

*Glauke's Gown: The Function of Myth*

MEDEA  
*A synopsis*

After taking the throne at Corinth, Jason the Argonaut, husband of Medea, fell head over heels for the pretty princess Glauke.<sup>1</sup> Medea, who had saved his ass on more than one occasion, became enraged with jealousy and sought revenge. But instead of “exacting revenge” on Jason, Medea aimed her site on Glauke. She soaked a beautiful gown in a secret potion that “stored up the powers of fire” and sent it to Glauke. When Glauke tried on the gown<sup>2</sup> it burst into flames so hot they melted the flesh right off her bones. She threw herself into a fountain, but the water only made the flames burn hotter.



**CHORUS:**            **Medea, Medea, you bitch!**  
                              **No wonder it's your name on our lips.<sup>3</sup>**

1. Yes, there are lots of names here, and if you know nothing of Greek mythology then it will be Greek to you. For the sake of clarity, say the role of Jason is played by Donald Trump, Glauke by Marla Maples, and Medea by Ivana Trump.

2. What the hell was she thinking!?! A gift from Medea, a woman who had dismembered her own brother in order to be with Jason?!? And what was Marla thinking!?! Signing a prenuptial agreement with The Donald that declared if the marriage didn't last five years she would get only \$1-5 million of The Donald's \$2 billion. How long did the marriage last? *Almost* five years. Big surprise. What were they all thinking, these women who love their men?!? Beautiful, yes. Wise...? Can't we blame it on environment, the inexorable way environment (i.e., the omnipotent media) molds young women into creatures who would do and say anything to get and keep their man. As a woman myself, I would like to blame it on environment, oh yes, for I am too ashamed to accept it as my “nature.”

3. This line appeared in Euripedes' original version of his play, *Medea*. His editor forced him to delete it for fear of offending the mainstream reading public.

*The Woman*

turns to **Her Very Best Friend** seated next to her on her living room couch in front of a TV that's playing a video of *Lover Come Back*, starring Doris Day and Rock Hudson.<sup>4</sup> **The Woman** and **Her Very Best Friend** are drinking Diet Cokes and eating salad and watching the scene where Doris realizes she's been duped by Rock and therefore gets mad, real mad, as mad as Doris can get.

"By the by," **The Woman** says to **Her Very Best Friend**, "you will *never ever* believe what I did last night!"

**Her Very Best Friend** leans eagerly forward, salivating almost, almost twitching with un-Doris-Day-like anticipation. "What what *what* did you do?"

"Well," says **The Woman**, cautiously glancing over each shoulder, first her right, then her left, though she's sitting in her own apartment where she lives alone, while on the TV screen Doris convinces Rock to strip down naked on a beach and then leaves him stranded there, taking his clothes with her, while **The Woman's** mouth expands in a grin tinged with evil: green sky pre-

LOVER COME BACK

*A synopsis*

Doris is a scrupulous virginal advertising exec who wears silly hats, and Rock is an unscrupulous womanizing advertising exec pretending to be a shy rocket scientist who's never been laid so he can (1) get in Doris's pants and (2) distract her from pursuing a new ad account for a product that doesn't exist. Basically, Doris gets to wear a lot of white—and, of course, those silly hats—and Rock gets to wear a beard and tweeds when he's not bare-chested and perpetually tan. The sexual tension is palpable in their love scenes. What talented actors! Considering that in real life Rock was gay and Doris was married four times.

4. BY THE BY: Doris Day would never ever harm another living soul. I am not the only one who knows this. When I was a child my mother resembled a brunette Doris Day and everyone therefore believed my mother incapable of malevolent behavior. Even my mother believed this when she looked in the mirror and smiled at herself like Doris Day smiling at Doris Day. My mother's thought of spanking the piss out of me for drawing on the living room wall with broken crayons in shades of red melted to the mantra, "I am Doris Day, benevolent humanitarian, a phrase which may in fact be redundant, I don't know, whatever, anyway, I would never ever harm another living soul, not even my spoiled brat of a daughter." Yes, it's true: Doris made my mother a *better human being and she saved my ass*.

dicting hail, "I called Jiri every hour on the hour and hung up without saying a word."

"And then what?" asks **Her Very Best Friend**, drool gathering in the cleft of her chin.

"Then what *what*?" **The Woman** asks.

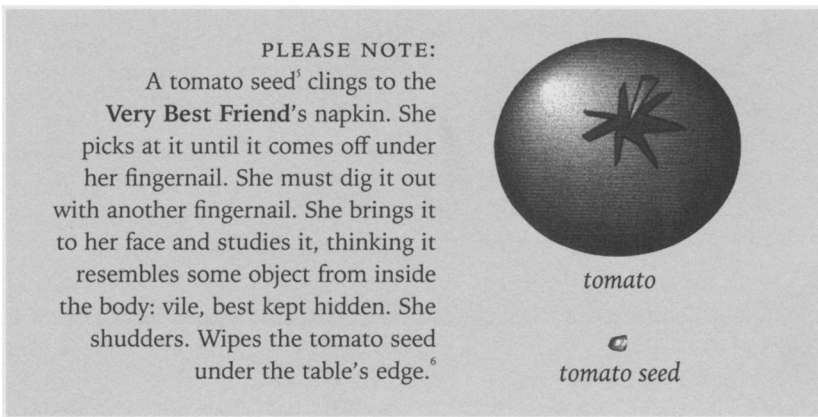
"What else did you do?"

"Why, nothing else!" Normally, **The Woman** would never ever begin a sentence with "Why,...!" but she has been watching Doris Day for approximately 57 minutes, and Doris Day has gotten under her skin, transformed **The Woman** into a woman whose language resembles Doris Day's language, not only in its vocabulary but its timbre: that sexy-but-celibate breathiness that is Doris, all Doris, why yes, Doris!

"Like I said," **The Woman** continues, "I called him on the phone about a hundred times and then hung up!"

**Her Very Best Friend** recoils—not from horror but from an exquisite boredom, tangible and pungent and weighted as if Death himself [Why is death always a man? Nature always a woman?] had just settled a wet mink coat around her shoulders.

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5. \*\*\*SHAMELESS SELF-PROMOTION\*\*\* See sections 9 and 11 of "Say What You Like" included in my first book *Drought*, published by New Directions (1997) and winner of the Thorpe Menn Award.

6. Days later a child will run her little hands underneath this very same table's edge and discover the tomato seed and pick it off with her tiny fingernail and stare at it long and hard. Then she will hold the seed toward her divorced-and-now-a-week-end-father father and exclaim, "Look, Daddy! A booger!" Daddy will glance around

“Wasn’t that just *awful* of me?” asks...no, *pleads* **The Woman**. Awkward demanding plea couched in Doris Day vernacular. Doubtful and hopeful all at once.

“Yeah,” **Her Very Best Friend** mumbles unconvincingly. “Awful.”

140 Desperate to be bad, very bad, bad to the bone, **The Woman** says: “It’s probably a crime. A misdemeanor at the very least. Harassment. I’m sure I could get arrested for it.”

“Right,” says **Her Very Best Friend**. Her eyes roll to the ceiling then stare at Doris Day singing on the TV screen, waist impossibly skinny below her impossibly pointy breasts below her impossibly golden hair, and quite suddenly she turns to **The Woman** and asks, “Are you gonna eat the rest of your salad, or what?”

### *The Art of Getting Bumped*

*In ancient legends the combustible cloak<sup>7</sup> was a weapon for exacting revenge. — Archaeology, March/April 1997*

There is nothing exact about revenge. As a science, it’s not. As an art, it’s possible. After all, it’s the creativity of revenge that makes it worthwhile. Originality of the act. Brilliance: Medea also murdered her children so that Jason would have no heirs.

**FIRST SON:** Oh, what can I do? How can I escape my mother’s hand? Where can I hide?

**SECOND SON:** I don’t know. Dear brother, we are lost!

Lost like the screams of children disappearing into water or smoke.

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the cafe to see if anyone has heard his daughter’s vulgar cry of delight, then brusquely clean the “booger” from her tiny finger with his paper napkin, then slap her hand hard and hiss, “Don’t pick your nose, do you hear me?” And she will somberly nod her little head—though she will not be able to make the connection between the table’s booger and her nose—and will rub her stinging little hand and start to cry until she remembers she is also not supposed to cry. When she grows up, she will become the Chief Financial Officer of a Fortune 500 company and date far younger men and be disparagingly referred to as “Big Bad Ball Buster” by males of equal or lesser corporate rank.

7. Also known as *tunica molesta*.

Susan Smith.<sup>8</sup> Debora Green.<sup>9</sup>

*“I had never felt so lonely and so sad in my entire life. I was in love with someone very much, but he didn’t love me and never would. I had a very difficult time accepting that.... I dropped to the lowest point when I allowed my children to go down that ramp into the water without me.... My children, Michael and Alex, are with our Heavenly Father now, and I know that they will never be hurt again. As a mom, that means more than words could ever say.... My children deserve to have the best, and now they will.”*  
— from the confession of Susan Smith

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*“I’m sorry my children are dead....Maybe God wanted me to be here to teach or tell me something. I cannot believe this is His plan for the rest of my life.”* — from a letter written by Debora Green in the Topeka, Kansas Correctional Facility

*Gazing at the World’s Navel...*

we discover lint.



“The human genome is a pigsty, bulging with non-genes, ex-genes, freeloader genes, viral detritus, pocket lint and chewing gum. All but a few percent of it appears to be doing nothing at all.”<sup>10</sup>

Date: Mon, 25 Mar 2002 3:04:02-0500  
To: prettygrl@bohemia.cz  
From: jcech@awol.com  
Subject: Ontological concerns

Dear You:

God created heaven and earth, and somewhere in between a Man and a Woman rose up out of the dust and recognized in the other not so much the means by which desire

8. Depressed over her bad marriage and bad love affair, she drove to a lake, put her car into neutral, stepped out, released the parking brake, let the car roll into a lake with her two sons strapped inside.
9. Depressed after her husband had an affair, she set her big house on fire. Two of her three children did not escape the flames.
10. Source: Natalie Angier, for *The New York Times* online, June 26, 2000.

could be met but the end of loneliness. They must have connected that first encounter, Man and Woman, must have seen in the other the image of who they were inside their own mind--Narcissus and his reflection, perhaps?--otherwise it would have ended there: no more dancing toward each other, dancing around each other, dancing inside each other, trying to get a scent on the shape of "companionship."

I tell you it smelled like the shape of a piano about to fall on my head.

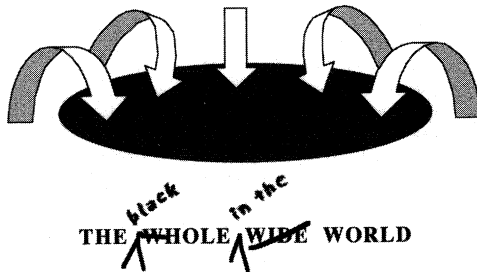
love,  
jirí cech

### *Picturing the Past*

The **Woman** cannot get the image of **Her Very Best Friend's** bored face out of her mind—though the TV is on and there's a war in Eastern Europe and people she has never met, now will never meet, *never ever*, are dying, will be dead in a matter of weeks days hours minutes seconds, are already dead, rotting even, mere flashes in the history of humankind (unkind humans!)—though she picks up the remote and turns up the volume and hears nothing—though somewhere, *out there*, indeed in a million neglected places, lives are coming to a horrible and tragic end—though all this and so much more, the face of **Her Very Best Friend** nevertheless stares back at her—*O how exquisitely bored!*—and she can think of absolutely nothing worse in the whole wide world.

#### QUIZ

- (1) Do you keep the promises you make to yourself?  
*No.*
- (2) Then how can you keep your promises to me?  
*Because I value you more than myself.*





*Revenge is wicked and unchristian and in every way unbecoming...  
(But it is powerful sweet, anyway.)* — Mark Twain

144 Dear Mr. Twain:  
Why is revenge sweet? I think it is bitter bitter bitter. The dried-blood taste it leaves in your mouth between your teeth remains far too long. Like limburger cheese. Like literally kissing someone's ass.<sup>12</sup>

**MEDEA:**            **Let no one think of me as weak, the object of  
                              their simpering pity or contempt...**

But, Medea! *Sweetheart!* Don't you get it? Don't you understand that the mere act of revenge is a confession to having been somehow wounded: betrayed, insulted, humiliated, shamed. And not only have you been wounded, you've stooped to advertise your wounds, for revenge lets **THE [black] WHOLE [in the] WIDE WORLD** know your pain, therefore confirming what you already suspect: *You're not worth your salt, baby.*

So the asshole left you for a younger more beautiful woman, so what? It's not about you, it's about him: His need for power and acceptance, more hair, bigger pecs, a thicker longer harder dick.

Take my advice: The best revenge is to lick your wounds in private—or find another lover and lick him. In public always pretend that it's not blood you're trailing behind you but an extraordinarily passionate and somehow corporeal...*aura!* That, or learn to write fiction wherein you can exact your revenge sweetly while simultaneously claiming to improve humanity.<sup>13</sup>

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12. Okay, I've never literally kissed anyone's ass, though I have pressed my lips to a lot of other things, including limburger cheese. My ability to relate limburger cheese with someone's anus is the result of IMAGINATION! The point being, I suppose: *The best revenge takes imagination.*

13. \*\*\*SHAMELESS SELF-PROMOTION\*\*\* See "An Interview With My Husband" included in my second book *Prayers of an Accidental Nature*, published by Coffee House Press (1999).



13. Please read the following passage for comprehension:

A certain Czech director whom I met at a certain film festival said he once asked his wife (a certain Czech actress whose name begins with the letter D) what she would do if he ever had an affair. D replied, "I'd kill her." The director cried, "Why her? Why not me?" And D pinched his scruffy cheek and cooed, "I could never kill you, darling, you're my husband!"

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### *How Fast Are You Going?*

Date: Mon, 01 Apr 2002 10:41:55 -0600  
To: prettygrl@bohemia.cz  
From: jcech@awol.com  
Subject: Here and There

Dear You:

Now you can go from lost to found at the speed of light. The way we find each other here in virtual space, our virtual love for one another. Let's never meet. Let's never learn each other's gestures, the way you might push your red (blonde? black?) hair behind your ears over and over again and again until I want to scream, break your wrist, wait until you have fallen asleep some fog-ridden night and take the blue-handled scissors and cut off your beautiful but unruly red/blonde/black hair. Trust me now: I don't want to know the smell of your morning breath, unwashed crotch, stale farts & belches. From this remarkably clean distance even your anus smells like fresh-bloomed lilacs, or cinnamon sticks in coffee, or the breezes of my youth in Bohemia forever vanished beneath the smoke and dirt of culture, or lack of culture.

(Yes, it's true: more dog shit on my doorstep.)

Oh, You! There You are! There! at the speed of light and I love You. Please don't betray me by insisting we meet. Don't prove your infidelity by wanting too much.

Please,  
jc

## *The Color of Revenge*

She believes everything must have a color. Therefore:

What is the color of revenge? Not red, an impulsive hue of quick anger and undeterred lust. No, revenge is slow burning, cool and calculated, blue and clean like propane. She dresses in pale blue silk, naked beneath the cool slip of a dress, nails stripped of polish, hair still wet from a good scrubbing and no cream rinse or conditioner to weigh it down.

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## *Picturing the Past: Part Two*

### QUIZ

- (1) Leave me the hell alone, will you? *But why don't you love me anymore?*
- (2) I just don't, that's all. *Tell me the truth.*
- (3) All right, I've met someone else. Satisfied? *She's younger than me—and a lot taller.*
- (4) How do you know that? *You're parting your hair differently.*

## *When People Seek Excellence They Look for a Sign*

Date: Fri, 05 Apr 2002 16:11:45 -0500  
To: prettygrl@bohemia.cz  
From: jcech@awol.com  
Subject: I Want You

Dear You:

Here the day begins when the sun comes up. No more lingering in bed where it is warm and smelling of sweat and cum! Yes, I masturbate. What did you expect? I'm a man with sexual energy not easily quashed. If you were here that energy would go into you--literally and figuratively.

The thought of my cock in your cunt excites me even now.

But let me repeat: I don't ever want to meet you. The probability of our mutual disappointment depresses me so much I want to weep, claw at my eyes, tear at my hair, and I've wept and clawed and torn so much already.

argh!

jirí

*How Fast Are You Going?*

**The Woman** and **Her Very Best Friend** are eating enormous salads at the Cheep Salad Bar<sup>14</sup> and talking about work and now shoes as if the war in Eastern Europe were a commercial for *New and Improved!* tampons. Though **The Woman** now dislikes **Her Very Best Friend** to an irrecoverable depth, she pretends affinity. Nevertheless **Her Very Best Friend** senses something amiss in **The Woman's** behavior but attributes it to PMS or gas.

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Why the pretense? Because **The Woman** has a secret which she shall soon reveal, a gleam of victory and pride in her eyes (victory in right eye, pride in left) to **Her Very Best Friend** who will stare in awe, she is certain, awed by her wit and intelligence, stare in awe at least up until the moment **The Woman** says:

**THE WOMAN:** Moses removed his sandals before the Burning Bush, afraid to desecrate the ground from which God arose as living flame. He knew his place in the scheme of things, humbled himself before a power so incomprehensible that its only route of manifestation was a shrub whose fire would not go out. Moses recognized omnipotence and was thusly rewarded with the power to part waters.

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14. Salads again, as if eating healthy, when in fact each salad contains over 1,000 calories and 34 grams of fat, and the lettuce and other fresh vegetables have been heavily sprayed with preservatives to extend their shelf life, and the cottage and cheddar and blue cheeses were made from cows fed hormones and antibiotics in order to produce more milk. As I write this cancer cells have begun multiplying in the left breast of **Her Very Best Friend** while here it has just begun to rain outside my window. I can hear the trembling of leaves, whisper of grass. All birds have gone silent, and the breeze is sweet and cool and clean. Such moments make one reconsider the weight of things—not the body's weight for it will lighten to dust or ash soon enough, but the weight of what's on **The Woman's** mind as she waits for **Her Very Best Friend** to finish yet another story about her loathsome boss. Outside it rains and there is nothing I'd rather do at this moment than stand barefoot in the wet grass, lift my face to the sky, recall the first time I stood in a summer storm, and for a tender moment believe I am once again a child weighted only by rain. Incredibly, it is this very same yearning that flashes through **The Woman's** mind as she bites into a tainted snow pea, therefore missing part of **Her Very Best Friend's** I-loathe-my-boss story. Which, in hindsight, she knows is a blessing.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. A half-hour before the Moses bit—which has absolutely no relevance to this story, not even to me (who wrote it), I just like the image of Moses going barefoot, thinking the soles of his feet would somehow be cleaner than the soles of his sandals—**The Woman** speaks:

**THE WOMAN:** I placed an ad in the Personals under Men Seeking Men. I received 72 responses and replied to all of them with unbridled enthusiasm, signing Jiri's name and listing all of his phone numbers—home, office, and cell—plus his pager number and his e-mail address. I enclosed a photograph of him, the one I took at the beach last summer where he looks kind of like Rock Hudson in *Lover Come Back*.

Curious Minded Very attractive PWM, 42, over 6', 180, muscled, hung, seeks HWP SGM to explore long repressed sexual desires. Please be gentle! Ad #1002A<sup>14</sup>

**Her Very Best Friend** is dumbfounded. She says, "I'm dumbfounded." Later that day she makes the long walk from her parking space to her office. She is preoccupied and moody. By the time she sits in her ergonomically correct chair and brushes a strand of hair from her knitted brow and picks an aphid from the Wandering Jew on her desk, she has decided that (1) **The Woman** is insane, (2) she no longer wishes to be **The Woman's Very Best Friend**, (3) Doris Day's acting talent was grossly underrated, and (4) she no longer wishes to be associated with **The Woman** in any way, shape or form. Her wish will come to pass; **The Woman** will not give a shit.

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14. PWM: Professional White Male. HWP: Height/Weight Proportionate. SGM: Single Gay Male.

## *And A Mountain of Evidence to Prove It*

Date: Wed, 17 Apr 2002 10:50:08 -0800  
To: prettygrl@bohemia.cz  
From: jcech@awol.com  
Subject: Scatological concerns

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Dear You:

Well, it's not dog shit, it's pig shit. Don't misconstrue: I'm not a shit expert. I'm not even into scatological humor. But I took quite a large pile to the local vet and had it analyzed. She, the vet, wasn't eager to accommodate my query and was for some reason upset with the \*amount\* I'd brought as evidence, but I paid her as much as it would have cost to surgically remove shit from a pig's anus, so she agreed to do the analysis. Pig shit! I asked her, the vet, where someone would have gotten pig shit in this city? She told me, "Well, it's not shit from a pot-bellied pig, that's for sure. The turds are too thick." (I don't think she actually used the word "turd.") "Then where?" I demanded, for I was by this time extremely vexed. The vet said, "There's a corporate pig farm up north, about two to three hours away. They have plenty of pig shit. Maybe she got the shit there." And I said, "She? She? What makes you think it's a \*she\* who's leaving pig shit on my doorstep." And the vet gave a smug little snort of a laugh and said, "Who else would exact such clever revenge but A Woman!" Then she handed me all the pig shit in a plastic bag, which I took, though I'm not sure why.

Oh, You You You! The whole world has gone to shit, hasn't it? For You are there (where I wish You to remain) and I love You and am lonely for the woman You are there not here where You'd be ordinary pathetic redundant somehow less than You are there.

Love,  
jirí

**CHORUS:        O this cannot have a happy ending!**

Date: Sun, 21 Apr 2002 08:19:15 -0500  
To: prettygrl@bohemia.cz  
From: jcech@awol.com  
Subject: The Power of Myth

Dear You:

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Replicating a moment from the prehistoric past, a dragon stands defiantly outside my window. If I were a coward, I'd be scared shitless. No pun intended.

jc

**CHORUS:**        **O this story will end ~~sadly!~~**  
                  " " " " " " **madly!**  
                  " " " " " " **badly!**

*And A Mountain of Evidence to Prove It*

All right, maybe this isn't about Glauke at all. Maybe it's about Medea. But why, I ask, why not Glauke? Why do victims not pique our interest? Why only the victimizers? When we think of Susan Smith, why don't we first remember her children, wonder about them in their last moments of living, the utter disbelief in their fluttering little souls, pounding on the rear window of the car sinking into the dark dark death-water, screaming, "Mommy! Mommy! MOM-MEEEEEEEE!!!" Utter disbelief as only children can disbelieve, utterly: believing the opposite more palatable story must be must be oh has to be true, doesn't it, Mommy? Mommy!?! MOM—

Worse perhaps than their deaths are victims fading in our collective memory while their perpetrators grow to mythological proportions. And so do we love more deeply, admire more particularly, the killer in our souls?

QUIZ

Circle your preference:

(select only one)

prey

predator

Date: Wed, 01 May 2002 19:50:38 -0600  
To: prettygrl@bohemia.cz  
From: jcech@awol.com  
Subject: Watch Out!

Dear You:

It must be a coincidence, some glitch in the space/time continuum, incontestable proof that we are destined for one another (as long as we keep our distance) for it can't be otherwise.

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But how could you possibly think I'm the culprit? I don't even know where to get pig shit, having no idea what the hell a "corporate pig farm" is. All I can say is, if there's pig shit on your doorstep then there must be a dragon nearby. Watch your step, darling--figuratively and literally! And think of me and my own hellish sidestepping here while You are there. And tonight why don't You dream of me hovering like some future saint over You, virtually real, real enough for love, the way we love here in this clean world of emptiness.

Always, always,  
jirí

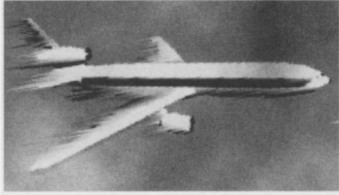
**THE WOMAN: Moses removed his sandals before the Burning Bush, afraid to desecrate the ground from which God arose as living flame. He knew his place in the scheme of things, humbled himself before a power so incomprehensible that its only route of manifestation was a shrub whose fire would not go out. Moses recognized omnipotence and was thusly rewarded with the power to part waters.**

Maybe Moses does have something to do with this story after all. Moses kneeling before the burning bush, a bush aflame, flame as the voice of God: vengeful God who could and believe me would kick some major ass when it came to exacting revenge. Frogs and locusts and disease and a fiery (again fire!) hailstorm?

We don't need a psychopath to teach us vengeance. We have God.

## *How Fast Are You Going?*

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*(Medea appears above us in a chariot drawn by dragons.)*

## *Things Certainly Aren't What They Used to Be*

No. Certainly not.

When a jet-lagged body thinks it's morning not even a hearty dinner will help. Not even the chiming of church bells in the piazza nor a slap in the face nor ice water on the genitals. Will help.

Yes, after a long night of killing on the other side of the world, **The Woman** is tired but can neither sleep nor stay awake. She hovers somewhere in-between, caught in a bardo state wherein reality and dreams overlap so precisely that there is no distinguishing fact from fiction / fiction from fact. Much as in the case of a reader who suspects that the author's inventions / intentions are more deeply seated in truth than imagination.

Thus **The Woman** wonders if, in a small third-floor apartment in Prague, crumpled in a corner like a rag doll carelessly tossed aside, a pretty young Bohemian woman by the name of You is really burning to death inside a tunica molesta or if in fact it was all just a fantasy to mollify the desperation rising inside her like a wet wasp from a cracked mud-heart.

**CHORUS:**        **No Woman could resist that gown.**

*Not even You who thinks herself above crass materialism. And so You put on the lovely dress, the surprise gift, and stand before the long oval mirror admiring Your beauty. And You think it must be love—an astonishing and welcome form of self-love—that makes Your skin burn beneath the gown. Until the burning/the loving intensifies, grows unbearable beneath the fine fabric that smells faintly of petroleum. And it is then the world converges—*



*scraps of stories loosed in time folding into one another, gaping seams stitched tight and catching fire. Fire of Your love, God's voice afire, You are on fire and not even a cold shower will put it out.*

No. No.

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“[P]etroleum, sulphur, and lime...ignite and burn in ways similar to the descriptions of Medea's...cloak. Petroleum products are notorious for flowing, clinging, unquenchable flames.... Sprinkled with water, quicklime becomes slaked lime, which can generate enough heat to cause spontaneous combustion, and water would feed these flames.”  
—*Archaeology*, March/April 1997

**CHORUS:**        **Ah, revenge! Sweet revenge. Sticky revenge.  
Humanity's favorite pastime. Exxon never  
had it so good!**

Jesus-God-and-Mary-too **The Woman** is tired! She collapses onto the bed and thinks of Doris Day in *Lover Come Back*, there at the movie's end where Doris is pregnant on a gurney, being wheeled into the hospital delivery room just as Rock arrives to rescue her from solitude and single motherhood and silly hats. *Rescue her not necessarily because he loves her, thinks The Woman, but because he knocked her up.* She lays her hands on her flat belly and thinks, *If only I'd gotten pregnant. Oh, well. Too late now. Too late.*

She stares at a water stain on the ceiling of this foreign hotel room—in Vienna? Budapest? Sofia?—and thinks how its shape reminds her of him, the man for whom she feels such passion that to call it “love” seems a denigration, a bastardization of the soul. Water stain resembling his face with chin scar and lazy eyelid and one crooked tooth on the bottom like a weary young soldier no longer able to stand at attention.

“Ten-hut!” she hears: rasping of knife on whetstone.

“Ten-hut!” fading now. Fading:

“Ten-hut!”

“Ten-hut!”

“Ten-hut!”