



Prologue

Councilman Cyprian Purpura was always considered to be a pillar of the community. He was popular because of the jobs and prosperity his sapphire mine brought to the town, as well as the way he vanquished the mightiest warriors from the rival township of Ostia Major.

Despite having decapitated three men, (two in battle and one in gladiatorial sport) slashed the throat of a thief in his home, and bludgeoned to death a drunk who had insulted his wife, Cyprian never considered himself to be a killer.

Not of people anyway.

And certainly not of the woman who lived in the small cottage on the southern edge of town.

Her name, or rather her alias, was Seneca. She lived with her husband and their young, adopted daughter, and together they tended a garden famed throughout the region for producing some of the rarest and most useful herbs and fruits, many of which refused to grow anywhere else.

Cyprian knew he couldn't kill her. It was a widely known fact that it was impossible to kill an immortal goddess.

But he was curious to see what would happen if he tried.

So he unsheathed his knife, which was made of polished amethyst, and studied the way it gleamed in the moonlight for the fifth time that night.

The other councilmen watched him anxiously.

There were nine of them there in total, wielding an assortment of blades and knives. The tenth Councilmember, Pygmalion, had refused to come. He had also refused to explain why.



That was what made the others anxious. They constantly wondered if he knew something they didn't.

But then, they all knew he was a queer one in the head.

So they followed Councilman Purpura because the logical and more ambitious part of their minds told them to.

They followed him into the warm summer night, where the air was full of pollen and fluttering insects, and the sky was filled with distant stars and nebulas without a cloud to be seen.

It was such a peaceful night to fulfill their plans of debauchery.

As if compelled by some unseen instrument of time, Cyprian chose that moment to point his knife forward, giving his peers the signal to proceed.

The nine leaders of the town went forth, creeping towards the little cottage on the hill.

Cyprian and two of the other councilmen walked directly to the front door, while all the rest approached by the rear. He knocked politely as they hid their knives.

After a moment, they heard the sound of a bolt being drawn back, and the door opened to reveal their target.

She looked surprised.

"Councilman Purpura...what an honor," she said. "My apologies. I expected no one at this hour."

He just smiled and asked, "Would you be so inclined to invite us in?"

The woman who called herself Seneca opened the door wider and let them inside.

She was well regarded as a beautiful woman, and many a man, present councilmen included, were envious of her husband. She had grey eyes, freckled skin, tawny hair, a shapely body and an earthy feel from the dirt beneath her fingernails and worn spots around the knees of her dress.



However, the councilmen weren't there because of how she appeared.

"My husband shall return soon," said Seneca as she led them to their kitchen, where various dried-out plants hung from the ceiling and coals from the fire were smoldering in the fireplace. "However, I can lend you my skills in the interim. Is there an herb you require from the garden?"

"No, not at all," said Cyprian just as a young girl with light brown skin and a simple white dress sleepily came into the room.

"Are you going to tuck me in, Mater?" she asked, rubbing her eyes.

"I shall be right there. Just go back to bed," replied Seneca.

Her daughter spared a curious glance to the councilmen, but then went back to her room as she had been told.

"I am sorry, but what did you gentlemen come here for?"

Cyprian smiled. "We know what you are," he told her simply.

She paused, but didn't betray any emotion. "I have naught the slightest idea as to what you mean."

"Is that so?" he continued. "As there is a series of events that have led us to believe that you know precisely what we mean. Ursacille, if you would please," he indicated to the councilman next to him.

He stepped forward at the mention of his name and cleared his throat.

"We have, of course, the tale of the brook which was turned to wine for over a week, oddly enough, coinciding with the butcher accidentally crushing your hand in the door. Then there were the birds which burst into flames and left an egg or two in the ashes after your husband said you had been bitten by a snake in the woods. And let us not forget that old orchard by the river, whose farmer, as we all know, hated his peach trees with a passion, and had them somewhat mysteriously replaced with apple trees



the same time you wore a bandage on your hand after cutting it in your garden,” he listed. “The pattern of all these things, of a woman whose injuries changes the nature of the world itself, is peculiar in its resemblance to a certain myth we teach our children.”

“And last but not least,” said Cyprian smugly, “I overheard your dear husband use your real name the last time I was here.”

“Perhaps you misheard, and I am only the troublesome magician who cast a spell on all those things,” she suggested, refusing to concede their insinuations quite yet.

“We both know there is no such thing as magic,” replied Cyprian. “Not yet anyway.” He slipped his knife out of his sheath, as did his fellow councilmen.

The woman they called Seneca frowned. “I see...Well, in that case...” she slowly raised her finger, pointing at the councilman on Cyprian’s left. “I revoke thee.”

And just like that, he collapsed, his eyes rolling into his head without a hint of life in them.

She pointed to the man on Cyprian’s right. “And thee as well.”

The effect repeated itself.

By now, Cyprian had overcome his shock at how swiftly his comrades had fallen and began to rush forward to attack.

There was no way for him to reach her before she uttered the fatal words, but he got lucky. The councilmen who had entered through the back door tackled her to the ground.

She tried to say the words anyway, but by then it was too late. Her impact with the floor was enough to injure her, meaning her power to steal back human life was subdued.

The councilmen grabbed her by her wrists and ankles and hoisted her up onto the kitchen table, while she struggled and screamed all the way.



The noise brought her daughter running back into the kitchen. “Mater!” she shouted in terror. “What are you doing to her!?”

One of the less occupied councilmen grabbed her by the shoulder and held her back.

“You know, Veritas, the old stories say that a single cut to your heart gave you and your husband the power to make all the life on earth,” said Cyprian, holding his dagger over her. “I wonder what a couple more would do.”

“No!” she shouted, but she couldn’t stop the numerous blades from plunging into her flesh.

She arched her back in pain, but no blood poured out from her wounds, and suddenly, it was not flesh which they had stabbed.

Her skin became inky darkness, and her freckles became stars and her eyes became nebulas. The humble kitchen became awash in different colors, including several that hadn’t existed before that moment.

As Cyprian’s blade pierced her heart, the councilmen felt a great power flow through them. One that very nearly made them masters of reality itself.

It was too bad that a greater power smashed itself through the front door and began to slaughter the councilmen. That power being Veritas’ husband.

Summarily, all the councilmen but Cyprian, who was quick to jump out a window, died in brutal retribution: with many limbs and heads parting from their respective bodies in the process. But what was done could not be undone.

For Cyprian Purpura never regarded himself a killer of humans. Where once he was only the killer of lesser creatures, he was now the killer of worlds as well. Specifically, the world before the goddess of truth was struck down.

