

## TRYPHAENA

You are Tryphena, a simple girl from Corfu, forgotten by mom and dad you were raised by old peasants: lymphatic and lactic people who emitted the breath of dead animals and spoke in centuries-old phrases. Years of grueling boredom and even the beauty of nature meant nothing to you: tiring in its repulsive uniformity of landscapes and skies. You longed for something else.

And then you meet someone who differed from the people of Corfu, an old legionnaire who was awarded some land on the shore because he had proven himself worthy during wartime: his cave was full of scrolls and stolen books, war loot in Greek and Latin. He mastered these languages and could tell stories from distant lands.

You put a lot of effort into winning his favors and you know you are gifted for these kind of things: he soon took good care of you. When he finally teaches you to read you won't have to pay attention to him and his languishing repetitive stories anymore: his scrolls and books will open a new world for you, a world of idle wishes and pipe dreams, accompanied by the sweet fragrance of fig.

Now you're sitting under the fig tree for days on end, reading about important people whose words and actions are valued; you read about love and about women for whom great men are willing to lose their life: you'd do anything to be like them. And day by day you grow more beautiful as you linger over the verses and picture the things that will happen to you.

Literature provided aid to some people, but to you the books were poison: Incapable of loving things and people for their own sake, you see them as a mirror of your aspirations and how they might work in your story. More and more often you come across sentences and sayings which seem to be describing your future.

And when you finally see the big bee-man standing on a mast in front of the shore, you will think of the poem you read a few days ago:

*And all the bees flew, in circles around Aseneth  
From her feet to her head,  
and yet more bees as big as queens  
Found rest on Aseneth's lips*

And you recognize the bee on his lips and on your lips: it is destiny. And you love Lichas, you really do, he is everything to you and you get down on your knees: Lichas you're the only one, Lichas you're true, Lichas you're destined for me. And then he really takes you along and you won't waste a second to think back on the people to whom you meant everything: far away is now the grandfather with his carcass breath and the old legionnaire with his hairy, muscular shoulders.

Great Lichas, Savior Lichas, endless words of gratitude for taking you from the lonely shore into the wide world. You're kissing the calluses on his feet and everyday you take your bath in honey to keep your skin beautiful for him.

And as you get to know the great men by his side and you learn to understand their qualities you realize that Lichas is only one of many: Tryphaena, you have to leave him! You know that the fine gentlemen can lay a fortune at your feet and that they'll do everything for you, much more than Lichas could ever do. And you now know your worth.

When Tryphena walks the Via Egnatia alone at night, legionaries turn their head and centurions wolf-whistle her, a senator was heard whispering infamies into her ear while eating together and Trimalchio tried to lure her into a chamber - enter Tryphaena! And suddenly you understand the expanse of the Roman Empire and the expanse of your possibilities.

Who can satisfy your demands? Today it's Lichas, tomorrow a bigger man and eventually the world won't be enough.

Now the honey has become ordinary to you and you demand to be provided with expensive oil plants for your beauty care. Rarely you grant Lichas an audience: and even then you give him the feeling that he is the plainest man in the Roman Empire.

But he has fallen for you: stupid old Lichas wants to impress you with his gifts and his voyages. Graciously you let him persuade you to accompany him to Capri, for you have heard that one could meet Tiberius there, and old Tiberius is known for his taste for young women. Bright and shiny you see it before you: Tryphaena on the side of the *pater patriae*, how you laugh about the ordinary people while eating peafowl eggs for breakfast.

But on Capri nothing is as expected: when you first spot Hedyle, older than you and more mature, with attitude and character and from a wealthy family: She has everything you lack. Her beauty more complex, her features finer and you have to recognize how ordinary you are, and that no one cares for you a bit: Tryphaena, they know that you are nothing but a peasant's daughter from Corfu, that you are a descendant of a porcine family whose name will never be remembered! And no one wants to talk to you at the Villa Jovis, a place where even Lichas matters more than you.

And for a short time you longed for Corfu, for the peace of your fig tree, and then you remember your ancestors and one of their stupid proverbs comes to your mind: *Circulus aureus in naribus suis mulier pulchra et fatua*. - A beautiful but simple-minded woman is like a golden ring in a pig's nose.

Then you fall into a rage against everything and your face convulses in the wild manner of your ancestors: You have scolded and lied, yelled and insulted everyone, and then something changed inside of you: something that should have been left unchanged for the better. It pushes you towards the bodies of the present gentlemen and suddenly everyone is interested as you scream loud and moan while you want to hear them say that Hedyle is worthless and that she must vanish. With Tiberius' terrible laughter and yelled instructions echoing through the halls, the evening turned into one of the most debauched nights of Capri.

Hedyle had long disappeared and the tired sad old Lichas was left behind and forgave everything, but you barely cared anymore: you were crazy with curiosity about the smell of a black slave's skin (and you tasted his hardness), then Bromius und Selecus, and then the beautiful Giton. You wanted to know, and soon you will find out: these are the days of your *delicta carnis*.

You now like to accompany Lichas on his good ship as you learn to appreciate the qualities of his team and his affiliates. One day a raging storm approaches and Lichas goes overboard: looking for him you trip and plunge into the water and as they pull you out nigh unto death you feel eight strong

arms and their banging veins, and you deeply inhale their scent. Someone tells you that Lichas drowned, so you mourn for a few more days, but it won't deceive anyone: they all know what you're up to.

And you dream of being abducted as a prisoner of war and of being forced into prostitution - you become a master of the *artes meretriciae*, dying your hair blond and following the forbidden practices: you do it *bestiarum more*, in the manner of the animals, and also in the manner of Greeks, sometimes thinking of your old legionnaire with his strong and hairy shoulders.

*Claude os, aperi oculos*: Close your mouth and open your eyes!, the old proverb said, but you always did it the other way round and then someone wrote *Tryphaena bene fellas* on the walls of the Lupanar (and he wasn't lying). You call yourself *Woman of the Ninth Hour*, *Fortuna* and *Myrte*, and you dance at the feast days of *Venus Erycina*, *Venus Verticordia* and at the *Floralia*, always looking for the *bipes asellus*, the two-legged donkey. All around the world they say that the Cretans are liars, vile beasts and idle gluttons: for they have other qualities which you can now confirm.

Everywhere penetration and spunk, body-completion in the temple of the *Magna Mater*, in the den of the she-wolves and in the bathhouses: your life as a *cena dubia* and a last passing away in lust. Later they will write on your tombstone:

*Desinit morbus, incendium extinguitur.*  
A disease ends, a fire is extinguished.

## HEDYLE

You are Hedyle, a Roman of noble decent. Your family's name is Valerii and your grandfather's name is Messala, who was known to be in good terms with Augustus. Little Hedyle, named after a Greek poetess and your parents were full of love for you. Your childhood: you lie happily in the arms of your mother, smell her hair, her breath ... *You are my little leopard*, says your mother, scratching your back while you purr with your eyes wide shut.

You grew hardworking and serious, your tutor taught you a lot, and while your sisters couldn't wait to celebrate their weddings and imagined how life would be like as a *matrona* wearing the stola, you always had different things in mind.

You had no interest in the young patricians who are in need of a slave to put the toga over their tunic and you despised the small pleasures their dull lives offer: all the mosaic floors and the oil lamps, the dogs and the hot water running through the floors to keep them warm; their mothers' hair straighteners; the slaves who tear the fish and meat into bite-sized pieces and press the wine-grapes by hand one by one,... All these things appeared so mundane to you and you couldn't care less about men until you meet the one who is so different: the one with a long beard and shaggy hair, who never heard of a toga and holds honeycombs in his hands with honey dripping to the ground. He calls you his queen bee and tries to sell you something, but you are hardly listening: you are drawn into his blue eyes, sedative like the ocean view on a calm day and unsettling like a stormy morning on the open sea.

And it's blowing a gale in your first night together (and you think you might have been his first), has this strange person ever thought of such things? Love is strange: you simultaneously feel like the biggest and the smallest person alive, while the limits of the ordinary are no longer valid. You are full of craziness and climb around the arcades, you lie in each others arms in the Campus Martius, steal a moment of solitude in the portico of the Theatrum Pompeii, while the tragedy is performed inside and you bring happiness to everyone you meet: children want to touch Hedyles *palla* in which she outdoes all women in their *stolas*.

Beautiful time in unison and in youthful joy, the first tenderness outside the family will soon become tenderness inside the family again as you grow