

Silencing the Sirens

A Novella by Trina Love-Abram

Written for the WRIT 735 Visiting Writer class with Elizabeth Kostova, our assignment is to write a 40 to 50 page novella centered around mythology or folklore that we place in present time and conduct research for. I chose the Sirens from Greek mythology.

Prologue

The voices were back; the low, sedated murmurs that crawled through her mind, probing and searching, as if they belonged there. They began as a crescendo of singular sounds that climaxed into a chorus of staccato lyrics she couldn't identify. The voices brought with them the piercing headaches that felt as if someone split her brain in two. When she left home 15 years ago, the voices didn't accompany her. She found freedom in a southern town in the United States full of magnolia trees, peanuts, and slow drawls that made her feel safe, comforted, and welcomed. Somehow, they found her, and she couldn't bear living with them again as she did when she was younger. Their manipulative sounds and horrific words put her in a trance, seduced her, left her in places she didn't know, made her do things she couldn't remember. She refused to go there again. This time, she would fight.

Only the trained ear of her friend Kai, a trained counselor for kids that experienced traumas, recognized the coiled energy, thinly contained in her taxed mind, induced by her childhood trauma. Losing both parents at such a young age caused her to grapple with her identity, ushering an impotent struggle with her past. A past she'd blocked out. But she wanted to be whole. She wanted to be comfortable in her own skin, to recognize herself, to have an identity. Chloe wanted simple pleasures, like to walk into her closet, easily select an outfit, and know that it looked good on her without needing Josh's accolades. She wanted a comfortable balance between her tennis shoes and pumps without feeling the need to explain. It wasn't just clothes though, it was everything. Josh's parents wanted to know why they trimmed their Christmas tree in blue instead of traditional red, white, or green. She envied Josh's comfortable

reply, "because that's what we wanted." Chloe felt the need to explain until she acquired approval or acceptance for her decisions or preferences. Josh stopped her. "It's our vision. It's our house. We don't have to explain." He told her. It was that easy for him. Acceptance was easy for a wealthy Wilmington. She had to work for it.

"Chloe," Kai said, "If you were my patient, I'd tell you to confront the voices, the past, and your childhood. Confronting these mental blocks is an integral part of developing your identity and fostering your healing. You've suppressed some wounds and as a result, they have not healed. You must open these scars, allow them to bleed, so they can properly heal." Kai's words meant something, also from Asteria, she was kidnapped as a child, which is why she works with kids who have been traumatized.

Chloe rolled those words repeatedly in her head as she lay in bed beside her husband listening to his peaceful slumber. He always slept sound. She slept in fits since her birthday last October, finding creative ways to block out the sounds, the songs, the lyrics that she sometimes couldn't decipher. *Return to Asteria* is what her doctor suggested. Asteria almost killed her before. What she did remember about Asteria was the homogenous atmosphere of peace and evil coexisting in every cycle of her childhood...white and red. She turned onto her back, clinging to a pillow on her stomach as if it were a shield. *Chloeeeeee, it is time....Awaken and rise. It is our time. Your blood is our life. It is your duty.* Chloe shut her eyes tight willing the words to die, demanding the voices to excavate. But resistance caused a piercing head pain that rendered her practically motionless. *It is futile to resist Chloe...this is your destiny.* Chloe expelled a horrifying cry that rang through the bedroom causing her husband to awaken and jump out of bed, finding his wife drenched in sweat, writhing in pain. Her eyes rolled back in her

head and her body convulsed. He pulled her to him. Her body was hot like a warming stove.

Pressing cool lips to her forehead, he dialed 911.

Chapter 1: Five months later, May 2011

“Josh, I’m going home.” Chloe turned this over in her mind every week since returning from the hospital at the end of December. Tired of running and putting Josh through trips to the emergency room because her mind fought itself, she was ready to face her past.

“To Asteria?” Josh quickly sat upright. He’d been slumped down in the plush sofa at Lunacy Black Market, their favorite local restaurant. She sat on the edge of the sofa, took Josh’s left hand between both of hers, and signaled the server to bring him another drink. He’d need more wine for this.

“Yes sweetie. I cannot ignore this issue anymore. It’s time I stop avoiding my past and deal with it or it’ll be a constant part of our lives forever.”

“Well, I mean, are you ready? Dad and I talked about sending someone to Asteria and Petramos, a private eye, who can get infor...”

“No sweetie. I must do this myself. The psychiatrist told us that I’m repressing childhood memories. It’s time I face them and not hide behind you or some private eye. I don’t wanna hear about my childhood second hand.”

Chloe allowed Josh to pull her into an embrace. “I’m proud of you. You are so brave,” he told her. She blushed, not one to acknowledge accolades, she brushed his comments off.

“I have somewhat of a plan. I’m going to call Acacia and see when is a good time for me to...”

“There is nothing you can say or do to keep me from coming with you Chloe. If circumstances were reversed, you would never let me go through something like this alone.” Josh said.

She was grateful for his support. He was such a southern gentleman, chivalrous, respectful, and protective. Chloe cupped his face in both of her hands and kissed him. When they pulled apart, she told him, “I’d love to have you with me, but no superman stuff, unless we discuss it first.”

Josh threw his head back and laughed. The hearty sound filled the small restaurant. People looked at them and smiled. “Deal!” he answered, sticking his hand out for her to shake.

Chloe had a better idea though. Lifting her wine glass, she waited on Josh to lift his, then toasted, “to the death of unknowns, invisible shackles, and mysterious pasts.” They clinked their glasses and drank.

“Hi Acacia. It’s Chloe. Sorry it’s been a while since we’ve spoken. Give me a call when you can. Josh and I want to come for a visit. Let me know a good time for you. Love you.” Chloe pressed the end button on her iPhone and put it back in her pouch. She sighed heavily, glad that she’d set things in motion. Now she could concentrate on work.

Chloe’s leaf green eyes peered through the high-powered lens at the statuesque woman whose dark, waist length braids brushed against the pale sand as she reclined. Nadia, had to be at least 5’10 with a perfect body, face, and smile, which she expertly projected to the camera. It irked Chloe that the poses were more prominent than the model. She hated poses. She’d rather

photograph the model in more natural settings, walking through the plaza, along the beach, or reading a book. Nadia was too ready for the camera, and Chloe hated those kinds of photos.

“Nadia, let’s break for the day,” Chloe prodded looking behind her at the setting sun, “go grab a bite, shop a little. We can finish tomorrow.” Nadia looked relieved as she gathered her belongings, pinned Chloe with a winning smile, and sauntered to her dressing room. Chloe quickly gathered her equipment, stowed it away, and waited. Just as she suspected, two of the other models convened at Nadia’s trailer, none of them had changed out of the exclusive Dolce and Gabana garb they modeled for the pictures. *Perfect* she thought. Minutes later, the women all headed out. South Beach, Miami was replete with restaurants, dance clubs, and any imaginable nightlife within walking distance of their beach photo shoot. Chloe knew that Nadia and her friends would head to a cool spot.

The lens was her eye, the camera her body. Chloe felt like her lens had a brain and an eye that always led her to that perfect emotion or presence. Josh called Chloe and her camera the dynamic duo. Well she and the boy wonder were going incognito to get some real shots. At a local bar, she caught Nadia and a couple of the other models on the patio, large palm trees masking as umbrellas and the Gulf of Mexico their back drop. Their laughs, body language, and demeanor were so relaxed that at first they didn’t even notice Chloe. She snapped photos of them ordering, admiring the butt on the waiter, signing autographs for admirers, and in serious contemplation. “Chloe? Is that you?” Nadia was the first to notice her. She slid the huge glasses down from her face and motioned to Chloe.

“You got me.” She raised her hands in the air in mock surrender as the women smiled.

“You know Chloe, you could be a model.” Nadia told her.

Chloe blanched, "Oh, I'm too short, and..."

"You could be a face model." Nadia always thought Chloe was beautiful, with that perfect nose perched regally between high cheekbones that were always a bit rosy. She had the prettiest, thick, long, dark rivulets that she kept pinned back or up. She hid her petite body under loose fitting dress pants and peasant style blouses, like she didn't want the clothes to touch her body. "You've gotta come shopping with us. You have a wonderful shape, but your attire is, well, it doesn't do your shape justice."

Chloe dipped her head in embarrassment, but this wasn't the first time she'd been told this. "I just like comfortable clothes." The waiter appeared to take Chloe's order.

"She'll have what we are having," Nadia informed the waiter. "There are comfortable sundresses that can show off your hazel skin and small frame. You've got a great body. I know women who'd kill to have your shapely hips and small waist. All you need are a couple of skinny jeans, some fitted shirts, and plenty of sundresses...above the knee."

"I don't know. It's been a while since I've shopped. I hate shopping. I usually order my clothes online or from a catalog."

"We can tell," Sasha, one of the other models said as she smiled at Chloe. "Come on, we won't totally redo your wardrobe, just get you a couple of pieces, and you'll have them when you need them."

Chloe relented, "Okay, after the shoot tomorrow."

"Oh, no," Nadia said, "after a couple more drinks, we can head down Biscayne Bay to the boutiques. They stay open until 11pm." She didn't want to risk Chloe changing her mind.

Chloe knew when she was outnumbered. She raised her glass to clink with the others for a toast.

“To Chloe’s makeover,” they said in unison. Nadia went around the table to Chloe’s side, “Just one more thing,” she said as she released Chloe’s hair from the several pins that held it. She used both of her hands to tousle Chloe’s hair, enjoying the youthful look the dozens of curls cradling Chloe’s face gave her. “There!” Nadia said triumphantly.

“Your hair is beautiful. You should wear it out more often.” Sasha told her. “It’s so thick and long with curls, but it frames your face so well.”

“My husband likes for me to wear it out too. It can be a bit heavy at times.” Chloe found a strand to twirl around her finger, emptying her glass. “Another,” she called out to the smiling waiter.

Several martinis and dozens of bags later, Chloe returned to her hotel room after dinner, drinks, and a whirlwind shopping trip on Biscayne Bay Street. Her hotel room was a small but quaint room on the same street. She and Josh rarely argued, but they disagreed about this hotel, which is where everyone on set stayed; however, Josh persisted that it wasn’t good enough for his wife. Josh wanted her to stay at the Miami Beach Resort and Spa where he and his dad stayed when they came to Miami for business or sent any of their employees for training. Again, Chloe refused, knowing that it was important for her to be apart of the group. Josh finally acquiesced, but he wasn’t happy about it.

The smooth white exterior of her hotel belied the colorful, modern interior. The wide double doors opened to a sleek waiting room full of plush, red sofas, a thick bear rug, fake palm trees, and a toothless Korean manning the front desk. The initial gawdiness waned as she

reached her room. Even though the air conditioner was on full blast, Chloe opened the screenless push-out windows to allow the noise of a sleepless beach city to clamber into her room like a snow storm...pulsing music, boisterous laughing, screeching cars, sounds that she loved. Chloe plopped down in the lounge chair next to the window, feeling an exhilaration she hadn't felt since she and Josh's wedding. She slid her laptop out of her bag to Skype Josh, but her cell phone rang first.

"Chloe?"

"Hi Acacia!" Hearing her grandmother's voice instantly sobered her, an amalgamation of pleasure and dread filled her. "How are you?"

"Hello my dear. I'm doing fine. I was so happy to hear your voice mail. As a matter of fact, I was set to call you this week to tell you about a photo opportunity that I hope you'll be interested in. You can come visit, help your country out, and make some money."

Chloe was surprised. She and Acacia never really talked about her photography because her grandmother thought of it as a hobby, not a tangible way to make a living. Acacia wanted Chloe to follow in her father's footsteps, the footsteps of most of the Livandi family, and go into some type of science or engineering to benefit Asteria or the Cinque Terre islands. Chloe blamed science for her mother and her father's demise, so she never wanted anything to do with it. "Well, when is a good time for us to come?"

"I hope you are coming for at least a month. It'll take that long for us to relax, catch up, and for you to get acquainted with Petramos."

"Petramos?" Chloe couldn't believe the coincidence.

“Yes. The pictures you’ll be taking are of Petramos, but I’ll tell you more about that later. Tell me, when do you think you can come?”

“Josh is coming too Acacia.” Chloe wanted to get that out there upfront in case it was a deal breaker.

“I suppose that’s fine. He is your husband; although, I cannot imagine why you’d chose a foreigner over all of these fine Astreites.”

Acacia didn’t attend their wedding, her disappointment in Chloe’s choice of husband, like her career choice, was yet another point of contention between she and her last living relative. Josh came from one of the wealthiest, most cultured, and respected families in Georgia, not that any of that mattered to Chloe, yet it didn’t endear Josh to Acacia. Only heritage mattered to the Asteria matriarch. Chloe spoke with her grandmother for several minutes more working out times and dates. She promised to call Acacia with their travel arrangements. When she hung up, she felt like a child again, lost, unsure, and like someone else controlled her life.

Chloe dialed Josh on Skype. She got him on the first try.

“I’ve been waiting on you sweetie. How’d the shoot...Wow! Your hair looks great loose and free like that!” Josh remembered the first time he saw his wife, at a concert at the World Congress Center, she was taking photos of the band as part of an internship. She’d gotten jostled in the crowd on her way backstage and her hair had come loose out of the ponytail holder. It was even longer and more unruly than it is now, and the way it framed her face made her look like an angel. Josh was instantly attracted to her, but her shy, humble, unassuming demeanor captivated him even more. They dated for several weeks before she knew that he

was one of the Georgia Wilimington's, but she didn't care. She had that same innocent, free look now with her hair falling around her shoulders and face and her cheeks a bit rosy. He could tell she had a little too much to drink, but he loved the wistfulness that embodied her right now. "Somebody's been out drinking." He teased.

She put her hand over her mouth and giggled like a pubescence adolescent. "The girls thought I needed a wardrobe renovation, so they made me go shopping, said my clothes are homely and I needed some that flattered my figure instead of hiding it. Do you think I dress dowdy?" Chloe cocked her head to the side, her hair cascading to the right, capturing her introspection.

Josh clicked Skype's "take picture now" button and snapped a picture of his wife. "Dowdy? No. Conservative, Yes." He lowered his voice, but I know what's underneath those clothes, so it doesn't matter to me what you wear. I get to see the good parts." He winked at her.

She dropped her head again, hiding her blush.

"So tell me more about your day Princess."

Chloe loved his calm, bedroom eyes, "I told you my plan would work." She lifted her arms above her head, imitating the touch down signal the referees made.

"You captured the girls in a comfortable setting?"

"Bulls eye! That's how they suckered me into shopping with them. I'm uploading the pictures to you as we speak.

Josh imitated a high five on the screen. Chloe knew he genuinely wanted her to succeed. Photography had been her lifelong dream; an occupation her grandmother deemed a waste of

time. When Chloe graduated high school, she left Astoria as fast as she could, accepting a scholarship in Photography from the University of Georgia, where she earned her Bachelors and Masters degrees. Chloe got her big break when a friend needed her assistance with some model shots at Phipps Plaza. It was a retail photo shoot at Saks Fifth Avenue with Dolce and Gabana, while her friend shot the magazine shoot on Peachtree Street. D&B loved Chloe's style: how she calmly dealt with the models, easily found locations and settings, and matched them to the model. She was patient with their temper tantrums. But they mostly lauded her for her eye, how she sagaciously captured each model in their element, made it all look so natural. Ever since then, Chloe was their southern regional photographer. She traveled to location, maybe once a month. Chloe and Josh thanked God for Skype thousands of times a month. It was the best way for them to see one another the few times she was away. He could not travel with her because he had a cable company to run, but Josh encouraged and supported her, and the two sat on Skype for hours when they were apart.

"Oh, I talked to Acacia today too. You are not going to believe what she wants me to do." Josh lifted a blonde eyebrow, listening as Chloe gave him the details.

