

Songs of the Metamythos

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Prelude

I WAS DYING; I was sure of it, because my mosquito bites had stopped itching. That, and the skeleton in the black dress, sauntering towards me with eerie grace, seemed...well, a dead giveaway. I would have chuckled, if I hadn't been scared shitless.

Then again, maybe it was just a trick of the light. The skeleton was gone now, replaced by a woman whose every move muttered desire as dark as her dress. The color of her eyes I couldn't say, since I was lost in their black pupils, swimming and then drowning in them, engulfed in her gaze. Those eyes! Cool as a satin pillow on a summer night; here lay an ecstatic tryst, or a blissful rest, and the capacity to smother life. The sudden force of attraction left me more shaken than the skeleton had.

"Hello," the mystery woman said, calling me by name and extending her hand. "Let's not waste another moment here; I know you're dying to meet my father."

At that, I suppressed another chuckle. I had no idea what this woman was talking about, but I would follow her anywhere, to hell and back if need be, just for one more approving glance from those eyes. It was never in question whether I'd take that offered hand.

The moment I did, our journey began.

I slipped free of the constraints of my body and watched it fade away, not so much in distance as in memory; though I could still feel my heartbeat, a bit removed, like an echo. Wherever we were going, we were traveling fast, and the world around me grew dimmer and darker by the second.

“Don’t be afraid,” the woman said, but I clutched her hand tighter and felt my own pulse pounding. I couldn’t stop my mind from flashing back to my earlier thought...about following this woman all the way to hell.

“Where’s the light?” I said, only it came out as a child’s whimper. “There’s supposed to be a white light, like at the end of a tunnel.”

This time it was Death’s turn to chuckle. “You’ve been paying too much attention to tabloid nonsense.”

Those were the last words she would speak to me. For the instant the darkness was complete, Death’s hand slipped away. Panicked, I groped for her in vain, unable to see even my own hands groping, or any other part of me—a “me,” I realized, that might not even exist any longer. I found myself yearning for that insufferable tingling of the skin the mosquitoes had brought me, any sensation to remind me of my flesh. Nothing but the sound of my racing heart reassured me; the total black was the only tangible presence. This is the dark that comes when your eyes have closed forever, I thought, and surrendered to that whimpering child, abandoned.

“You’re not alone. You never were.” A velvet voice, male.

“Who are you? I can’t see you!”

“That’s the point,” he said, but the way he said it felt as if he’d draped an arm around me. “Since the day you were born you’ve relied on your sight, when you can only see so far, only look one way, at any given time. You should listen more. You can’t imagine what you’ll hear!”

But all I heard was my own heartbeat, the rhythm to which my whole life had been played. The beat grew fainter...faltered...and then stopped.

Silence.

“*Now* listen,” he said.

There was little else I could do, deprived by the dark of my usual senses. So for what seemed the first time, now that I was no longer preoccupied with the myopic details of my own canceled existence, I listened without distraction.

This is what I heard:

I heard the mosquitoes that moments ago had plagued me, that maddening whine in my ear, only it had been transformed; now I heard it as a dance of air molecules, pirouettes of aerodynamic lift along a membranous wing...I heard light refracting through feathers, turning them iridescent blue as a swallow caught those mosquitoes in midflight...and I heard that swallow's sleek form sculpted over generations by the relentless demands of an unforgiving sky...I heard a million worlds spin around their suns, to discover they were the atoms in a drop of rain... I heard a lover's quarrel unfold in hopelessly imperfect language and marveled at meanings lost and found...I heard their sweat and stink and awkward angles transformed by passion into poetry...I heard new stanzas written in life's twisted molecular tongue...I heard seasons, I heard migrations, I heard the crescent moon in a starry sky...I heard whirling galaxies of light and dust distilled to a dance to gravity's tune...I heard one cosmic speck whisper in all its complexity, my own dead body weaving its soft theme in a minor key.

I was struck speechless.

"Such music...I never dreamed!" I said once I recovered my voice. "Will I meet the Creator of it all, the master of its plan?"

"It has no master, no plan," the velvet voice of Night answered, "and you have known one of its creators on the most intimate terms. The singer and the song are one."

Feeling that perhaps he was being evasive, I realized that the answers I sought might be right before me, hidden in the dark. "The song is your doing, isn't it?"

"Interesting question," Night said, and paused to consider. "You could say it will be my song, one day a long, long time from now."

At this I became exasperated. “Speak plainly, please! Where does the music come from?”

Night shrugged, his black robes swirling in perfect spirals that in the perfect darkness no one would ever see, and answered: “You make it up as you go along.”