

Prologue

Athena - An Empyrean Tanka¹

Sometimes a god is
created to replace the
loss of another.
I found Goddess Athena
and she found my true Anthi.

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What an unclear year 2020 had been, followed, of course, not off course, by 2021, and 2022 appeared to be heading in the same dire direction! The culprit was multilayered and will not be mentioned in this story, my tale, if I can help it at all. I will, however, point out that the welfare of this *pale blue dot* should always surpass any aspirations to live on the Moon or Mars. Earth is our optimal place for living and thriving; every other place is folly as long as we can save this heaven.

This strange narrative begins in Montreal, steadfastly the greatest Canadian city, although I may be biased having lived on it, between 1978 and 2021, for close to 30 years. It all started on this island but occurred online on an odd writing platform called Medium², which I joined near the end of July 2020 but eventually mostly left on the last day of 2021 for a number of reasons, which are also not the topic of this story but that will be surely, although partly, mentioned somewhere along the way.

I know that I was fortunate to have “met” a Greek writer on Medium, followed by a Greek Goddess, and to have fallen, then, in love with Greece. But the country, the place, the state of mind, turned out to be a woman. I found myself both laughing and crying while writing many parts of this story, which spans over a period of a year; perhaps several more months if I also include some of its traces in a significant number of preceding weeks.

I am still unsure about the true originator of my love for Greece. Life’s complexity dictates that it must have ranged along a continuum of causes, all conducting to the same effect, except that Greece turned out to be a woman of substance, an Athena of this world, a living goddess who captured both my mind and its connected chest. The heart is but a blood pump, since feelings begin in the brain and are then felt within the chest. Mine tends to flood when she is near, whether within or in the fiction. I feel blessed by the gods of yore, especially Goddess Athena, as you will discern throughout this extraordinary story in which love appears on the stage and may never forsake it.

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Greek Inspiration - An Acrostic³ of Scope

G-force I beseech you to let me escape Earth
Returning is no longer an option for me
Every cell of my being weeps over my birth
Earth was never my suitable place to be free

¹ A tanka follows a 5-7-5-7-7-syllable scheme.

² <https://medium.com>

³ A piece in which a particular set of letters, typically the first letter of each line, spells out a word or phrase with special significance to the text.

Karma is a conception I never embraced
Instead preferring to behave predetermined
Negating every other option I erased
Several half-witted pathways undetermined
Please Zeus show me the way to her place in the sky
I always felt that Athena was the true one
Reverberating in my mind and heart to lie
At her feet with the hope that her heart I have won
Ten years of my life I will gladly sacrifice
Intending to become whatever she deems right
O Athena you are my only paradise
Nestling against your breasts in everlasting flight

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This story includes poetry in several genres, although the sonnet and the alexandrine (Greek Inspiration is also an alexandrine) are the principal ones that I use to convey love under several forms. Each of this story's five parts can stand on its own but is presented chronologically, although time and space may be displaced at times for the sake of their art. *We possess art lest we perish of the truth* (Nietzsche).

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Cryssarina's First Visit

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Part 1 - Athena Did Not Move

With two rakish vaccine shots behind her, Cryssarina decided to take a trip, her first visit to blue-and-white Greece. She had recently learned from a Greek source, an unusual goddess-like woman, that her name may have had Greek roots, like a tree keen to find its kin amid uncaring humans and unrelenting concrete. Cryssarina? Greek? It sounded serious in her mind and her heart. She had no soul to speak of, since she regarded it as a synonym for mind and also disliked the term given its religious connotations. The only gods but especially goddesses she liked happened to be Greek as well, thanks again to this special Greek woman she fondly called, Anthi, short for antithesis of everything unkind.

The masked flight was awful to be blunt and concise. Most people took off their masks to eat and consume the plane's culinary delights. Cryssarina felt sick. How could anyone eat anything, even with the mask off? she thought between her blue-and-white visions of yore. No food or bathroom for a few hours seemed more than sensible in midst of a pandemic. She was used to it given her intermittent fasting, although water would also be absent during this shorter-period flight compared to her daily sweet sixteen-hour fasting. She tried to sleep throughout the air disturbances both inside the plane among the other humans and outside among the chalky clouds floating effortlessly in the cerulean sky.

Greek customs were like an Athenian breeze upon showing them her fully vaccinated form. It became as important as a passport. Cryssarina took a taxi to her hotel, rested a bit to collect her excited thoughts, took a Greek shower, and strolled outside to get some fresh air and a taste of authentic Greek cuisine. A Greek shower? I can imagine some of you wondering. It only means a shower where instead of singing anything, one sings in Greek or thinks with every cleansing movement of a Greek god or goddess. Cryssarina was thinking of Goddess Athena. She was one of the reasons that she had travelled to Greece. She also hoped to find Patrick roaming around one of her statues and bring him back with her to Canada.

As she was breathing into her being everything Greek, she was also thinking about Anthi probably reading something worthwhile or writing something poignant and unusual. At one point, while drinking some Greek bottled water, she felt at home. It was a strange feeling to have out of the blue and the white. All three of them — M, Patrick and her — did not have any Greek roots, unless like trees, their roots had once been connected or very related by proximity when they were born not far from the legendary Mediterranean. Maybe Athena will know, hoping she will come down from her stand for a heartfelt chat.

The Moon and the stars seemed to be Greek too in that enchanting evening. Cryssarina even looked at them from her balcony before resting for the night. What about M? some of you may have thought. M was probably writing with his other two narrators. He was actually glad to see her leaving for Greece to meet Athena and find Patrick. A part of him regretted their silly fight. But wait! I can almost feel at least one of you wondering that if Cryssarina is in Greece and M and the two remaining narrators are in Canada, who is telling this story? Who is the narrator? I cannot reveal myself in this story. I may, however, in another one, Zeus permitting, of course.

The Sun's early rays caressed Cryssarina like a lover who had never left but remained invisible except to her heart, via her mind, of course. She asked the taxi driver to take her to the nicest statue of Athena but changed her mind on the way, requesting to be driven to the one least conspicuous instead, figuring that Patrick would probably be there, where Athena could be more easily touched. Patrick could be practical from time to time when given the right space. The driver seemed perplexed but drove her there first, knowing that she will ask him to drive her, after but a few minutes with the rather ordinary statue, to the first one he had envisioned in his mind. How human of him! I thought. How could Cryssarina know what was on his mind?

She kissed Athena's feet and asked for her help, but no apparent sign from her was there to be ascertained. Athena did not move. Cryssarina looked around the place and asked several passersby if Patrick had been seen, describing him as a cat dressed in a Santa suit. I am kidding, of course. No one there at that time had seen anyone that looked like him. She kissed Athena's feet again and returned to the waiting taxi, the driver smiling to himself, as he was giving another ride to the same passenger.

The nicest statue was not any better, even with Cryssarina's many kisses and prayers. Please, Zeus! she implored at one restless point while looking towards the direction of Mount Olympus. Please, help me find Patrick! Only her heart moved but she did not give up. She came to Greece for at least two weeks, both days and nights. Perhaps she will converse with Goddess Athena on one blessed day and or find Patrick having a keto coffee with coconut milk not too far from her. Zeus only knows. Maybe Anthi could help.

Part 2 - Athena Moved Her Right Foot

Anthi Psomiadou has graciously agreed to be included as a fictional character in this unusual visit by Cryssarina to Greece where she hopes to speak to Goddess Athena and find Patrick who may still be alive somewhere wandering around her but possibly someplace else.

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Ancient Greece was robbed by Rome, slowly but surely. Luckily, a lot of the architecture was left almost intact, including all the gods and goddesses that Rome unabashedly copied and changed, including their names. Modern Greece in turn was robbed by the European Union (EU) that brought it to its knees with its inhuman financial edicts reminiscent of those perpetrated by Rome. The EU is almost like Rome, especially that most highways in Europe lead to Brussels, its administrative *cor non grata* (“heart not welcome”). But this is not a story about the EU or Brussels. Rome, however, plays a certain underlying part.

Cryssarina woke up to a second day in Athens, the city always protected by Goddess Athena, even during World War II (enough with the Roman numerals); I mean, World War Two. But where were they, the Greek gods and goddesses when the Romans took over? Briefly, the Greek peninsula lost most of its body to the so-called Roman Republic during the Battle of Corinth (146 BCE), when Macedonia was turned into another Roman province. Southern Greece, however, while also under Roman control, saw a few of its key city-states (poleis) remain partly autonomous and thus avoid the crippling Roman taxes and rule.

The Greek gods and goddesses may have decided to remain on Mount Olympus, allowing the humans to continue with their deadly war games, often betting on winners and losers. Goddess Athena was probably the only one chagrined by what she witnessed. Is it any wonder that M fell in love with her? Is it any wonder that Patrick went to look for her as he mentioned in his note, even if he was doing it for M? Is it any wider wonder that she is still loved by most Athenians and the rest of Greece as well? I am sure that even Anthi loves her.

Cryssarina surely knew this about Goddess Athena but needed help from someone local to find every public Athena statue and in the process perhaps Patrick. The hotel manager was nice enough to suggest a few places, but Cryssarina could not rely on one interested source or a taxi driver who may take her for a ride. She left a message for Anthi on Medium, asking for her help. Anthi, the Greek goddess that she is at least in spirit, happily agreed to meet her later that day, which left Cryssarina ecstatic. She was going to meet one of her favourite writers on Medium, who was also keen on helping her find Patrick.

In the meantime, Cryssarina stopped at a few shops to buy presents for M and the two other narrators. She made sure that what she bought did not contain any tree meat, hypocritically known as wood. They were all of one mind by now as to all trees’ plight, swearing to never purchase anything made from them, not even paper. She returned to the hotel to rest a bit and freshen up before her meeting with Anthi. Her heart was pounding at one point from anticipation. She was also about to meet a fellow writer, although she had barely written anything compared to M or Patrick or even the other two narrators, let alone Anthi. She googled her name and was pleased to discover that Anthi meant “flowers” in Greek. She must be beautiful, she thought, as she closed her eyes and pictured her

favourite flowers and plants, as well as the trees that were never even kissed before being killed.

Someone from the lobby called her to announce Anthi's arrival. Cryssarina felt elated, instructing the caller to ask her if she wanted to come up first. Anthi agreed and Cryssarina felt her cheeks redden. She was ready but felt that something was missing; only her mind, it seemed, as it suddenly weighed like one of Athena's statues. She opened the door before Anthi's forthcoming knock, unable to say a word except for *Geia Sas* (Hello, in Greek). Anthi quickly sensed her agitation and hugged her. It did the trick for Cryssarina who proceeded to kiss Anthi on both cheeks, taking a bit longer with the second one, which happened to be on her right. Anthi was indeed beautiful like a flower, although Cryssarina could not choose which flower suited her best. They chatted for a little while on the balcony where Anthi pointed to a few of the visible Athenian landmarks.

It was late afternoon, almost evening, that brief special period comparable to the time between two kisses. Anthi instructed the taxi driver to take them to the colossal Athena Statue, a marvellous portrayal of the goddess sitting atop a triangulated column, emulating her statue in the Parthenon during the Golden Age. Cryssarina could not contain herself when they stood facing her. Created by the Greek sculptor, Vassos Falireas in 1952, it showed Goddess Athena prepared for battle with her shield, spear and helmet. At the base was a memorial to Commonwealth soldiers who fought in the country during World War Two. Cryssarina's tears flowed helplessly in front of their goddess. Athena was everyone's goddess, but most people did not know anything about her. Anthi knew it very well, as she held Cryssarina to comfort her. They looked around for Patrick, but he was nowhere to be found during the hour that they spent there.

Just before leaving, Cryssarina beseeched their goddess to help them, when almost imperceptibly, they could swear, Athena moved her right foot. They looked at each other, nodding their heads in agreement. Athena was there with them, listening. But could she help them? They kept looking at her, but it seemed that she had left for the night. Cryssarina told Anthi that she will return tomorrow at first light to spend all day with their goddess. Anthi nodded her head in agreement again, and looking straight at Goddess Athena's head, said the following words: *Se agapó óso tin agapó* (I love you as much as I love her). Cryssarina did not understand Anthi's words but felt extremely loved.

Thinking about life and its tribulations and happy endings, to be loved is, after all, everything that anyone could wish for. Surely to love as well. But it is never balanced. One always loves the other a bit more, even more than a bit. It is acceptable, I think, and I am sure that Anthi would agree, that to be loved is the greatest feeling there is whether by another human being or a statue of Goddess Athena. We have to love ourselves as well, but that is already a given. May Goddess Athena walk on Earth again and always! Perhaps she does already, unobserved and or invisible.

They both kissed the bottom of the pillar holding Goddess Athena, although they were sure that it was the goddess holding it. They walked hand in hand towards a taxi Anthi had summoned and did not notice the time that elapsed until reaching the hotel. They would have had a meal together, but they both felt satiated. Goddess Athena had already nourished them with her light. Anthi kissed Cryssarina both good night and see you tomorrow at first light.

[This song](#)⁴ is by Aris San, a Greek singer I used to listen to during my childhood before Canada became my new home.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSNTIwFrPYI>

Part 3 - Athena Is the Greatest

Anthi Psomiadou did graciously agree to be included as a fictional character in this unusual visit by Cryssarina to Greece where she hopes to speak to Goddess Athena and find Patrick who may still be alive.

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Cryssarina could not even entertain the idea of sleeping during her second night in Greece. She was simply too excited following the two events of the past day and not sleepless at all. She had met Anthi and they both saw Goddess Athena move her right foot. How could she sleep after such unusual happenings? She was sure that Anthi was also having the same feeling of exhilaration. Goddess Athena was there with them. Goddess Athena was on Earth. Cryssarina felt like dancing and breaking plates, as she had seen in the movie, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. She eventually calmed down and fell asleep, looking at the Moon and the stars through the opening she had left between the curtains, dreaming of Goddess Athena and apparently Patrick.

She was awakened by the rays of the Sun before her wake-up call. Only trees truly welcome the Sun after a night of Moon and stars. She was meeting Anthi at 6 a.m. for breakfast in the hotel. Cryssarina did not generally have breakfast given her intermittent fasting and keto diet, only eating her first meal of the day in early to late afternoon. But not having eaten the evening before, a breakfast was being demanded. She was ready in the lobby before 6 a.m., waiting for Anthi who arrived a few minutes later, as the clock showed 6:05. Cryssarina was the one who hugged Anthi this time, pointing with her head to the clock. Anthi did not understand at first what Cryssarina was alluding to. Five minutes is not considered being late. But then she remembered that five was Goddess Athena's number. Did they get a second sign from her?

After breakfast during which they kept looking at each other with excitement in their eyes, they took a taxi to Athena's statue. It was just after 7 a.m. when they arrived. They forgot to look at the time but I can tell you that it was exactly 7:05. A coincidence? Perhaps. Time will tell; I mean that I will tell. Methinks that I just did. There was no one there this early in the morning; no Patrick either when they looked around for him, but not before kissing again the bottom of the pillar on which Goddess Athena stood tall like Mount Olympus. They looked intently at the goddess but could not discern anything unusual. She did not move. Yet now was the best time. There was no one around and she had already moved her right foot in front of them. She could have moved her left. She must be right-footed, they reasoned while keeping their eyes on her statue.

They conversed about their lives as the hours passed. Cryssarina learned many things about beautiful Anthi but promised not to say anything to anyone, not even M. But Anthi did not know M as well as I did. He could be trusted with anything, even a woman's panties. Cryssarina also talked about herself but seemed not to have much to tell. She was almost like a blank slate. Cryssarina could be a perfect prototype for a female AI. It may be the reason why M finally accepted to be with her. She looked artificial, yet she was *human, all too human*. Anthi hugged her at one point, as if to make sure that she was made from flesh and bones. But Cryssarina hugged her back and kissed her on both cheeks, again taking longer with the second one, which again was her right. Her heart was beating faster than normal and Anthi felt it but did not say anything. She knew that Cryssarina was worried. Will they ever find Patrick? Is he even alive?

When Goddess Athena had not shown any sign by the beginning of the afternoon, they decided to go not far for some lunch. Cryssarina had decided to forget about her intermittent fasting while in Greece, but her keto diet could be maintained to a certain degree. She loved Greek salads, which in Greece were simply salads, and she also liked souvlaki of the chicken and fish variety. White meat under blue skies and not far from the blue sea seemed like a peaceful symphony. A Greek tragedy would have involved lamb, a “baby” that never got the chance to jump and live for a decent while. Like M and Patrick, Cryssarina never ate lamb or veal, considering them “infants” and thus off her menu. Eating their parents seemed more humane, but it was not, of course. But life was made thus. Humans needed the proteins from other animals to be healthy, but only organic given all that was injected and fed to the poor usual variety of for-food creatures.

They spent the rest of the afternoon near the statue of Goddess Athena, the evening too, and then it happened. I am still thinking about the way in which to tell you this part of the story. Maybe I should just retell it exactly as it unfolded. Cryssarina kissed Athena’s pillar from time to time, displeased that she could not reach her. Goddess Athena was standing high, overlooking the entire area and beyond. When almost no one else was nearby, Goddess Athena suddenly stepped down from her pillar and floated to the ground next to Anthi and Cryssarina. Yet when they looked at her statue, she was still there. Anthi and Cryssarina looked at each other but did not say a word. Goddess Athena approached them and said: *O Pátrik éinai mazí mou* (Patrick is with me). Cryssarina also understood what Goddess Athena had said, having heard it in her head. Will he return home with me? Cryssarina then asked. *Éinai sto chéri tou* (It is up to him), Goddess Athena replied. I love you, Cryssarina then said. *Ki ego se agapo* (I love you too), Anthi added. *Xéro paidiá mou* (I know, my children). *Pígaine spíti kai epéstrepse ávrio tin ídia óra* (Go home and return tomorrow at the same time). *Óla tha apokalyfthoún* (All will be revealed). Cryssarina asked Goddess Athena if she could kiss her hand, but she disappeared before she finished her sentence.

Like the evening before, their taxi ride back to the hotel seemed to have elapsed like a dream. Again, Cryssarina and Anthi had no appetite for any earthly food. They had just been nourished by a goddess. Even words became uncalled for. It was as if they heard and understood each other’s thoughts. They kissed again good night and see you tomorrow, but at the late afternoon this time around. Athena is the greatest. What a goddess! Even I love her. Do you?