill him then they could afford poison too, which would explain the fever. I could take the leg right now but I fear the poison has taken hold of his whole body by now anyway.

EXT. SHIP - NIGHT

Stephanus stares out to sea, scanning the rearward horizon for signs of pursuit. The ship captain steps up behind him and he turns.

CAPTAIN

The boy?

STEPHANUS

He may not last the night.

CAPTAIN

You have powerful enemies Bastian which places me in a dilemma: I have a full cargo hold and must make port, I have a dead crew member to replace, and I have living and half-dead passengers. Seems to me we could toss the boy overboard and take you as crew and all would be square.

STEPHANUS

Your crewman was a casualty of war. No more, no less. At the wrong place at the wrong time. I lost men from my octet the very same way.

CAPTAIN

Legionaire?

STEPHANUS

Veteran of Germania.

CAPTAIN

Then you should know that a few might need to be sacrificed to win the battle, if this truly is a war. Did your healers never practice triage?

STEPHANUS

Our healers were butchers in healer's robes. They killed those they couldnt be bothered to treat.

CAPTAIN

I am a simple man, profit and loss, profit and loss. I am out of pocket one crew member, damage to my deck and a hold of cargo. Taken

(MORE)

CAPTAIN (cont'd)  
 in two parts you and your boy solve  
 all my problems.

With a start Stephanus finds his arms grabbed from behind by several of the larger sailors.

CAPTAIN  
 You have strong arms and a good  
 back. I'll take those as payment  
 for the lost crew member and  
 additional damage to the ship.

Another crewman steps out from below decks carrying a cloth-wrapped bundle the size and shape of Carl.

CAPTAIN  
 And that deals with the cargo in  
 our hold.

With a SPLASH the Carl-bundle is hurled overboard. Stephanus struggles and cries out then goes limp in the sailors grasp.

INT. SHIP AT SEA - MORNING

Stephanus, now a crew member, is manning an oar as the ship maneuvers into the harbour. An overweight, BALDING SAILOR cracks a whip across sailors who're slacking as they fight against bad-weather and the sea to pull into the harbour.

BALDING SAILOR  
 Put your backs into it, or the sea  
 will take us for sure.

STEPHANUS  
 (muttering)  
 Of all the places I thought I would  
 be...

The whip lashes out and strikes him across the shoulder blades.

BALDING SAILOR  
 If you have something to say, say  
 it for the rest of us to hear.

STEPHANUS  
 I said, of all the places I thought  
 I would be...

BALDING SAILOR

Our company not good enough for  
you?

OARSMEN

(laughter)

BALDING SAILOR

Shut up, or you'll not be seeing  
daylight for the next month. I  
pick who loads and who unloads the  
ship. Anyone not on those crews,  
stays here. So, who's staying  
here?

Silence falls and the men bend themselves into rowing harder  
and avoiding the ire of the balding sailor.

INT. SHIP IN PORT - AFTERNOON

The fat balding sailor walks between rows of oarsmen and  
picks men, seemingly at random for the crew to unload the  
ship cargo. He looks Stephanus in the eye and steps past  
him. The chosen men hurry off into the cargo hold and  
there's soon a bustle of activity and voices. Three sailors  
join the fat balding guy, two carrying tools, and they begin  
working in pairs fixing metal shackles around each of the  
remaining oarsmen's right ankles. A soft metal rivet is  
hammered through the clasp to hold the manacle closed and  
Stephanus sighs as he realizes the futility of trying to  
escape.

EXT. THE OCEAN DEPTHS OUTSIDE TYRE

The Carl-bundle - the cloth wrapped body of Carl - sinks  
toward the depths. Colour is leached out by the depth of  
the ocean, silt stirred by the current makes it seem  
cloudy. The bundle sinks into depths where day and night  
cease to have meaning; the depths where weather and storms  
above cannot reach. The depths where a powerful  
undercurrent suddenly catches the bundle, spinning it end  
over end, dragging it against protruding rocks. The water  
rushing past tugs at the edges of the cloth pulling them  
free and slowly unwrapping the body within. Carl's eyes  
flicker open and he gasps for breath filling his lungs with  
icy cold sea water. Silently he screams as death takes  
him. His eyes close and a peace descends. Across exposed  
areas of skin areas of light and dark begin pulsating  
rhythmically. Moving in closer, the pores of his skin have  
enlarged and are opening and closing, rhythmically, in waves  
that pass across his body.

## INT. SHIP IN PORT - EVENING

Stephanus nods in appreciation to a sailor who hands him water to drink. Outside the crew area voices can be heard talking. Conversation falls quiet as coordinated heavy footsteps approach. Stephanus waves away the crew member's offer of stale bread in favour of concentrating on listening to those outside.

## EXT. SHIP IN PORT - EVENING (CONTINUOUS)

Most of the crew have taken off into the port city of Tyre. A skeleton number are occupied with tasks around the deck of the ship. Three stand guard and are talking. Their conversation falls silent as a four-man squad of Roman Legionnaires board the ship. At the head of the squad, an older and more care-worn CRISPUS pulls off his helmet as he prepares to speak with the sailors.

CRISPUS

Where is your captain.

SAILOR-1

Dont rightly know.

SAILOR-2

Havent seen him for a while.

SAILOR-3

(looking at Sailor-1)

The captain? Thought he went into town.

SAILOR-1

(shrugging)

Could be.

SAILOR-1

What do you need him for?

CRISPUS

What was your cargo?

SAILOR-2

Boxes, lots and lots of boxes.

SAILOR-3

(laughing)

I had to carry most of them when we unloaded. Heavy boxes.

SAILOR-1  
(about to speak)

In annoyance, Crispus holds his hand up for silence, cutting off further speech.

CRISPUS  
Your passengers?

SAILOR-3  
Dont recall.

SAILOR-1  
Ohhh, let's think about that. No  
... only passengers I saw got off  
before we arrived here.

CRISPUS  
And these passengers, a man and a  
boy?

All three sailors shrug. Crispus suppresses anger, clearly trying to stay within externally imposed limits. His hand twitches close to his sword hilt as his angry look is pushed from view.

CRISPUS  
I will return in the morning. I  
expect to see your captain and your  
manifest. Should you sail in the  
night, I will see to it that you'll  
never trade these waters  
again. Good night.

Crispus turns on his heel and strides back off the ship, his legionaires following him.

EXT. SHIP IN PORT - MORNING

The three sailors on watch and playing dumb the night before are now asleep, having been relieved by three others. The Captain strides out from his cabin, where he'd been all along, with a mid-twenties Greek slave in tow.

CAPTAIN  
Oarmaster!

The fat, balding Oarmaster hurries from below decks.

OARMMASTER  
Sir!

CAPTAIN

(pushing the slave)

Another one for you. I see cant see why the new governor wouldnt have kept him around, he's ...well versed ... but I've had my fill of him. Put him to work.

OARMASTER

Yes Sir.

CAPTAIN

Oh, dont spare him the lash on my account, could be he might enjoy it given his performance last night.

The Oarmaster roughly grabs the slave and pushes him below decks. The Captain turns and looks at the sleeping sailors.

CAPTAIN

On your feet dogs!

All three sleeping sailors respond, but far too slowly for the Captain's liking. He kicks one of them as an encouragement to all.

SAILOR-1

(doubling over in pain)

Yes sir?

CAPTAIN

We had visitors last night?

SAILOR-2

Yes sir, we did. Four Romans.

CAPTAIN

And? What did they want?

SAILOR-1

(recovering)

They wanted the passengers, the man and boy. I told the lead soldier that the passengers had "got off before we arrived here"

CAPTAIN

(nodding to himself)

They had powerful enemies. Rome doesnt usually sell herself to the highest bidder. Did they say they would return, these soldiers?

SAILOR-3

Yes, and we are not to sail to  
avoid them, or we'll never trade  
these waters again.

Fury seizes the Captain at the threat. The three sailors  
scuttle away before any harm can come to them.

INT. SHIP IN PORT - CONTINUOUS

The fat balding Oarmaster has dragged the GREEK SLAVE down  
into the dark, slumbering men all around lean on oars or  
have tried to get as comfortable as their manacled feet will  
allow. Stephanus watches the newcomers through heavily  
lidded eyes, noting where the Oarmaster keeps the hammer  
and soft metal rivets used in the manacles. Once the Greek  
slave is shackled to an oar, the fat man leaves.

STEPHANUS

(speaking in Koine Greek)

Psst! You there.

The slave turns to face him. Black make-up around his eyes  
has run from tears.

SLAVE

Yes? What do you want? Have you  
been sent to make my misery  
complete?

STEPHANUS

I am Stephanus. Do you have a  
name?

SLAVE

I am called Dymas.

STEPHANUS

Well met Dymas!

STEPHANUS

(waving a hand)

What news do you have of out there?

DYMAS

I was lover of Publius Sulpicius  
Quirinus, Governor of the province  
of Syria, and now this? Are the  
gods punishing me?

STEPHANUS

Quirinus?

DYMAS

Yes. He's been replaced, of course. In the household purge that followed I found myself in the slave market and purchased by your Captain. I clearly didnt please the new governor.

DYMAS

Not two nights ago I slept by a fire and was drinking wine. Now this? What next?

STEPHANUS

I, myself, was something else before being pressed into service. I have hope that I will yet return to the life I left behind. Sadly, the son I had taken for my own will never have that luxury.

Dymas stifles a look of interest, pushing it down, trying to look innocent.

DYMAS

You had a son? Down here?

STEPHANUS

No. We were passengers. He's dead and I now serve here.

Dymas nods sagely, and turns back to his oar in silence.

EXT. THE OCEAN DEPTHS OUTSIDE TYRE

Carl is still trapped by the current against a rock. The wound on his leg has gone green and small sea creatures are darting to and fro, picking at its edges.

In the semi-darkness two shapes swim up, using the current to gain extra speed. Out of the cloudy silt they appear: arms pressed to their sides, legs kicking fluidly in unison, hair and loose gauzy clothing trailing. Sailors on the surface would have called them mermaids, they refer to one another as EURYBIA and TANIS.

EURYBIA

It's true, I tell you, he swam with me last night.

TANIS

You know it's forbidden!

EURYBIA

Yes, I know but he looked so good in that uniform! But are you going to tell the Elders?

TANIS

If I tell them that, who knows what they will find out about me? No, your secret is safe, as I trust mine are?

Eurybia's laugh is cut short as she notices Carl's form pressed to the rock nearby.

EURYBIA

Food!

TANIS

No, I dont think so sister. Look!

The current has tugged Carl's shirt loose and patterns of light and dark, matching the mermaid's own, are passing across this torso.

EURYBIA

He's dressed like a surface dweller. You know they're only good for one thing!

TANIS

One? Eating?

EURYBIA

(giggling)

Alright, maybe two then.

TANIS

Look below the clothing, dont you see he's one of us?

EURYBIA

(with a sigh)

Yes, I do. Cant I have any fun?

TANIS  
Uhh, last night?

They pause near Carl's prone figure, arms and legs now working independent of one another, much as any other human would if they were treading water.

TANIS  
We cant eat one of our own.

EURYBIA  
Why not? Who will know?

TANIS  
(looks at her sister with a frown)  
Me?

EURYBIA  
Oh, alright. We take him back and let the Elders decide then?

TANIS  
He looks so young, dont you think?

Tanis swims closer and the filmy, gauzy edges of her billowing shirt brush across Carl's face. His eyes open in panic and his mouth moves, with no effect.

TANIS  
Calm down!

CARL  
(closes his mouth and looks at her with raised eyebrows and a pleading look in his eyes)  
...

TANIS  
Sleep little one!

Tanis reaches out and brushes fingertips across Carl's eyes. He goes limp and sleeps. The two mermaids take an arm each and swim off into the deeper ocean with Carl in tow.

EXT. SHIP IN PORT - AFTERNOON

Crispus and three Roman soldiers arrive at the ship, and his existing frown deepens as Crispus notices the activity going into preparing it for departure.

CRISPUS

Captain!

The Captain walks out of his cabin eating a fig.

CAPTAIN

Ahh, sir, welcome aboard. What can I do for Rome?

CRISPUS

I've seen the manifest you lodged with the harbourmaster, and it didnt mention half of what people saw you unloading...

CAPTAIN

Oh? Who were these "people" you speak of?

CRISPUS

...and there was no mention of your passengers.

CAPTAIN

You're right, of course, I had no passengers when I docked here.

Crispus grunts with annoyance and walks to the ship's rail to look out to sea.

CRISPUS

Far be it from me to doubt your official papers, Captain. I had it on good authority that you were transporting enemies of Rome.

A young boy runs up and kneels to offer a small parchment sealed with wax to Crispus. He takes it, breaks the seal and reads. As he reaches the end, his screws it up in an angry fist.

CRISPUS

It would appear that my prime informant, the seer Eurybia of the temple of Poseidon, has thrown herself off a cliff into the sea. Why would one so young take her own life?

The soldier to Crispus' right pales and takes a sharp intake of breath at the news.

CRISPUS  
 (to the soldier)  
 You knew her?

SOLDIER  
 Knew? In a certain sense, yes,  
 sir.

CRISPUS  
 Well, spit it out man!

SOLDIER  
 We were lovers. The last time I  
 saw her was when we were making  
 love in the ocean ... last night  
 ... a sacred offering under the  
 full moon, to Poseidon himself!

Crispus turns back to the Captain who seems amused by the interchange.

CAPTAIN  
 (dripping sarcasm)  
 My condolences!

Crispus angrily pushes past him and starts searching the ship, finding nothing in the crew quarters, hold or passenger quarters.

CRISPUS  
 (pointing to a closed door)  
 In there?

CAPTAIN  
 The slaves - oarsmen - I have a  
 bill of sale for all of them in my  
 cabin.

CRISPUS  
 Show me.

The men set off back up to the deck.

INT. SHIP IN PORT - CONTINUOUS

Stephanus perks up as he hears the Latin speaking group heading nearer.

STEPHANUS  
 That voice - its familiar.

DYMAS

Sounds like the captain of the  
governor's household guard.

STEPHANUS

This captain have a name?

DYMAS

Crispus, I believe, a war  
veteran. Why would the governor be  
taking an interest in this ship?

STEPHANUS

I have no idea. Powerful  
enemies...

He falls silent as the voices stop outside, then recede  
again without entering.

STEPHANUS

Damn them!

Stephanus angrily punches the wall.

EXT. OCEAN DEPTHS OFF THE COAST OF TYRE

The mermaids Eurybia and Tanis arrive at an area of  
cultivation: coral grows in a semi-circle around a cave  
mouth, with various coloured plants in beds inside the coral  
wall. A pathway winds between flowerbeds, past a  
decoratively arranged ship's anchor up to the mouth of the  
cave.

Eurybia betrays nervousness as she approaches the cave,  
adjusting her skirts and hair and hanging back to allow  
Tanis to enter first, still towing the sleeping form of Carl  
between them.

INT. MOTHER'S CAVE, OFF THE COAST OF TYRE

MOTHER is waiting in the depth of the cave, bathing in a  
current of hot spring water coming from the sea bed. Mother  
is quite literally the largest woman on the planet, her bulk  
offset by its inherent buoyancy in the seawater. Dark waves  
of opening and closing pores pass across the undulating  
folds of flesh.

EURYBIA

(grinning, relieved)

Mother? Are the Elders not meeting  
here today?

MOTHER

Greetings, youngest. No, no  
Elders. A delegate from our  
separated brethren brought news  
that our goal is almost in sight.

The two girls deposit Carl on the sandy floor by Mother.

MOTHER

You've done well! Is this the one  
we seek?

Mother moves close to Carl and examines him, stopping at the  
infected arrow wound on his leg.

MOTHER

Oh no. No, no.

She reaches down, lifts him by the leg and begins to GNAW on  
the infected flesh until bone is exposed along most of his  
lower leg. Scraps of meat float past Eurybia and  
Tanis. They grab and eat them making sure that nothing  
leaves the cave.

MOTHER

(looking up from her meal)  
He's under-nourished and the wound  
hasn't regenerated. The infection  
is stopped for now. Hunt for  
me. Bring fresh man-meat and  
bones. He must be strong to meet  
the Elders. Go!

The two mermaids squeal with delight and flit from the cave  
at top speed.

EXT. SHIP AT SEA - AFTERNOON

A sailor on lookout duty spots an approaching ship. The  
Captain looks and calls the crew to arms. Four men armed  
with bows take station facing the other ship awaiting  
orders. The Captain waits, allowing the other vessel to  
close.

CAPTAIN

Steady men, wait for them to  
announce themselves and make their  
intentions clear.

Half a dozen arrows impact the deck and side of the ship.  
The Captain orders his men to return fire. The rest of the  
crew stand ready, eyes on the sky, to avoid getting shot.

CAPTAIN

Let them close, then see to it that they get what they deserve. If these pirates are carrying anything, I want it. Whatever happens, their captain is mine alone, got that?

The two vessels approach close enough for men to leap from the pirate vessel and engage the defending crew in hand to hand combat. The fights are brief, brutal and bloody. Soon the defending crew find themselves on the defensive.

CAPTAIN

Arm the slaves, they'll only be butchered anyhow.

Men vanish below deck.

INT. SHIP AT SEA - CONTINUOUS

Stephanus looks around as he hears the battle cries from above. Other slaves share a mixture of fear and disinterest until crew members burst in, dumps a motley assortment of weapons on the floor and free them one by one.

SAILOR-1

Get something to fight with and defend the ship, or I'll kill you myself!

STEPHANUS

What's going on?

SAILOR-1

Pirates, here to plunder our cargo and sell it at port.

STEPHANUS

(testing the balance of the sword he pulls from the pile)  
It'll do. Now where are they?

Three slaves, including Dymas cower in the corner and refuse to fight.

EXT. SHIP AT SEA - CONTINUOUS

Stephanus starts into the pirates, swift and mechanically efficient, his soldier training clearly evident. Several of the oar-slaves die in the battle but they are quickly avenged as Stephanus' body count rises by the minute. He sizes up the situation and vaults across to the pirate ship bellowing a warcry.

INT. SHIP AT SEA - CONTINUOUS

Dymas, now unwatched, searches through the storage area and finds an old knife which he conceals on his person. The other slaves are too busy cowering to notice.

EXT. PIRATE SHIP - CONTINUOUS

Stephanus stands at the centre of a ring of carnage. As fast as pirates come forward to meet him, his blade finds a vital organ or limb, and they go down either dead or maimed. Finally the crowd thins and the PIRATE CAPTAIN steps through and the crew fall back. The pirate captain is armed with a pair of swords and wears a leather breastplate - overlapping strips shaped to look like leaves - with leather wrist and shin guards.

PIRATE CAPTAIN

So, you came here to die instead of staying at home did you slave?

STEPHANUS

My name is Stephanus and you're the one who is destined to die today.

Battle is briefly joined with a clash of swords. They part and Stephanus deftly scoops a small buckler (small metal shield) from one of the corpses and continues circling his opponent.

In the next clash, Stephanus barely escapes, with a critical blow from the pirate captain glancing off the buckler. Then he spots an opening and drives forward using both shield and sword in an impressive display of raw brutality, finally thrusting his sword upward through the pirate captain's palette and out of the top of his head.

STEPHANUS

Who's next?

Looking around he gets nothing but downcast eyes from the assembled crew, shock dawning on them at the death of their captain.

Stephanus looks the two swords over and unbuckles their scabbards from the captain's body. He unbuckles and removes wrist and lower-leg armour before returning to his own ship.

EXT. SHIP AT SEA - CONTINUOUS

The Captain is furious at Stephanus and circles him.

CAPTAIN

I said that their captain was to be left for me.

STEPHANUS

So? He brought the fight to me.

CAPTAIN

He was mine, his ship should have fallen to me. Who do you think you are?

STEPHANUS

Just an old soldier. Keep the ship, I just want my freedom.

The captain dismisses him with a wave of his hand, far more interested in the three cowering slaves that the sailors are dragging onto the deck.

SAILOR-2

Found them hiding. Didn't even lift a finger to help.

The Captain stalks over, his anger already burning brightly.

CAPTAIN

You did nothing?

DYMAS

We stayed safe, Sir.

CAPTAIN

(delivering a stinging back-handed blow to Dymas face)

Coward. Men of worth died today so you useless rodents could stay safe. I would gladly trade all of your lives for just one of theirs, ten times over.

One of the crew steps up with a flask of oil, another with a lit torch.

CAPTAIN

Hold them.

Crew members grab the three slaves and force them to extend an arm. In sickeningly swift succession three severed hands land on the deck, the stumps are doused with oil and set alight to cauterize the wound. Two of the men scream. Dymas looks with silent contempt first at the Captain then at the Oarmaster who'd been holding his arm. All the slaves except Stephanus are rounded up and forced back to the oars.

CAPTAIN

You did well, but the price of disobedience must still be paid. You'll pay just as any other rest of my crew would.

Two sailors tie Stephanus to the main mast, his arms extended over his head. The Captain proceeds to deliver ten lashes with a knotted rope before walking back to his cabin, kicking one of the severed hands out of his way as he does so. As crew members clean up the deck, tossing bodies overboard, Stephanus is left hanging.

INT. OCEAN DEPTHS OFF THE COAST OF TYRE, IN A CAVE

Carl wakes up to see Eurybia at his bedside. At first he's confused, trying to speak and finding no words coming out, then it dawns on him that he's under water and panic begins to rise.

EURYBIA

Hold still little one. You're safe. You're among your own kind.

CARL

(mouth moving but silent)

...

EURYBIA

No. Like this ...

She shows him how to make sounds without air in his lungs, how to force water in and out past vocal chords, how to form words.

CARL

How ... long ... have ... I ...

EURYBIA  
How long have you been here?

CARL  
(nodding)  
Yes.

EURYBIA  
Almost a half cycle of the  
moon. When you're ready you will  
meet with Mother and the other  
Elders.

Tanis glides in hauling something behind her.

TANIS  
It took forever. He almost  
resisted my song. I cant remember  
the last time that happened.

EURYBIA  
I can ...

TANIS  
... but you're not going to  
embarrass me in front of our guest  
are you? You always were the most  
beguiling hunter of the family

Tanis deposits the body of a dark-skinned sailor on the  
ground before Carl.

TANIS  
Eat!

CARL  
What? No!

TANIS  
Oh dear gods, has no one taught  
you?

TANIS  
(looking at Eurybia)  
Sister?

EURYBIA  
There wasnt time.

Tanis sighs and advances on the corpse.

TANIS

Mere mortals have been our food  
source since ... well,  
forever. See your leg?

CARL

(glancing down and looking  
startled)

I was wounded, poisoned! It looks  
perfect now. What happened? Are  
you a healer?

TANIS

(laughing)

Nothing of the sort little  
one. Your flesh will regenerate,  
even after losing a limb. Their  
life to support yours. We fed you  
while you slept.

CARL

(looking thoughtful)

A wise man said "For the life of a  
creature is in the blood..."

EURYBIA

Yes! And the marrow of his bones  
is even more potent.

While they're speaking, Tanis tears through the skin and  
flesh of the sailor to expose ribs. With a few swift blows  
she breaks them and extracts three of them.

TANIS

Here, start with this.

Carl and Eurybia accept the offered bones and Carl looks at  
its core, then at the two mermaids. Following their example  
he eats with some trepidation. This falls away as he feels  
his body's metabolism process the marrow, enthusiasm for the  
meal replacing the tentative beginnings. Between the three,  
the corpse is reduced to scraps, all flesh and major bones  
eventually consumed.

INT. SHIP AT SEA - MORNING

The Captain has split his crew between his own and the  
pirate ship, taking former members of the pirate crew to  
fill his own oar-slave positions. The two ships limp slowly  
into harbor at Ashdod in southern Israel. Taking a moment  
to himself, Stephanus heads below decks and looks in on the  
oar-slaves.

The fat, balding Oarmaster stalks up and down delivering a beating to anyone not pulling hard enough in his opinion. His attention seems focussed on Dymas and the newly acquired ex-pirate crew.

OARMASTER

Pull, you lousy sewer rats!

The whip lands a blow across Dymas' already lacerated back. He pushes the oar away from himself in silence and stops working entirely. The Oarmaster's face starts to turn red and the whip lands another blow, this time across Dymas chest. A defiant look and more silence from Dymas prompts two more blows across his torso. He slumps, though from Stephanus vantage point it's clear that Dymas is fully alert and there's fire in his eyes.

A look of horror crosses Stephanus face as he hears the unmistakable sound of metal CLEAVING flesh and bone, the CRUNCH of breaking bones and a metallic clank ... the sound of an ankle shackle hitting the floor.

The creature that stands looks like Dymas and yet isn't. Gone is the cowed slave. Gone is the gay-lover of the Roman governor. In the moments between the last whip blow and standing up Dymas has shed the persona as a snake sheds its skin. He stands in one fluid movement, an old knife in his right hand. Blood runs freely from his hand and the blade. He steps out of his position by the oar with the limp of a man with one functional foot ... and a SEVERED, BLEEDING stump where the other had been. He LAUNCHES himself with a ROAR at the Oarmaster and the two men go down in a tangle of limbs. The Oarmaster's screams are cut off as Dymas tears his throat out and hungrily plunges his face into the crimson flow.

STEPHANUS

Dymas!

Stephanus steps closer and Dymas' head snaps up greeting him with a FERAL SNARL. Stephanus takes an involuntary step back and looks shocked as Dymas teeth visibly transform into something far more predatory, becoming pointed, canine. He plunges into the Oarmaster's corpse tearing flesh out of his thighs, exposing the femur then with a wet sucking noise the bones themselves are pried free. Dymas pointed teeth make short work of cracking through the bone and after consuming the marrow he sits back, sated. He closes his eyes and stretches, working kinks out of shoulders, arms above his head. Stephanus watches in wonder as bones thrust themselves out from the severed forearm, raw flesh knits itself into being across the bones followed by skin regenerating. In mere moments the severed hand is restored.

Dymas stands and turns toward Stephanus, walking on two fully functional feet, a snarl on his face and murder in his eyes.

EXT. OCEAN DEPTHS OFF THE COAST OF TYRE

Carl is alone, laying on a shelf of rock, eyes heavily lidded as he watches currents slowly stirring the golden sand nearby. He lets his hand dangle down and starts tracing patterns in the sand. His eyes fall closed.

Some time later he is awoken by Eurybia.

EURYBIA

(pointing to the sand doodles)  
What're you drawing little one?

CARL

(looking at what he drew)  
My old Greek tutor told me stories  
of the Fates. Do you know of them?

Carl sits up and looks at the drawing in the sand - swirling lines, tracing an elaborate double-helix reminiscent of DNA.

EURYBIA

Of course I know the  
Fates! Clotho, Lachesis and  
Atropos... what of them?

CARL

(blushing)  
I was dreaming of Clotho as she  
spun the thread of life. She was  
young and beautiful, like you.

EURYBIA

How old do you think I am?

CARL

I, Uhh, I dont know.

EURYBIA

What would you say if I was to tell  
you that I saw the migration of the  
Hebrews into the land south of  
here? What if I told you that I  
was trapped in the Jordan river  
when it parted to let them  
enter. I watched my lover die as  
the walls of Jericho fell.

CARL

I dont know ... you dont look that old.

EURYBIA

(laughing)

No, I dont. Remember well: all the while you live by your true nature, it will keep you from aging. Almost nothing can kill you. Why else would you be breathing down here, under the water, with me?

CARL

That was in my dream! Clotho was spinning the thread and it was like I could see into it. I could see the double-twist of the thread of life she was plying. Lachesis measured every thread with her rod, but they were all the same length. The measure of the thread mattered less than the makeup of its weave.

EURYBIA

But it's Lachesis that determines a man's days, we all know that. She measures the span of his life.

CARL

In the dream she measured every thread the same length.

EURYBIA

And you're going to tell me that Atropos didnt cut the threads at their appointed hour?

CARL

Well, no. I mean, she examined the thread of life, parted the twists, and made adjustments to the way the threads were constructed. Somehow that determined when Thanatos would visit the person. She cut each length the same length, as Lachesis had determined.

EURYBIA

How was our true nature in the dream?

CARL

Some of the threads were different. They looked different to the rest but similar to one another. Atropos looked at them, even adjusted them, but something about the threads rejected her tampering. One of the two plied threads compensated for changes in the other.

EURYBIA

That's amazing!

CARL

(blushing)

You think so?

EURYBIA

Yes, I do. We all have to go through Atropos tampering to discover the truth.

CARL

The truth?

EURYBIA

Yes, the truth that we cannot die. The truth of our higher nature. Living here makes it so much easier! Our true nature needs to manifest or we are lost forever.

Eurybia and Carl stare at his double-helix diagram for a few moments in silence.

EURYBIA

Mother sent me in here to get you. We are going to visit the elders now that you are strong enough. They will want to hear about your dreaming. Its been a long time since our last dreamer ... left us. Come on.

Carl gathers himself up and follows Eurybia out of the cave to where Tanis is already waiting. Mother's undulating bulk floats in the dim distance, following a line of cultivated coral toward a large ring of standing stones, and the elders meeting.