

GOOD AWFUL

THIEF

S. ACEVEDO


THREE
POINTS
PUBLISHING

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CURTAINS UP

The hypocritical snobs in Olympus frown at my love of grape. But let it be known: if it weren't for my drinking, the mortal and immortal worlds alike would have been taken over by a swindler who can con sober minds. So let us all praise wine!

Pondering it later, I wondered if maybe I shouldn't have let the takeover happen. Either option, a rebellion or a furious fight for the status quo, would be fun – and extremely dramatic. Gods, I love drama. Still, I don't like someone poking around in my head, so interference became my best revenge.



Act I. Scene 1.

(Setting: The supposedly hollow cavity between my ears – or, the once vibrant chamber now rotted by sloshing wine – depending on whom you ask. As the god of wine and theatre, I often dream of stagehands dressed in Olympic laurels. Tonight's dream, however, is interrupted by a shadowy figure

nudging into the recesses of my memory. This may be shown as a figure in black entering stage right and slithering his way around sparse, broken down furniture.)

“Mmmm,” thinks my Sleep Self to the unwelcome intruder. “Who are you?”

The figure lifts its cowed head. I see a pale countenance dominated by a large, downturned nose, like a parrot’s beak, and guarded, olive-green eyes. I know the face.

“Tell me your secrets,” it speaks.

“No,” is my answer.

“Tell me,” it demands.

“Go screw yourself.” Or something like that. Wine does dull the memory.

The dream dissolves and reforms itself into a bedroom scene. *(Stagehands, be clever. Drape cloth over the furniture to suggest a bed.)*

I see the figure lurking over Jupiter’s inclined form. The King of the Gods mumbles answers to every question.

The scene swirls until it finds itself in murky depths. The same shadowy figure floats above Neptune’s watery berth. *(Stagehands, cue the stage wiring.)* The Water Lord hums the secrets of his soul, bubbles rising with each breath.

I understood then what was happening and wonder if you do, too. Don’t fret if you’re as in the dark as

Neptune's domain. The drama is set to unfold. I made my choice, the option most likely to create conflict. Delicious conflict. The savory filling of the best stories.

I'd not let Mercury succeed, that greedy, two-faced delver in dreams. The god of commerce, theft, and the unconscious may *think* he can swindle, steal, and connive his way to the top, but wine and love *do* go together. I sided with Cupid if for no other reason than to foul the plans of the god who disrupted my dreams.



THE WATER BOILS

Cupid, the newly reinstated god of love, zigzagged above a raging sea. Even his new, power-infused, blue-tipped wings – an upgrade given by Jupiter for saving the kingdom – barely got him past the huge waves leaping skyward from the wind-whipped sea below.

Only a few quiet weeks had passed since Cupid regained his crown, though his misadventure remained fresh in his mind and vivid nightmares continued to contaminate his confidence. Fighting The Lord of the Dead and battling his beasts has a way of sticking with you. Even so, Cupid tried to forget such unpleasanties. He most uncharacteristically distanced himself from the limelight, which isn't easy to do when you believe that the world needs love, and that you yourself are lovely, and that everything's made better with you around it. For the sake of restoring normalcy to the kingdom, Mr. Love himself tried to keep his head down, do his work, and steer clear of controversy. Yet here he was again dodging trouble.

Cupid flew erratically, flapped furiously. His long, brown, curly hair whipped his face, leaving flushed welts across the white plain. His pooch of a belly jiggled as he struggled to clear the tempestuous, watery upsurges. All the while, he racked his brain to understand what he could

have possibly done to anger his great uncle, the sea god. Those salt water hooks would drag him down and drown him given the chance.

Even with distance and speed, Cupid knew he wasn't going to outmaneuver the raging waters for long. He spotted an island ahead, mountainous and lush with vegetation. *Not exactly a safe port*, Cupid thought, keenly aware of Neptune's ability to create earthquakes powerful enough to split that spit of land in half.

But I can't stay out in the open much longer, he thought. *I'll take my chances.*

Lowering the tips of his magnificent wings, Cupid soared upward. When he felt slightly safer, somewhat more out of reach of the giant, briny waves, he rocketed horizontally toward the oasis. The water below him seethed. Tall, teal blue curls rolled in pursuit.

Cupid peered more closely into the froth and saw a merman, porpoising face-up just below the surface. The bearded manfish was staring hard. When their eyes met, the fish-guy raised a pink conch to his lips and blew.

Cupid heard nothing but knew in a heartbeat who that aquatic being was: not his great uncle the sea god, no. Neptune looked nothing like this feral merman. Besides, Neptune's method of stirring waves was by circling his golden trident or commanding his powerful horses to gallop or maybe even just thinking about it. But Neptune's *son* Triton did it by blowing into a conch shell. Even

underwater.

In the time it took Cupid to understand, a giant water-hand shot up and swatted. It grazed his feet, and Cupid tumbled mid-air. He saw hundreds of fish being tossed around inside it – as if they deserved the mistreatment any more than he. Cupid regained his balance just as the fist threatened to pummel him again.

The god of love was being loved by no one now.

Cupid decided he didn't much like this game, if it was a game, which it probably was because *everyone* loved him. So he pumped his wings hard. As he outpaced the fishy fist, his strength surprised him; it had been some time since he'd flown in earnest. Then again, he reminded himself, he *was* a god, and a marvelous one at that.

As Cupid breached the imaginary plane separating land from sea, he spun to see what the water appendage would do. Surprisingly, it stopped its forward progress and collapsed like rain.

Panting, Cupid raised his own hand to halt the water droplets. He could control water in various ways: he could float on a single molecule and gather huge balls of it from the air at will. But this particular water refused to obey. It didn't halt mid-air like he wanted. Instead, it kept falling and plopped into the surf rolling onto the beach. The water had ended its pursuit – but not its animosity.

Salt water, he thought. *Different than fresh water. But I've moved salt water before, in the Roman Colosseum.*

Hub. Had Neptune allowed it back then?

Shifting his focus beyond the now harmless surf lapping the sandy beach, Cupid watched Triton rise above the water's skin.

Triton's heavily muscled torso heaved on each breath. His shoulders were barnacled with shells pouring water from within. He rose to the ends of his long, double-fluked tail while the rest of the snake-like appendage writhed and curled. That sight of mastery was one every sailor feared:

*"E'er Triton stands atop his tail,
ships anon be sunk by gale."*

Cupid got the distinct impression that the sea's messenger god was sending *him* the same message.

Cupid gently flapped his wings, backing into the palms. Once he'd disappeared in the greenery, he allowed himself a moment to think, drifting well above the forest floor, lost in thought.

Just weeks ago he'd fought Pluto, The God of the Underworld, and the evil mastermind's minion, planted specifically to overthrow Olympus. *Posers*, Cupid thought.

Despite his dismissive attitude toward it now, The Love God suffered a great deal of indignity at losing a duel to Pluto's servant – and then having to regain the trust of his grandfather, Jupiter, to save the kingdom. At the time,

it seemed that his Uncle Neptune had helped Cupid in the fight, so why was Neptune's son now trying to drown him?

Why would anyone want to harm me? Cupid asked himself. *I'm the god of love, the maharajah of pleasure, and the most beautiful sight in Olympus. Well, Tamara's great eye candy, too, as any girl with me should be. And wait a minute – no one could even be mad about her, either, because me lavishing my many affections and bedroom skills on her means I'm not lavishing them on their women. Even if their women still secretly want it.*

(It seems that near banishment from the kingdom was not quite enough to slay Cupid's ego. But the braggart was bragging slightly less often. It was a start.)

Shaking off the idea of unrequited love and jealous lovers, Cupid returned to thoughts of his immediate situation. He could fly high enough to avoid even the loftiest waves, he knew, but he wanted to understand what prompted the need. Clearly Triton was in no mood for a calm, god-to-god discussion.

What's Triton's problem? he wondered.

Cupid looked down at his clothes and sighed. They were soaked, his grey suit darkened nearly black. The ultra modern Spanish Grey hue was a new look for him, from the day he and Tamara had officially paired up and he'd ditched his sparkly white suit. The fashion change

signified a more serious and committed life, a shot across the bow against his own haughty hubris. Put simply, he intended to show less flash.

Problem was, his new duds were staid, and he missed the bling. *Maybe I'll add rhinestones*, he mused. *Or ruffles*. He ran his fingers along the lapels' sopping edges.

(And as he pondered, dear reader, imagine how I marveled. I saw all this through Cupid's eyes while I myself lay on my hammock in my forest home. Seeing life's events through another's eyes? The transformation is a voyeur's dream, and what is theatre if not voyeurism of the living condition?

It appeared logical to me that Mercury, in his nighttime traveling and rummaging through unconscious and unguarded minds, had failed to close this particular door. I unwittingly alighted upon Cupid's mind in my waking moments and could hear his every thought, loud as my own. Hearing him was as effortless as granting a foolish mortal his fondest wish. Say, have I ever told you the story of my bestowing The Midas Touch? It is a harsh lesson in avarice and a nearly tragic tale. But I

digress. Back to Cupid's plight.)

The love lord, apparently uncomfortable in dripping attire, bunched the edges of his lapel in his hands and squeezed.

Now, be it told, *fresh* water might have left the merino wool willingly, without insult, but not *this* water, riled to anger by a salt water deity. The droplets held fast to the fabric and suddenly moved as one. The suit jerked left – with Cupid in it.

“Whoa!” he shouted. The suit halted and reversed course. “Whoa! Stop!” Cupid commanded. In answer, the suit pistoned left, right, and left again, shaking him like a maraca. Cupid flailed. His wings, arms, legs, everything moved, but none of it prevented his suit from pulling him wherever it wished – and it wished to haul him into the canopy of the nearest tree. Cupid was yanked upward and brushed by the soft rush of leaves before being stabbed by the tree’s tangled branches.

Cupid’s waterlogged suit changed direction and plunged downward, pulling him onto lower branches. The branches either immediately snapped or held strong, scraping Cupid as he passed them. Cupid finally collided against a lower, fatter bough and grabbed hold before sliding underneath. He held on and panted for breath.

The suit slammed to an angry halt. It swung side to side. It shook violently. Unable to continue its downward plunge, the suit changed tactic and threw itself back

upward onto the bough before scraping Cupid along it like cheese on a grater.

“Stop! Stop!” Cupid bellowed as the brown-grey bark cut into his flesh and the wood’s milky sap seeped into his cuts. Bits of skin-shredding bark scattered in every direction. Cupid looked up and saw that the tree’s entire crown shook. Anyone watching would have thought a family of orangutans swung in hysterics. Bark rained into his eyes.

Cupid extended a hand blindly, hoping for any change of circumstance. He managed to wrench loose a handful of leaves from a connecting twig. Reaching out again, struggling, he felt something different, something fleshy, and grabbed hold.

A hiss told him he’d made a bad choice, and the notice was confirmed when teeth clamped down.

“Whaaaaaaah!” Cupid screamed. He opened his watering eyes and saw that he’d grabbed the fat hind legs and spiked tail of a long green iguana. The poor thing’s puny front legs were scratching desperately to cling to its perch. Its neck curled back to bite its attacker. It wasn’t going to be able to hold Cupid’s weight a second longer. The affronted lizard whipped its tail in defense and slapped him, spikes up, hard across the face.

Howling in fresh pain, Cupid released him, but too late. The iguana lost its tenuous grip, dropped to the forest floor, and bounced.

Cupid knew he was next. As the suit pulled downward, ready to plunge him to the earth, the legendary lover demanded, "STOP!"

The suit halted just a fraction of a second, apparently obeying him or simply failing to acknowledge gravity.

Not wasting a moment, Cupid grabbed the suit lapels and wrested off the jacket. Its sleeves snagged Cupid's bow and quiver, which dropped to the forest floor. The falling arrows just missed the iguana (*which is good because who knows how a reptile in love might act?*). The jacket shot off toward the sea and Triton, who was no doubt controlling it.

Maniac! thought Cupid.

But the maniac's assault wasn't over. Cupid's finely tailored trousers tipped him upside down and swung him to bash his royal head against the hardwood's trunk. (*Cupid's puffy hair made him look like a living drum mallet, the tree his instrument.*)

Cupid barked louder than a howler monkey. Without thinking (*because, really, it could have turned out ugly*), Cupid tugged on his zipper and dropped out of his pants. His body plummeted toward the ground while his pants zoomed off toward the sea. Just before Cupid hit soil, his shirt, traditional diaper, and shoes, the only clothes remaining, flipped him face up and halted; Cupid's head whiplashed against the ground.

Our battered beloved groaned in pain. His neck was jarred, and his body only lacked a final slam onto Earth to finish him off. Cupid didn't want to see what his few remaining articles of clothing might have in mind, so he reached beneath him and felt through the forest undergrowth for his bow and quiver. Snagging an arrow, Cupid whipped it forward. He dragged the arrowhead across the front of his shirt, shearing it from neck to hip, and his diaper from hip to leg, all while pushing his shoes off his heels.

These clothes were a lot less wet than his outerwear – but still damp enough for a sea god to govern. They whisked away, dropping Cupid, naked as the day he was born, onto terra firma. I wondered if Cupid would ever get his diaper back. Then I doubted that he'd want to, seeing as he was going for reinvention.

Our charming nudist spluttered, the wind knocked out of him. He struggled to suck in air – but could not. I unfortunately felt his terror through our unusual but terrifically entertaining connection (**I could breathe just fine, thank you so much for asking.**). Cupid couldn't feel his lungs at all, but he could feel the mossy earth at his back and the nock of his bow digging into his shoulder blade and, finally, sharp nails climb up the back of his head.

Cupid, unable to move any other part of his body, rolled his eyes up toward the top of his head. I heard him

worry that something was crawling through his beautiful hair, the precious brown curls that so many ladies dreamed of wrapping around their fingers.

What emerged through the split ends of the longest curl was the head of the bright green iguana. It crested the top of Cupid's forehead and looked down into his eyes, the same grey-green eyes that could make the world swoon. **(So esteemed the narcissist.)**

The lizard hissed and continued its scratchy, scaly walk over the god's face and chest. Cupid noticed broken spikes all along its back and knew he'd caused them. He couldn't feel much remorse; he was at the time trying to save himself. And he couldn't apologize even if he wanted, his breath still gone from his lungs. Instead Cupid watched as the creature approached his abs, scratched good and deep into his divine flesh, raised its tail, and left a parting gift of green goo before darting back to the cover of the forest. Bits of bark and leaves continued to rain down from the tree and stuck to the goo like jimmies on frosting.

Cupid felt his chest release, and he inhaled deeply. It triggered a coughing fit, but, once he again had control over his faculties, he lifted his heavy head and shoulders and propped himself on his elbows. He looked down at his naked, wounded body and noticed something even more distressing. He was swelling. And blistering. He raised a hand before his face and saw its cuts soaking up the tree's white sap like a sponge absorbs water.

This isn't normal, He thought.

Cupid looked up at the tree's trunk (*freshly chafed, thanks to him*) and saw a sign posted about five feet up:



I'm in trouble, Cupid thought (*waaaaay later than I would have come to that conclusion*). His eyes itched. His fingers felt fat and numb. Through his quickly clogging ears, he heard a rustling in the trees to his left (*It was actually a crashing through the trees, like a herd of charging bison.*). He turned to feast his eyes and spotted a tree being felled by a giant pair of legs. Massive, knotty knees bent. A hand as wide across as he was tall came into view.

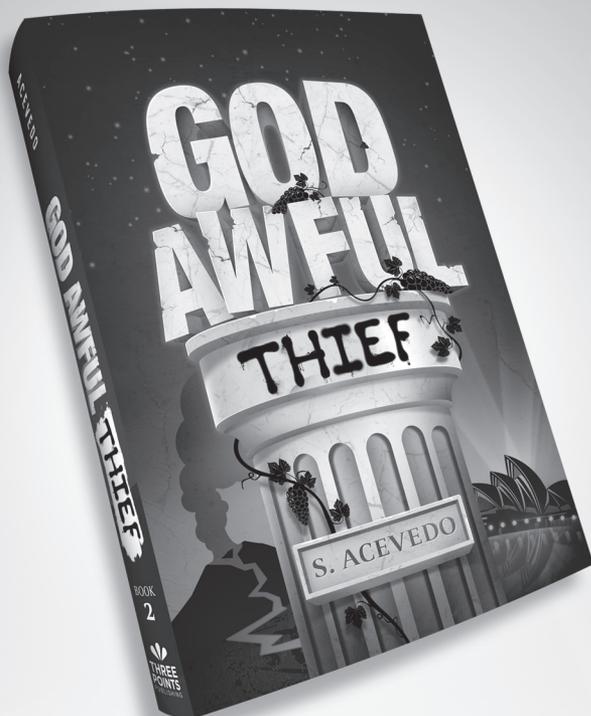
And before Cupid could understand, he was swinging upside down once again, this time high *above*

the treetops. The hand that held him connected to a one-eyed giant. And the giant was licking its lips.

Find out what happens next in the full version of

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