

Eyes of Janus

by Mehmet Kerem Türkcan

"You are going to need lots of that ink," Silvius examined the green vial with his handcuffed arms, "if you truly wish to recreate a believable story for this strange swindle of yours. You see, the national margin of astonishment is rather limited nowadays; after all, especially in universities like ours where you find people like me, people don't always get to retain the responsibility to cut their dreams short and keep their hopes high. As such, nostalgia becomes a matter of believing the past and forcing yourself into remembering your former follies. After a while, you regret everything. You see, it seems it may be too late for you, even your face shows it- of course, it will all depend on the way you execute things on this rather radiant stage, and whether or not our truly superb advisors will be in the mood to appreciate their superiority."

"Well, surely, we aren't that many;" Mercurius laughed, and dropped his small waterskin. From the windows of the colorless dome, beams of light stretched far, brightening the dying forest around their seats, blurring the marvels of the world with lucid dreams. "But I think we may be onto something here, with all this junk and people deliriously searching for your worthless memories. Sometimes, the way I see it, a bit of memory can change a lot of things, and that's why we still have some museums in the shining systems in the east. And day by day, those momentous stars of our essence fade as though something is never too right here and there; you see, yesterday we even found a copy of Gilman's Merry Days in the northern mines, a tragedy in most common name, about some noblemen -- called Boswell and Johnson-- and their usual wives and their ever-dominant pruelity. The structure is that of Alexander Pope's: biblical, elegant, funny and extravagant. Irony, you see, was a rare talent to have back in those days, and that's how this rather ridiculous story was able to gain its prominence among the restless wretches of humanity's final days."

"Indeed, we have been too bound to our rationality and our idle struggles to conceive the level of consciousness of our masterfully crafted, but ultimately imperfect arts," Silvius continued; "...Say, you don't think these ruins you talk about are real, do you? Well, let's say, at least for now, that I know they are imitations; and that's why I will never come near them. They are terrifying, I surmise; they remind me of those ancient massacres in the starless systems. Even though it was millions of years ago and I was merely a child of common ancestry back then, I had seen it all with my eyes, when they were still an uncommon shade of amber. What would you say? Does your story cover these views, these revulsions and these suspicions? If not so, then surely they are going to understand, and it will be well over before it even began."

"It's not as if you do either, which turns this absurd dialogue of ours into a lavish duel of words one could otherwise use to bring wisdom among the many colonies scattered across the seas." Mercurius said, smiling. "I know many communities which would consider your words to be those of their magniloquent prophets. And perhaps, you would be famous then! However, you see, we are going to be so rich and powerful we aren't going to need anything if we succeed. And it seems our ticket out

is now coming. Even though, I fear, this plan is doomed to fail again."

Instantly, a roaring made the masterwork pillars of the building vehemently tremble; the sound changed its shape every moment, and it was the strangest of things Silvius had yet seen in his life. The dome went dark and the windows turned to opaque, dark walls for a moment. Then light, nearly unexpectedly, returned to the dome. It was solemn and silent, and all they were left with was a broken heap of events never happened.

"Is it them?" Silvius asked, almost whispering. But there was no need for an answer, and he knew it.

Corporal Fenix entered the dome, wondering why Mercurius had called her; as far as she was concerned, he was just a naive scoundrel and a worthless fool who couldn't be of any help to them. However, she respected her commanders even when they were boring old men - were it not so, surely she would have stayed in Freya's Hand. Then she saw the bright windows of the dome and was reminded of Jasmine's soliloquy in Saturnus and Victoria. As she approached, Mercurius clapped his hands and joyfully began:

"Miss Fenix, how you honor us in this God-forsaken place! I was expecting someone a little less attractive, actually- pardon my tongue, I've not seen my wife for days."

"A Tortesian with a wife, really? Now that would be interesting..." Silvius laughed.

"A half-Tortesian, boy. There's a huge difference between the two, and happily she didn't live long enough after my birth, so I'm actually a citizen of our noble kingdom, miss, if that would please you."

She was actually disgusted to know that mongrels like him were given citizenship nowadays. We are really in decline, she thought. But it had been like that since the elections. And it was just getting worse every day. Someone had to make something happen soon.

Mercurius used his clownish smile after he stopped talking, hoping to give a good impression of a perceptive man as she talked. She didn't talk though, and it all looked very absurd, as was written in the script.

"Wise move, miss! Straight to the point, I always say; you see, if you don't know- I am, or at least I prefer to call myself, a specialist: I find things, and if I can't- well, I just create them. And while I prefer the latter-"

"We prefer the former." She interrupted. He was a slow speaker, the slowest she had ever seen. He tried to talk like a professional, but ultimately he was too cold and theatrical. He was far too occupied with his performance to think about the man behind his relentless masque.

"Quite, quite. And it took me a lot of time, but finally I've found the one I seek. And he just happens to be the one we all seek."

"Corporal Fenix, I present you Silvius Gilman, renowned writer and famous anthropologist. He is our key to the past- the last human to die, and the first to live again."

Fenix was frozen for a moment: she was confused; for if this moment was indeed real, many things were not; and it was all very stupid and meaningless. So, she concluded, this was all a joke, and possibly, a trap.

"What do you mean?" she asked as she took a step back towards the door.

"Well, you see..." Mercurius began, and went to see the green bottle and the pages around it. "This is the stuff we've found in the north. These are the things humans apparently used once to record things like history, literature, lives and memories. Time appears to have erased all but several of the pages; and they talk of Mr. Gilman here, how he was buried under them and all that. He was, it appears, like a god in their eyes, with the ability to turn his writings into reality. Aeons later, he seems to have found a way to turn his thoughts into reality too, and, while contemplating an untimely death, died. We know him only through his books and plays, but there is, of course, more to his follies than solely writing. Come, see him explain it for himself."

"No, I won't have someone as important as Silvius Gilman spend his time here on this forsaken desert, S. Mercurius. It is just impossible to know how much damage was dealt to his memories during the resurrection process. You usually need a good clinic to do that, but I can see from your eyes that you were just too blinded by your intuition to even think of that."

"I never do, Miss Fenix. You know that." Mercurius said, presumptuously smiling.

"Amen to that, Miss Fenix." Silvius stood up. They walked together, almost happy, as the last lights of the day entered the dome in which they were to remain forever, away from their sinking stars. She wondered for a moment how she was called there. She didn't remember anything at all. Maybe, she was searching for something once, in this place. Something about her job, her worries and this and that. But no longer. She had Silvius, and she would have everything she ever wanted now: Money, power, satisfaction. And she would never return to the dome again.

Mercurius was left alone then, alone like he had always been. He looked at the bottle and examined the green fluid within. Many years he had spent in search for it. He had expected it to bring fulfillment of self and the mastery of fate. But it was nothing more than nepenthe, nepenthe and a moldering prison of the mind. For there was nothing but weakness in men, and without that weakness, men were prisoners of themselves, terrible tyrants of universes that never existed. Forever, chained behind the tomb of Janus, the god of doors and beginnings and endings, they held within their reality the last breaths of a meaningless self. This gift, he proclaimed, had to be guarded. Or else, he thought, people like Fenix would use it to turn the universe into a better and worse place for everyone within.

"Oh... another day, another story. But this time, I seem to have let my imagination take hold of me. Note to myself: that will not happen ever again. I promise. I really do." Silvius Mercurius Gilman said as he filled his timeless pen with the green mockery of ink and began writing a story entitled *Eyes of Janus* once again.