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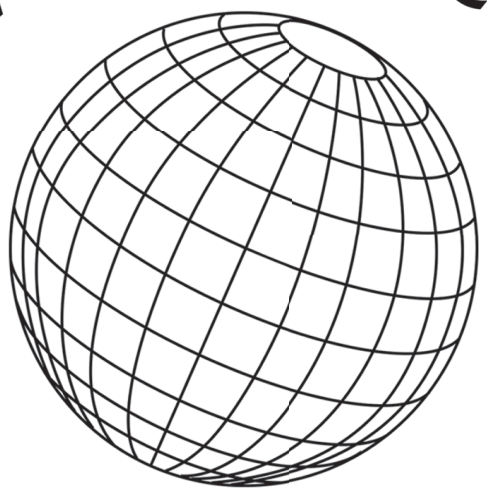
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RADIANCE



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corsair

CORSAIR

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Sappho translation on page 413 by Francis Fawkes

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For Heath, who taught me about light
and my father, who taught me how to get the shot

Chronology

(Some dates are approximate due to known issues with reconciling standard and sub-light transit calendars.)

1858: Conrad Wernyhora and Carlotta Xanthea launch the *Tree of Knowledge* from the Hawaiian islands, Earth

1872: Violet El-Hashem born in Marrakech, Earth

1876: Hathor Callowmilk Corporation founded

1883: Percival Unck born

1891: Mary Pellam born

1902: Proserpine, an American colony on Pluto, is destroyed. Cause unknown.

August 1908: Mary Pellam's first significant role (*Meet Me on Ganymede,* dir. Hester Jimenez-Stern)

24 March 1914: First episode of *How Many Miles to Babylon?* broadcast throughout the inner Solar System

29 October 1914: Severin born in the Lunar city of Tithonus

6 January 1915: Premiere of *The Red Beast of Saturn* (dir. Percival Unck)

25 January 1916: Erasmo St. John born on location in Guan Yu, Mars

1917: Enyo, a Russian mining settlement on Mars, is destroyed. Cause unknown.

3 July 1919: Premiere of *Hope Has No Master* (dir. Percival Unck)

1921: Severin sees Mary Pellam for the first time in *The Seduction of Madame Mortimer* (dir. Thaddeus Irigaray)
1922: Percival Unck and Mary Pellam wed
1924: *The Abduction of Proserpine* (dir. Percival Unck) released
3 July 1924: Anchises St. John born in Adonis, Venus
14 January 1930: The *Achelois* sets sail from Tithonus Harbour for *The Miranda Affair* (dir. Thaddeus Irigaray) wrap party
1936: *Self-Portrait with Saturn* (dir. Severin Unck) released
Christmas 1937: Erasmo and Severin become romantically involved
1938: *The Famine Queen of Phobos* (dir. Severin Unck) released
1939: The *Stone in Swaddling Clothes* departs for the Outer System
1940: The *Clamshell* built
1940: Fifth Venusian census, the last to record the village of Adonis
1941: *And the Sea Remembered, Suddenly* (dir. Severin Unck) released
1943: *The Sleeping Peacock* (dir. Severin Unck) released
June 1944: Moscow Worlds' Fair / The *Clamshell* departs for filming of *The Radiant Car Thy Sparrows Drew* (dir. Severin Unck)
16 November 1944: The *Clamshell* lands at White Peony Station for *Radiant Car* principal photography
21 November 1944: *Radiant Car* film crew sets out from White Peony Station
1 December 1944: Crew arrives in Adonis, Venus, first contact made
2 December 1944: Auditory phenomena commences
3 December 1944: Severin disappears
1946: Erasmo St. John debriefed by Oxblood Films
10 October 1947: Severin's funeral *in absentia*
1951: Severin's funeral

1959: Production begins on *The Deep Blue Devil* (dir. Percival Unck)

Spring 1959: Posthumous publication of Erasmo St. John's book *The Sound of a Voice That Is Still*

1960: Major rewrite on *The Deep Blue Devil,* retitled *The Man in the Malachite Mask* (dir. Percival Unck)

Winter 1961: Major rewrite on *The Man in the Malachite Mask*, retitled *Doctor Callow's Dream* (dir. Percival Unck)

Summer 1961: Major rewrite on *Doctor Callow's Dream*, retitled *And if She's Not Gone, She Lives There Still* (dir. Percival Unck)

December 1961–October 1962: The action of ~~*The Deep Blue Devil* *The Man in the Malachite Mask* *Doctor Callow's Dream*~~ *And If She's Not Gone, She Lives There Still* takes place

Locations

The Moon 

Mercury 

Venus 

Earth 

Mars 

Jupiter 

Saturn 

Uranus 

Neptune 

Pluto 

Being unable to retrace our steps in Time, we decided to move forward in Space. Shall we never be able to glide back *up* the stream of Time, and peep into the old home, and gaze on the old faces? Perhaps when the phonograph and the kinesigraph are perfected, and some future worker has solved the problem of colour photography, our descendants will be able to deceive themselves with something very like it: but it will be but a barren husk, a soulless phantasm and nothing more. "Oh for the touch of a vanished hand, and the sound of a voice that is still!"

—Wordsworth Donisthorpe,
inventor of the kinesigraph camera

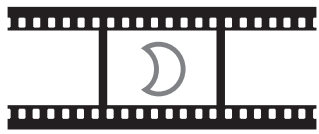
Light makes photography. Embrace light. Admire it. Love it. But above all, know light. Know it for all you are worth, and you will know the key to photography.

—George Eastman

Talking pictures are like lip rouge on the Venus de Milo.

—Mary Pickford

Come Forward!



Come forward. Come in from the summer heat and the flies. Come in from that assault on all senses, that pummelling of rod and cone and drum and cilia. Come in from the great spotlight of the sun, sweeping across the white sands, making everyone, and therefore no one, a star.

Come inside and meet the prologue.

It is dark inside the prologue. Dark and cool and welcoming. Whatever is to come, the prologue welcomes you absolutely, accepts you unconditionally, receives you graciously, providing all that is necessary to endure the rest. The prologue is patient. She has been told often that she is wholly unnecessary, a growth upon the story that the wise doctor must cut off. She has time and again found the doors to more fashionable establishments closed to her, while tables are set with candles and crystal for a top-hatted in medias res*, a pedigreed murder at midnight, a well-heeled musical number. This does not trouble the prologue. She was fashionable when plays still began with sacrifices—and if you catch her in her cups, she will tell you that any show that jumps into the action without a brace of heifers burning centre front still strikes her as a rather tawdry affair. The prologue is the mother of the tale and the governess of the audience. She knows you have to bring them in slow, teach them how to behave. All it takes is a little music; a soft play of*

lights; a flash of skin; a good, beefy monologue to bring everyone up to speed before you expect them to give a witch's third tit who's king of Scotland.

The prologue is where you take your coats off. Relax. Leave your shoes at the door. Invoke the muse, call down whatever royal flush of gods you want pulling the action between them. O Muse, O Goddess. Sing, Speak, Weep. Give unto me the song of rage. Hand over the arms and the man on the double-quick. Hit that horn and play me the voice of the many-minded traveller who could not get home. Keep a front-row seat for that masked demiurge, a plum spot for that jazzy old Word in the Void, or let it be on your head.

So come in. Let your eyes adjust. We need your eyes. Let the chartreuse pop of the sun's afterimage fade into the blackness we have thoughtfully provided. The floor creaks underfoot: slick, yielding wood, green as an olive in a martini, fresh from the forests of Ganymede. You can smell it lightly, under the lime polish. Ashes and copper. Let the dark scoop your ears clean, scrub out the bubbling champagne-cacophony of the world you have only just left behind. We need your ears. And we want your hands as well. We are all primates, after all. We love to touch; we love to interfere with objects. Nothing is real until you can touch it. Your sight will sharpen in time; the shadows will lift and separate like curtains. You will find pages under your eager fingers: pages, phonographs, objects great and small but mostly small, resting on pillars of Uranian saltrock carved into cresting, foam-gnarled waves, trusting their flotsam to your keeping.

Come in, come in, there is so much to see.

No sitting down, though. We need you standing. There's a projector here, just there—have a care, sir—to your right. Another—mind your hems, madam—to your left. But you will find no screen. You're it. If you'll gather in . . . yes, just so, all in a row like good little daisies. Tall folk to the rear, small folk up front. Now, if you are comfortable, we can begin.

This is a story about seeing. This is a story about being seen. All else is subservient. The ears assist; the hands comfort. The only verbs that matter are verbs of vision: look, see, watch, observe. Gaze. Behold. Witness. The eye is our master, and the eye worships light. That which makes light is good, that which takes it is to be feared. We have taken it from you, but we will give it back again. Make of that what you will.

God—if you will forgive such sweeping pronouncements so early in our acquaintance—is an eye.

It would be better if you would consent to disrobe. Skin is the most intimate and perfect of screens. But having come from so many ports and climes, we do not expect your taboos concerning modesty to match up perfectly with ours—why, thank you, miss, you are most kind. And sir, we are greatly obliged. The matron seems to be having some trouble with her costume; if you could assist her, young lady? Thank you. You have all proven yourselves wonderfully gracious and liberal-minded. You are an audience we do not deserve. Perhaps it is a relief after the heat to shed silk and leathers? Nevertheless, we are thoroughly impressed. We shall endeavour to make ourselves equally naked, equally bare, equally vulnerable to iris and pupil, whose bites are ever so much fiercer than teeth.

The clatter and whirr of the projectors pick up like wind across a long desert. Look down. You can see a woman with dark hair and unhappy eyes moving silently on your bellies, your breasts, your thighs, your feet. Upside down, shorn of colour, flickering. Bent and cut up by the curves of your bodies and the age of the film. You see her as you see anyone in this world: distorted, warped, reflected, refracted, contorted, mutilated by time.

Perhaps you recognize the scene. It was once a famous film, after all. She was once a famous woman. I hear you say her name, sir—but this is our show, pray allow us to reveal things in our own time.

Observe: It is daytime in the movie on your chest. The crew is setting up the morning's shoot. The director of photography, a great, broad-chested fellow with a smart moustache, shaves in a mirror nailed to a cacao-tree. The looking glass hangs at a rakish angle, half-sunk into furry black bark. You will know by the tree that he stands upon the surface of Venus, not far from the sea. It is late summer. A spot of rain glimmers on the lens.

Yes, my dear fellow, you know his *name, too. You are just awfully clever.*

The DP uses a straight razor inlaid with a scrimshaw of fossilized kelp. You will find it along the east wall. Do not be afraid; it has not dreamed of sharpness since its profligate youth. The blade belonged to his grandfather, a merchant sailor who played the bassoon—a most impractical instrument for a seaman, but how the old man loved his pipe! The scrimshaw shows a sea serpent, each scale lovingly etched, as round as fingernails. The director of photography is shirtless, his skin as dark as unshot film, his face angular and broad. He catches a glimpse of the woman in his mirror and whirls round to catch her up. He kisses her with a resounding smack you cannot hear, smearing shaving cream on her face. She laughs noiselessly and punches his arm; he recoils in mock agony. It is a pleasant scene. Some phantom discontentment pops like a flashbulb in her eyes and obliterates itself into love.

Observe: It is evening in the movie on your legs. A small boy, head bent, dressed in the uniform of a callowhale diver, walks in small, tight circles in what was once the centre of a village called Adonis. The houses and outbuildings look as though they have been gored with great horns: lacerated, burst open. Long, squalid lashings of what appears to be white paint spatter the ruins. But it is not paint. Adonis, the lost city, destroyed, obliterated, without reason, without warning. A mystery that pulled a woman across the stars and down into its scarlet seas. The boy does not look up as the camera watches him. He does not see himself being seen by the

film crew, by the audiences to come, by us. He does not see his echo; he does not hear his projection. He simply turns and turns and turns, over and over. The corrupted film skips and jumps; the boy seems to leap through his circuit, flashing in and out of sight. Clouds drift down in long, indistinct spirals. Celluloid transforms the brutal orange of the Venusian sun into a blinding white nova. Beyond him, pearlescent islands hump up out of the foamy sea of Qadesh: callowhales, a whole pod, silent, unmoving, pale.

Now. Gaze, behold, witness: A third projector judders on, seeing but unseen, hidden in the curtains. It fires its beam at the laughing couple, the shaving cream, the razor that once belonged to a bassoon-loving grandfather. Image over image over flesh. The woman seems to step out of her lover's arms and into a ballroom, becoming suddenly a pouting, sour-faced little girl practically drowning in the stiff lace and crinoline of one of those old Gothics we love so well—would you care to name it, sir? You know so much; I will not believe for a moment you do not recognize The Spectre of Mare Nubium, *the marvellously morbid masterwork that earned its director, Percival Unck, his first Academy Award. Your fine chest sports the classic ballroom sequence, wherein the blood-soaked villain receives her much-deserved comeuppance. The little girl can be seen crouching miserably near the rice-wine fountain, chewing her fingers and spitting the nails at the whirling dancers. The grand dresses of the waltzing ghosts pass over her face like veils.*

Please, ladies and gentlemen! Your protestations destroy the dark quiet of our little universe. I can see you leap quite out of your skin. You must be prepared for these interruptions, invasions, intersections. They are necessary. They are the exhalations of the dead. Humans do not proceed in an orderly fashion from one scene to the next. Memory lies underneath happenstance; hope and dread sprawl on top. Our days and nights are their endless orgies.

Now, listen: Our phonograph scratches up a man's voice and a

small girl's, the very girl who at this moment is flickering silver and black on your thighs, sinking her face into balled fists under the murderous Clarena Schirm's banquet table.

"How many beginnings can a story have, Daddy?"

The man chuckles. It is a nice chuckle, tobacco-velvet, a chuckle that says: Oh, the questions my kid asks!

"As many as you can eat, my lamb. But only one ending. Or maybe it's the other way around: one beginning but a whole Easter basket of endings."

"Papa, don't be silly," the child admonishes in a voice accustomed to getting its way. "A story has to start somewhere. And then it has to end somewhere. That's the whole point. That's how it is in real life."

The man laughs again. You like his laugh. I like his laugh. We cannot help but feel well disposed toward a man with a laugh like that, even though it is not really his, but a laugh he learned at university, copied meticulously from his favourite screenwriting professor as you and I might copy from our neighbour during an exam.

"But that's not how it is in real life, Rinny. Real life is all beginnings. Days, weeks, children, journeys, marriages, inventions. Even a murder is the beginning of a criminal. Perhaps even a spree. Everything is prologue. Every story has a stutter. It just keeps starting and starting until you decide to shut the camera off. Half the time you don't even realise that what you're choosing for breakfast is the beginning of a story that won't pan out till you're sixty and staring at the pastry that made you a widower. No, love, in real life you can get all the way to death and never have finished one single story. Or never even get one so much as half-begun."

"Papa, you're babbling. Ada says you have to stop that. She says you're full of hot air."

"I'm full of many things, I'm sure. Very well, you do so love rules! I shall make some up for you on the spot, so that my little

moppet is not forced to wander the world in a soup of stories without laws. A tale may have exactly three beginnings: one for the audience, one for the artist, and one for the poor bastard who has to live in it."

A bright cascade of giggles splashes out over the crackle of the phonograph. The child lowers her voice to a whisper: "I like it when you swear."

And at that moment the child leaps out of the phantasmal throng of dancing ghosts, out of the frame, out of The Spectres of Mare Nubium*, and shimmers into the shape of the Venusian boy, his serious expression so like hers, turning in endless circles on a grey lawn.*

Her name is Severin Unck. She is ten years old. She is talking to her father, Percy.

She is dead. Almost certainly dead. Nearly conclusively dead. She is, at the very least, not answering her telephone.

Welcome. This beginning is your beginning. We have saved it specially for you. Shall we?