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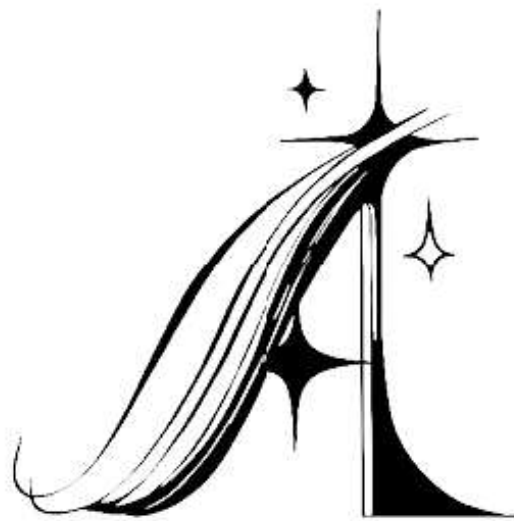
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# Hecate's Twin

Matias Travieso-Diaz

"The battleline between good and evil runs through the heart of every man."

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the Gulag Archipelago

As Asterias' pregnancy advanced, her husband Perses became increasingly worried. It was not only that the provenance of Asterias' offspring was dubious—she had been pursued by Zeus, who may have coupled with her in disregard of her husband's rights—but the unborn within exhibited frequent signs of agitation, causing Asterias great pain and anxiety.

Perses feared that his wife might be harboring a monster in her womb.

When Asterias came close to term, Perses could no longer withstand the tension. He took his wife on a trip to Pytho, the sacred precinct in which sat Pythia, the sibyl who was consulted by gods and men regarding matters of the past, the present, and the future.

Pythia was an old woman of blameless life, who always sat alone on a tripod in an enclosed inner sanctum suspended over an opening in the earth. Out of which rose intoxicating fumes, causing the sibyl to fall into a trance. In this state, she prophesied in a litany of ecstatic speech—ravings which were translated by the temple's priests into a speech that replied to the questions posed to Gaia. As she sat, Pythia chewed oleander leaves and inhaled their smoke, writhing as she was possessed by the spirit of the mother Earth, herself.

Perses posed two questions to Gaia, through the sybil, "Will my wife give birth to a mortal human child? And will this child bring a blessing to the world?"

The sybil's incoherent response, as interpreted by the priests, was, "She will deliver a mortal female human, fair in appearance but of evil disposition. The child shall cause great distress to many but she will give nurture to another who will seek to undo the harm she causes."

Perses was confused by the prediction, which was obscure, as the sibyls' utterances tend to be. On their return home, he and Asterias spoke at length, deciding what to do.

Finally, Asterias acknowledged, "My main concern was that I might be carrying a terrible monster in my body. You know I have not been able to remain faithful to you—after all, we are both of the defeated race of the Titans, and with the loss in battle we were deprived of our immortality and became subject to the whims of the Gods."

"I understand. But the question remains, do we allow this creature, whoever's child she may be, see the light of day?"

"Pythia said that she would be fair..." pointed out Asterias.

"But wicked, by the sound of it."

"But at the end she will bear another child that will redress her evil."

Perses sighed, "I suppose we will let events run their course, and do our best to raise her into a virtuous woman. Have you thought of what name to give her?"

"I would like something like ekon, that is, willed for. How about Hecate, 'the one whose existence was allowed?'"

"Fine. I hope that in the future we will not be blamed for her crimes."

\* \* \*

Hecate lived up to the sibyl's prediction. She grew into a beautiful and seductive woman, yet she had a dark side Preferring night to the light of day, always dressed in somber garments, and often seen in the company of a large black dog. Despite her peculiarities, in her dealings with others, she always achieved her ends through a combination of charm, cunning, and dishonesty. She used her talents to become the tyrant of her city, a position she exploited to enrich herself, favor her friends, and banish or punish her enemies.

In short, she terrorized all those who dealt with her. She triumphed, but she was unhappy.

Since the days of her early childhood, Hecate had been fighting a war with a small part of herself that often resisted her will and opposed her ambitions. She did all she could to quell the opposition of her secret adversary and was careful not to reveal its existence to her parents or friends, but as her stature in the world grew, her inner conflict became more intense.

Hecate had been told numerous times a sanitized version of her parents' trip to Pytho and the prophecy the sybil had rendered of Hecate's future (which always omitted the part about her wickedness). She finally decided to travel to Pytho herself and challenge the seer about the flawed forecast she had delivered. Pythia had passed away, but her successor, under the influence of the sacred fumes, delivered an astonishing new prophecy:

"There are two souls inhabiting one body. Their conflict will cease only when they become separated."

At first, Hecate interpreted the prophecy as alluding to some form of spiritual cleavage, a malady in which her mind was tearing itself apart, but the pain she felt was too physical to lack a corporeal origin. So she traveled to Pergamon to visit with Asclepius, the most renowned practitioner of the art of iatrikē (medicine). Given her high rank, she was welcomed at once, and given a potent drug that induced a semi-conscious, dream-like state in which Asclepius questioned her about her symptoms while conducting a thorough physical examination.

Later, Hecate awoke and found Asclepius ready to deliver his diagnosis.

"My lady, you have been carrying a guest in your body all your life."

"A guest?" replied Hecate, incredulous.

"Yes. My best guess is that your mother was carrying twins. You were the dominant, or more powerful, of the two and, little by little, overcame and largely consumed your sibling. But she managed to survive as a parasite, ensconced in your belly. Your twin has lived off your substance and your blood for all these years and has matured enough to have a separate intelligence. Somehow, she conveys her thoughts to you. It is like having what we call a *suneidêsis*, an awareness of one's own moral failings and a sense of being in the wrong, only made manifest within your body."

"What can be done about it?"

"I could try to operate on you, open you up and, remove your twin. But such an operation would be quite risky and we may discover that removal might cause irreparable damage to your body. The decision is, of course, yours but I would recommend against it."

"So, what options do I have?"

"We could proceed with the surgery, try to locate your twin, and assess whether it would be possible to extract it without killing you. If so, we would attempt to cut her out—she must have attached herself very tightly to your body—and hope for the best. If not, we would sew you up and ensure you recovered."

"What else can we do?"

"In the absence of a removal, you would have to try to make peace with your tenant or learn to ignore her."

Hecate took no time to reply, "I am quite capable of getting my way by out-reasoning or out-talking my opponents. Now that I understand what I am dealing with, I can very well deal with an overstaying fetus."

Asclepius let slip a thin smile. "As you say. But please remember that your twin knows you well and probably has some intelligence, so she might be more difficult to overcome than your local politicians."

"We shall see."

\* \* \*

Hecate went on to rule for many years. Over time, she learned to temper her behavior to placate her twin. She would ultimately be remembered as a moderate ruler who curbed her earlier excesses with the wisdom of old age.

She ordered that upon her death, her corpse be sliced open right away and examined. Those who carried out her command discovered within her chest cavity, below her heart, a tiny humanoid female who only stopped breathing when she became exposed to fresh air.

# **Davy is Floating**

**Glenn Dungan**

One morning, I woke up and Davy was floating and Grandma told him to stop but he wouldn't. Then she went to take a shower because she had Pilates. My brother Davy just turned 18.

He lurked in the foyer, arms splayed out like he was tanning on a floatie atop a pool. I poked him, but he wouldn't budge. This reminded me of when we thought my dad was sleeping but wasn't and then we had a funeral. That was a couple of years ago. So I pleaded with Davy a little bit more, hoping he was just sleeping. I pulled up the kitchen chair and Grandma yelled that I was going to scuff the floors. I touched the ceiling with my fingers because I could.

Davy's eyes fluttered saccadically, which here means moving his eyes as if reading, or