

In my thirty-first year, a monster from my youth contrived to get himself ordained as Bishop of Alexandria. Though I had escaped his devilry some years previous, a chill shot down my spine upon hearing the news of his ascension. I did not know whether to scream or cry. Inside, I did both.

But my story begins long before his ordination and before I met him. It was the morning I lost my father. Impossible to know at the time that this was the beginning of my whole world crumbling down and putting me in harm's way. I was a young girl, impudent and unmindful in my innocence despite my father's efforts to prepare me for the world. I thought he would be there always to teach, to protect, to make me laugh. After his departure the world became my teacher but the world, I soon discovered, neither protects nor guides. Instead, I was compelled to find guidance elsewhere, not just to survive the violence and treachery of the times but to navigate strange dreams, visions and visitations, as well as trust in the warmth and scents of some few others.

The night before he left my father tucked me into bed with a prayer. He smelled of leather and metal polish. Not yet ready to go to sleep I pestered him about why he prayed when he always was so fond of saying the gods never listen to us anyway. He answered in his usual measured way.

“Daughter, let the gods be. When the water rises, just swim with the current of fate.”

“So, Papa, are you saying we should not pray?”

“No, daughter. Pray. Just not to the gods.”

These were the last words he said to me before snuffing out the oil lamp. Next morning he was gone. My mother said he was on assignment. Again.

Though it is now long past, my father's words still light the road traveled from that adoring girl to the woman I am today.