

Untitled

by Matthieu Ellaga

I quicken my pace, my grip on the old, tattered, paperbound book tightening as I swivel my head round at the old, crumbling streets of Central Geelong. Cars zip past me, merely background noise in the ensuing chase. I let out a shaky breath as I glance behind me.

My heart skips a beat.

She's just up the street. She still looks the same. She still has that diluted green chiton, those worn out greek sandals, and her skin is still rough with age, calloused and peeling in places, yet not bleeding. Rays of sunlight shine on her gleaming nest of emerald green pythons, the light of the afternoon sun bringing her hair to life.

The pythons wake and turn to me, angrily hissing, their venomous fangs poised and ready, their dull grey eyes shining, ready to turn me into stone. My breath catches in my throat. I run. I dash into a nearby alley, tripping over a garbage can in my panic.

I don't stop - she's just behind me!

I exit the alley and run like the wind, my shoes barely gracing the cracked and wounded pavement as I sprint. She follows suit.

I quickly lose her in a crowd of ignorant tourists, who're smiling, snapping photos at the last things they'll ever see. I notice a bookshop out of the corner of my eye and bolt into it, taking no heed of the poor, old lady I scare as I run in.

I sprint to the front desk, pushing aside a young man and his wife who glares at me.

"Where's your roof access?!" I practically shout at the employee manning the desk.

"Excuse m-," He starts to say, but I cut him off.

"Where's your roof access?!" I ask again.

“Look kid, you can’t come in here and start shouting at me,” he proclaims brazenly, reaching for his cell as he does so. I slam my hand down on his.

“I don’t have time to explain, but I’m going to die if you don’t tell me where your roof access is!” I shriek.

“I don’t know what sick prank you’re playing…” he starts off but I cut him off.

“I’m going to die,” I cry pleadingly.

There must have been something in my eyes as he uses his free hand to point to a locked and peeling blue door on the other side of the store. I thank him quickly and rush to the door. Before I touch the rusty and worn door handle, I grab a burnt and smoking candelabra, its flames still making a futile dance; bringing it down on the lock. It works. The padlock snaps and falls to the floor with a satisfying clink. I shove open the door and run.

My legs feel like they’re on fire as I scramble up the spiraling stairs that lead to the roof. I throw open the blood red door and stumble onto the roof, clutching the old, plastic paperback to my chest as I gulp down as much oxygen as I can.

My chest starts to burn and I gasp, throwing the book to the floor. The book is burning and pulsating with demonic red light. I hear a menacing snarl from somewhere below me and grab the book, stumbling behind a pile of thick glass panes.

I hear the door being thrown off its hinges with a metallic thud and to my horror, hear a dry, rasping voice.

“I know you’re here,” rasps the gorgon, her snakes hissing, scanning the roof for any movement. “You can’t hide forever.”

“I know I can’t,” I breathe. “But you know what. I don’t care.”

She shrieks in fury and throws herself at the glass. I avert myself out of her eyeline and leap out of the way.

“You creatures have the perfect defense. But you also have the most stupid weakness.”

She clasps her sharp and rough claws around my throat and shouts, "Turn around and face me!"

I struggle in her grip as she lifts me off the ground, my breath growing short and laboured.

"When's the last time you looked in the mirror?" I ask and she stops.

In her confusion I wrench my hand around, grabbing the corner of the glass panes and push. There's a screaming and shattering of glass and I collapse to the ground, coughing dark red blood.

I stand up, my face full of cuts and bruises from the shards of glass and glare at the gravel statue that now stands before me. I glance down at the idle and innocent book in my hands and then throw it off the roof. It arcs through the air and lands with a thud in a smoking fire where it's devoured mercilessly by the flames. Letting out a breath, I turn and walk to the unhinged door and make a quick mental note to double check the book before I open it.