

ARROW AND LOVE

by

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Aphrodite

On the black, charred mountain of Olympus,
Smoke blotches the sky
carrying the essence of the dead.
Our people and the *Nazarenes*.
A new path of corpses every day.
Peace always thirsts for the blood of the innocents.
“Death doesn’t discriminate
Between the sinners and the saints
It takes and it takes and it takes
And we keep living anyway,
We rise and we fall”¹

Mother Earth and Father Sky gave us one truth:
Twelve Gods to obey and to serve.
When our people desired for war, we gave them war.
When they cried for freedom, we offered them the choice.
When they asked for our protection, we became the shield.

He came from afar. The infidel!
Called us pagans and chased us from our homes!
He was the trespasser! Not us!
Forced to run in the middle of the night.
He tried to burn us in our sleep!
Laurel wreaths replaced by halos.
Empty hearts and empty hands.
Piece by piece. He dismembered us.
Our people converted to his unholy cause.
Like butterflies pinned on the wall,
we screeched and we fought.
A claim upon the seat of Gods.
The throne of our dear Father.
The weed of discord among our people.
Thus, brother turned against brother,
mothers denounced their children.
He gave new names to our people!
Nazarenes!
An army of murdered *fanatics* and so-called *martyrs!*
Fickle monsters of greed
and pride

¹ Lines from Broadway Musical Hamilton by Lin Manuel Miranda from the song: “Wait for it.”

and pretentious self-righteousness.
He raised churches above our sacred temples.

Our sons turned on our daughters with hate and called them whores.
Our fair maidens denied their gods...Denied their right to love and pleasure.

The Ghal doesn't hesitate.
"He exhibits no restraint,
He takes and he takes and he takes
He keeps winning anyway
He changes the game
He plays and he raises the stakes" ²

I should have known,
When you began to confuse love with obedience
When you pointed that filthy finger at Pleasure, my granddaughter,
and pinned the scarlet letter—
Sin.
"All the hidden parts of me turned the lights off,
shut the blinds,
locked the doors;
I hid in the back of some upstairs closet of my mind
while someone came and broke the windows—
You,
someone
kicked the front door
and you
took everything—
You...someone...took...me..." ³
Took my Father
And my son.
And that poor child that wasn't even born...

When you broke into this country,
When you forced yourself
into my home
and took me as your hostage,
It never felt like mine again.
Pinned me on the wall like a butterfly you stitch with needles,
You watched me
strive and groan,
twitch and stir,
foam rising in my mouth with all those things I wanted to spit at you.
You! Monster!
You killed my son before he made his name.
You butchered my young, innocent boy
And named him Sin.
Cursed my love for my people.

² Lyrics from the song "Wait for it" by Lin Manuel Miranda in the musical "Hamilton."

³ Lines from the poem: "I am taking my body back" by Rupi Kaur.

Wearing my sacred cloth of Love you hung it in your wardrobe.
You! Monster!
You took my name and called yourself the God of Love!

So tired of doing things your way.
“I’ve spent years trying to figure out how to have stopped it,
But the sun can’t stop the storm from coming
The tree can’t stop the axe”⁴
All that is done, is done.
Forgotten.
Yet... unforgiven.

⁴ Lines from the poem: “I am taking my body back” by Rupi Kaur.

Eros Part I: Eros the Warrior

When a God commands you, you obey.
You force your heart to synchronize with the thunder of heavy boots.
Boots of Gods stomping upon the infidels.

Experienced, dark eyes scanned my soul.
Ares pierced where it was forbidden to peek through,
(Wretched souls, standing in line,
Sent to kill.)
A supreme legion, trained, lethal killers.
Complete, yet uncompleted.
Ares knew the fate of the world was hanging from a thread.
Was he overjoyed? He should be.
For he was a beast, a warrior, death incarnate.
As for me...
So much for being the God of Love.

And as for you,
yes, I am talking to all of you,
Ignorant and fragile creatures that you are.
I call you lucky bastards.

Souls and lives spilled down the well of oblivion.
We spilled ourselves for you.
A chance we were denied.
A chance ... I ... was denied.
So your prayers would never be left unanswered.
So you never lost your faith.

Instead, I lost myself.
I lost myself in battles and commands,
in scarlet scars stretching from my chest,
up and around my neck.
My collar of obedience.
A collar whispering of long lost innocence.
I opened my arms and embraced the God of War.
Love opened up and let the War come in.

Had Love run faster,
I would have dropped my arrow and bow.
I would have begged for mercy.
All the faces of the infidels I had killed.
Flinching and screaming
just before my wrath pierced their soft flesh.
I would have begged for her forgiveness.
I would have dropped on my knees, recognizing my queen.
My equal,
My companion.

But Love stayed away for years,
And war turned me into this.
The God of Love, a ruthless killer.
Do you enjoy this?

Soul Part I: Soul the Christian Soldier

When your mother commands you, you obey.
When your Lord commands you, you obey.
It didn't matter that I had auburn hair
and hazel eyes.
My fingers were destined to be calloused.
My spirit was destined to abandon my sinful flesh.
Don't be fooled.
When your name is "Soul," you obey.

I knew my destiny before I knew the world.
Before I learned the patterns on my palms,
the meanings of my thoughts,
how to be me and not ... me.
My mother took care of it.

The first time my mother held me in her arms,
she dipped me in water and announced:
"Her name shall be Soul."
Priests with his golden-gilded robes,
Saints with halos of innocence—
They decided for me:
A destiny to live besides the King of Kings.
A destiny of beauty.
Handed upon my trembling palms.
As if it was my choice.

Staggering the heavy name on my shoulders.
An ocean of names.
A dead lift on my feet.
Soul is not another Mary, Andria, Safiya.

Belonging to Him and not myself.
I was denied the choice.
A soul never becomes one with its host.
Like another parasite,
A vampire of sorts.
Leeching on my sinful flesh.
Desire and temptation holding my hands.

"To test you, love," He whispered.
"To see what you are worth."

My trembling heart knew what Love looked like...
From the first time I saw His icon.
Love was bloodied and bruised.
Love had nails instead of flowers in His hands.
Love had thorns instead of roses.

He was my destiny.

Convinced that love was right for me.
Pain and endurance would prove me worthy.
For as long as the human host contained me,
I had to push and pull. Resist.

Dear mother gave me one truth:
Love was an eternal test.
A test for strength.
For my endurance.

Love refused to hug me when I was down.
“Endure”
Love denied me consolation.
“Suffer more”
Love denied my human eyes to look upon His bright light.
But love was always there.
In the hymns my mother sang me to lull me to sleep.
In the icons, in every psalm and litany.
In the smell of essence and the flames spiraling on candles.
The Ghal was always there.

Soul Part II: Letter to Delilah⁵

To Delilah,
To the girl who had the courage to cut off the wings of a man stronger than her,
to pin him down to earth and rejoice in the power of her womb.
To the woman that was not afraid to fly higher than she was destined
and brought her lover to his knees.

I have been seeking for you.
For your guidance and wisdom.

“I shall make you queen,” He promised.
“Offer me the head of the man who sits on my throne. Consider it...a wedding gift.”
Did they promise to make you queen?
You are the first one, the one we look upon...
You are the original—
And we are the fake copies of your power, the stupid imitations of your truth;

Did you wait before your man was on his knees, fully trusting your caresses
and lulling voice, before you cut off his hair and handed it
like a fistful of change to a random stranger?
Or did you drain him of his semen, standing above him like another succubus,
sucking the soul from his marrow, till he had nothing else to give?
Do I have to be a succubus?
I can try, but all my life, they forbade me to use the power between my legs.
They muffled that voice and chained my womanhood shut.
A virtuous woman doesn't need her folds to bring a man
to his knees and make him beg for mercy.

(You can pretend, child)
(Lie your way to his trust)

Can you lend me your skin, to crawl my way through it?

(Hold my hand and hold on tight)

I have read about you.
The way you plunged your hands into your victim
Took his bouquet of chopped off trust.
I have read that to kill a god, it only takes a smile.

(Smile your way to his neck)

For a moment, I can pretend the smiles I give him are smiles just for him.
I can pretend not to flinch away from the knives I look at,
trying to make out the lines on my palms
The hair he asks me to let loose,
the breath I let him touch upon my shoulder.

⁵ Poem inspired by: “To the boy who may one day date my daughter” by Jesse Parent.

I can pretend I am not putting on a show just for the Ghal to watch.
I can pretend the knife on my thigh is another punch line
at the end of my performance
That the red velvet drape of his bed is just another curtain for me,
another stage.
I can pretend ...I am another you.

Like another Delilah, I sway my way across the room.

Keep your eyes locked with mine,
Mine for this night.—
Come to me, Father of Gods, I ... have been seeking you.

Eros Part II: Eros the Dreamer⁶

“I knew exactly what Love looked like”
The first time I dreamt her.
Calloused fingers,
Brushing through velvet drapes.
(A luscious bed in the middle of the room)
No, I hadn’t seen her face.
You see, clarity evaded me in these precious dreams with her.
“Always too much body and not enough time to see it.
Instead, she gave me her shoulder, her elbow, the bend of her knee.
Unwilling. She lent me her corners, her edges, the parts of her I could afford. She gave me
her eyelashes, the back of her neck, her palms.
And the spaces she never showed me,”⁷
The ones the Nazarenes call “*Private Parts*”,
“I made up for that by handing over all the private parts of me.”⁸

I knew exactly what Love looked like:
From the moment she opened her legs,
Willing to surrender to the Father of Gods.
Bloodied and bruised.

Even though I hadn’t met Love yet,
I would have recognized her at first glance, lurking behind my closed eyelids.
Love was innocent,
Love knew nothing of war,
Love was definitely not a *Nazarene*.
Love would not be afraid to let me in.
Love would recognize her mate. She would recognize me as hers.

And I knew,
Must have been searching the wrong places
The wrong nooks and corners,
She was there, I was sure of it.
If only I could find her.

⁶ Poem inspired by: “When love arrives” by Sarah Kay and Phil Kaye.

⁷ Lines from the poem: “Private Parts” by Sarah Kay.

⁸ Lines from the poem: “Private Parts” by Sarah Kay.

Eros & Soul: When Love Arrives⁹

Soul:

To have Zeus at your mercy is easy.
It only takes a woman.
If you want to be the type of woman Zeus desires,
You can let him take you.
If want to be the type of woman Zeus sleeps with,
You can let him slip into you.
But don't mistake his lust for Love.
You can show him only what longs to see.

It's not you he wants to touch.
Sometimes, it's the figure of Hera in every woman, in every girl.
Sometimes, it's the skin of acceptance he wants to bury himself into.
Sometimes, you are the safety blanket a boy clutches to his chest.
Zeus wants to clutch your breath and snatch it from your bosom.

Zeus doesn't mistake your knives for hands.
Zeus doesn't mistake your teeth for love marks.
Zeus doesn't mistake your revenge for desire.
Zeus knows a woman's lust when he sees it.

And the tree can't stop lightning from striking.

I ...am not that tree.
Before lightning strikes the same spot—
Run little one—
Run to save your Soul.

Eros:

The trespasser came into the night
She played with our minds, she stepped onto our land
Had knives instead of hands
Had ropes instead of legs
She turned Ares into a beast,
We can still hear his screams.

“Bring me her skin!”
“She tried to kill our Father!”

When Ares commands you: “Bring me the Harpy dead!”
You sniff, you search, you dive,
You look into the night,
the battle never ends.

⁹ Poem inspired by “When love arrives” by Sarah Kay and Phil Kaye. Also inspired by “The type” by Sarah Kay.

I say:

I am tired of using you for target practice.

But war never asked for my permission.

When war put the bow in my hands and pushed arrows of wrath into my veins,

War never needs to ask for your permission.

Eros & Soul

When Love finally showed up¹⁰

Eros:
Love was not innocent.

Soul:
Love was a marble statue of lust
Love was not trapped in an icon.

Eros:
Love was a harpy.
Dressed with malice and hatred on her face.

Soul:
Love was bloodied and bruised.
But, Love didn't have nails instead of hands.
Love held a bow in his hands.

Eros:
Love was a sacrifice, and Love was a warrior.
She hadn't picked flowers but thorns.

Eros & Soul:
It turned out: Love...was an enemy—
“But Love arrives exactly when Love is supposed to,
And Love leaves exactly when Love must...
Love was not ready for me;
I...was not ready for Love.
Love is not what you can predict.
Maybe Love stays only for the night,”¹¹
Escaping through the backdoor of your mind.

Eros & Soul:
When Love arrives, say

Eros:
Welcome, drop your blade.

Soul:
Drop your arrow and bow

Eros:
Come, step into my temple,
I have dusted the place for you

Soul:
Come, welcome to my church,
The windows are spotless, let the light come in

Eros & Soul:
In the middle of the war,
Thank you for stopping by...

¹⁰ Poem inspired by “When love arrives” by Sarah Kay and Phil Kaye.

¹¹ Lines from “When love arrives” by Sarah Kay and Phil Kaye.

Soul Part III: Soul the Apostate¹²

Hypocrites. That is what we really are.
Feasting,
pretending the shadow of war has not been cast
Upon us...
By us...
That is what they really are.
The priests with the gold-gilded robes of greediness and lust—
Pigs!

The Ghal tells you to come to His home with an innocent and pure heart,
though you know the Ghal's home,
has nothing to do with pureness or innocence.
The Ghal wants to communicate with you exclusively;
Through Fast and Prayer.
Through Abstinence from Life.
Don't fool yourself.
He will never be exclusive with you.
There are always so many souls to reap.

Let's play *Hide and Seek*.
You *Seek*.
He wants you to *Hide*.
The Ghal is furious when you try to *Seek*.
You stop seeking. You hide.

His vanity and complexes are your responsibility.
A stream of unsolicited temptations.
A mirror of His weakness.
Not a single opportunity wasted to request for nudes.
For exclusivity.

I sit in polite silence watching Him.
Slaughtered humans ornate His chessboard.
Pawns dressed in red.
Scarlet was always His favorite color.

When He calls me everything but my name,
I dress up as another Mary, Andria, Safiya.
Replete of my best memories,
Longing for all my missing parts.
Missing parts of me.

The Ghal hates how I look in that dress.
The Ghal doesn't get the point of pants and short dresses.
The Ghal says I look like a sinful whore.
I stop wearing those pants. Those short dresses.
(I didn't even like them anyway)

¹² Poem inspired by "Fuckboy" by Blythe Baird.

The Ghal promises heaven to all His creations.
Preaching servitude and obedience.

He doesn't ask me if I wish for a part in His heaven.
Has He ever asked anyone?
If He hasn't, let me make things clear for you.
You shall burn, dear. For the rest of eternity.
In the darkest and deepest cauldrons of hell.
This is the heaven The Ghal has in store for you.
The Ghal promises you a new closet with scorching hooks
Hang your tongue...
Hang your armpits...
Now, hang your breasts and hang your womb...
So, you make a new wardrobe for The Ghal.

The Ghal wears the new clothes you picked for him.
Appreciates your Fast.
Ignores your hollowed, haunted eyes.
Virtues.
Badges of honor upon the bruises of your soul.

You give up. I fucking give up.
He yanks my spirit as His pet.
A leash upon my soul.
Get on your knees.
Apologize and lick His shoes.

The Ghal pushes you against the wall, like a martyr nailed on a cross.
"Your voice a crushed tulip between the pages of His temper."¹³

You are the reason The Ghal found so much empowerment in sapiens culture.
But, you are still not good enough.
For Him.

I am good enough for me.
Claiming my name back from Him.
From Him, I snatch away my destiny.

A destiny wrapped around a set of arrows and a bow.

It took a monster, to steal my Soul away.
It took a warrior to reclaim me.

¹³ Line from the poem "Fuckboy" by Blythe Baird.

Ares

War spits on your love and scoffs at your games.
Because War knows that the only game that matters is your lives lost.
War knows that when the locks are locked and the lights are out,
when you shut your eyelids trying to escape into dreams of infinity,
War knows...he has the spare keys to your mind.

Here are some things you need to know about War:

1. War knows nothing of dates under the rain or candlelight anniversaries.
2. I know nothing of family reunions and uncles with bellies full of pride and mothers with hair buns and burnt kitchen gloves that smell of care.
3. I come in the middle of a school break and jump to play tag with you. I tag you under rumble and laugh at the corners of your bloodied smile.
4. I come in the middle in the night and take your father and your mother from their beds. I grab them with the pajamas on and use their fear to start up the house alarms.
5. I come and you snuggle under your bed, watching me rip off your favorite T-shirts and take out the eyes of your teddy bears. I come with boots stomping on your little safety blanket.
6. When I come, don't fool yourself and stay on your doorstep. Do not beg. Run.
7. I come and tug your hair from your scalp to keep you from the borders of peace.
8. I come and pick up your dropped bow and arrows, and all your blades...
9. Cupid is fucking irresponsible for letting me use humans for target practice.

(When people asked for protection, we became their shield...)
Tell me Eros...Are you her shield or the apple on her head?

10. War sets your arrow in your bow and shuts the lights...

Listen to the quiet, Eros...
Whisper...
*Thanks...for stopping by...*¹⁴

¹⁴ "When love arrives" by Sarah Kay and Phil Kaye.

Eros Part III: Eros the Broken¹⁵

Ever since I was a boy,
I clutched a blanket to my chest.
I tangled my legs around it,
snuggled beneath it
as if it was the last safe place on Earth.
As if it could keep the monsters away.
A haven of sorts.
No, it was not because I felt cold.
Winters and summers on repeat, the blanket never changed.
Go ahead,
Ask me why I never switched it for something lighter.
(Let's say a thin sheet)

You see, for me, love is like that blanket.
I snuggle beneath it
because it is heavy enough for me to feel
Its weight.
Its comfort.
You cannot fool me with a sheet.
A sheet cannot press
down on you,
encircle you,
and tuck you in.
Winters and summers on repeat, the blanket never changed.
Heavy enough to keep the monster of loneliness at bay.

When you don't have a body to tuck you in,
to feel its warmth
at your side,
in your palm,
on your skin,
you don't compromise with a sheet.
You suffer through the heat of summer and wait for winter's frost.

Loving you was the last thing I was really good at.
Loving you was like the weight of that blanket,
And my heart refuses to compromise for a sheet the same way.
I cannot untangle my soul's bond from your long-lost warmth.

Someone told me once:
"Soul mate is not the person that makes you feel the happiest.
But the one who makes you feel the most.
Who can conduct your heart to bang the loudest,
Who can drag you giggling with forgiveness from the cellar they locked you in.
It has always been you."¹⁶

¹⁵ Poem heavily inspired by Rudy Francisco's "Scars" and Sierra DeMulder's "Unrequited love poem- On watching someone you love, love someone else."

When life gives you a dream
You don't get to despair for waking up.
You don't get to mourn for being given the chance.
You see, the dream was never meant to replace reality.
When life offers you a chance, you squeeze the life out of it.

Now my soul is a dead language, and you were the last speaker
who could pronounce every word perfectly.
You will always bang the loudest inside me, and
I will dream of you more often than I won't.

Thank you...for stopping by.

* * * *

Love is an elevated topic usually associated with cheesy romances. "Arrow and Love" aims to restore love to its long-lost glory. The poems follow the transformation of Eros and Soul as they move from their fixed opinions on reality to the wonder of finding true love in the midst of war. After reading A Court of Mist and Fury by Sarah J. Maas, one thought tormented me day and night: What if Eros and Soul were not mere lovers but soul mates? What if Eros had been dreaming about a young, innocent human girl amidst his nightmares from war? As an individual fixated with the idea of eternal, irrevocable, unconditional, and destined-from-the-stars love, I re-imagined and revisited the myth of Eros and Soul, constructing their characters as the archetypes of soul mates. As an atheist, I felt the freedom to manipulate a religion I consciously abandoned and have it clash with a religion I always admired, thus rendering the difference between Christianity and Paganism as a dividing force between the two lovers. I decided to make Eros aware of his soul mate since he is a God and his soul and mind are more finely attuned. Soul, on the other hand, represents humanity, so all the information she gets about the world is filtered through her senses. Unfortunately, human senses are quite numb in comparison to God senses.

¹⁶ Lines from the poem: "Unrequited love poem-On watching someone you love, love someone else," by Sierra DeMulder.

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