

When Pan meets Cal

A recent Maltese tale from the next century

A merciless summer

In a summer from another time, no star will shine, and no dark flimsy clouds will be present. At times, a moon like a deflating, shrinking balloon will be seen. The raging heat of the sun that used to astound us, has burned away any verdant growth. What will be left of the parched earth will be yellowed: sickened cane reeds and even sicker trees. You can count it on one hand as old as time. There will no longer be a cycle of four seasons. We will be left with hot summers, season after season. It will be just summer and summer and summer and summer. The summer will leave us with a razed terrain with no recognizable physiognomy. It will be the start of an era of scorching summers and some of us will still be here.

Resemblance of a fish

The island (and its sister island) that pretends to be a continent, way bigger than it is, right in the center of the world, will not remain in the shape of a fish. It will have moved to a newer center and its shape will change to something not yet known. Pan will remember that he once read about an island in the shape of a fish with its surrounding islands, and about bays covered with deck chairs, and cars all in a twitchy, jittery line, with its children left without any roof over their heads, leaving the turbulent, polluted air with a sour taste in their mouth. Even these island stories will disappear. Everything will have disappeared and turned into dust. There will be few inhabitants left who can write, except for a few who will record what they hear and see so the next generation and the one that follows will continue to pass on the stories.

Gloom

They will recount the stories of what they heard and saw. These are the future generations of raconteurs. They will not see the distinctions between retelling the stories, retelling them in their entirety, or even retelling them accurately. We will be at their mercy in what they choose to recount. Journalists. It was like this before the time of darkness and it remains so. Journalists. There will be few left who can read the stories. Journalists. Among those that are left, few will be able to read or love these narratives. Especially, those non-fiction stories. But there will be those few left, who because they can read, will, at times, put pen to paper. Journalists. They will be as one. And they will write together, for each other, for others who do not write, but at least will read something. They will write because they want to, they will write to give testimony to

what is and so will not be forgotten, they will write so we do not forget the past. They might use a different language but the meaning and the art of storytelling will not be lost. There will be those who write:

/Stories of horror and stories of women

/Stories of good and evil

/Stories of our inner islands

/Stories of love lost

/Stories of the mundane

Maybe for those who come later, there will be some who want to read about and uncover a narrative of a generation that once was. There will be those who will want to read the story of a woman who shines bright among them all.

And now, Cal

Because she will be there, among them. Cal. The woman who writes mundane, everyday stories. The screaming and the cheating. Inventing excuses and abuses. Scribbling about the flow of time and stolen tempo. No one knows if Cal stands for Calypso or Calliope. It might be that Cal stands for Cal and does not stand for anything else. But it will be she who will manage the journalists so that for centuries no one will forget. Even if the others, among them the bird hunters, will try to bury everything and blame it on the dry landscape. The stories of horror, evil, and lost love will not be needed. She of the brittle, emerald eyes and emerald ink will prevail and will write with burning cinders. When the unforgiving sun burns the green, living earth, her eyes will remain. By that time she will have written a lot of stories; she will write about what could have been but did not happen and what occurred and could not be undone. The final stories will start when we think everything has ended. The first days of scorching summers.

Works of scorching summers

At that time there will not be much left to do. Some will look forward and repeat the past.

There will be journalists, writing. Chefs trying to cook. The sweepers will courageously continue to sweep. Teachers will try to teach. But there will be those who will try something new. And those who will always just think of themselves. Along with them, there will be the older inhabitants, those that Pan will remember reading about. Fishermen will look on still waters. There will be those whose task will be to walk without stopping. And the hunters will try to catch something that can be eaten.

Among all of them, Pan will be the best bird hunter because, long ago he hunted turtle doves, quail, and other creatures that fly. He had read a lot about birds.

And now, Pan

During the first years of scorching summers, hunger will affect the ground and the mind. Slim bodies will wander from one place to another trying to figure out what is happening. Among them, Pan stands out because he cuts quite the figure. Despite the stabbing hunger, he still is handsome. Broad-shouldered and tall. His gaze is deep and goes right through you. He does not talk much but every movement counts. Pan will remain healthy and very much aware. He will remain determined to catch any creature even the lightest bird and the smallest prey. He will fly towards that prey in the batting of an eye. Pan does not want to listen to any long tedious talk. Pan does not want to hear about any pandemic. Pan will keep on going. Pan will be defined by what he does.

The First Letter

Ma,

I'm writing to you while I am among the withered branches of a desiccated acacia tree. Don't ask me how I recognized her. As I am writing these words, I don't know if they will ever reach you. But wherever you are, Ma, you will know and hear my words. You will read. And so, my words will reach you.

What has brought us here? And it is right that you left us long ago. On that day that your soul flew far away, I cried over the blessed days and was grateful for the hours you were with us. I cried thinking of your peaceful gaze and your busy hands. We cried as if tomorrow would never come. And when tomorrow came it was not the same. You know what Ma? The more time passes, the more I am like you. My eyes are now the color akin to yours, my voice is now hoarse, resembling yours, and my nails are rounded and neat identical to the shape you kept.

I am doing exactly what you have done. I talk. Not with the hoarse voice rising like a peal of bells, but more intricate. I will continue searching for those words we lost with every tree that disappeared, I will keep looking for those rare, truthful syllables that left our shores. There are those inhabitants here that are winning with the dark forces and they don't want to acknowledge any other possibilities. And I will talk. This last sentence --

Are you going to take note of every word I say and every case I will unravel?

Love you,

Cal

The hunter

Those hunters were used to shooting arrows. Their bodies come up out of nowhere and hit their target in a flash of the eye. There will be arrows flying everywhere. And Pan's will be the fastest arrow. He will work hard and will be able to feed others. He will look for some primordial creature that, if caught, will feed everyone for the rest of time. Pan wants to be the one to slaughter and clean it. He will go after the creature with all his strength and will splay her out once and for all.

Planes of flowers

And the creature will wander without knowing where it is heading. She will wander without being caught. She will stay away from any living thing. Nothing will be sacrosanct in the time of scorching summers. The rule of law will become mere suggestions. Rules will exist nowhere, no object will be illicit, and no act illegitimate.

Except.

Some patches of ground where no one is allowed to enter with blackened sacred trees with the smell of flowers that bloom every two months in their midst.

Mi/rage 1

In the first days of scorching summers, Pan will run. He will be running until he is out of breath. He will run just like the primordial creature running from one point to another looking for a spot to pounce. Her strong body is the color of night. The nuanced light gives off the same dark color, teasing him. He sees her. Her hands and feet are long. She has hair and her eyes are the shade of green of the most valuable jewels that used to be bought and sold. They were the most precious of gems.

Slander 1

And when, days later, he sees that some want to put obstacles in his path, he gets mad. He will become like a primordial beast himself. He will look for those who are making it difficult for him with their use of words. He will let no one interfere with his search for the ancient beast

close to his heart. He will let them talk and will continue searching for her. If needed, he will find more hunters to help him with the search. There are places he has never seen and more stretches of land to cross before he finds what he is seeking. Even though it hurts to hear what the others are saying and writing about him. He will continue doing what he has to, even if it upsets him. He will try to make them understand that he is full of good intentions, unlike the ones that went before him.

The journalists suspect otherwise, but Cal will stay until she finds him.

The second letter

Ma,

I am writing to you to let you know how I am feeling and how I'm spending my days. I am going from one place to another hoping to catch a glimpse of some patch of darkness I did not see from far away. I am writing about every morsel, every minute, every instance. When you next see me, I imagine you telling me how proud you are that I did not keep my mouth shut. Especially about Pan. Do you know Pan? Once upon a time, he used to live among us, but under the glare of the moon he lost the passion for truth, and he was happier in the dark than in light. I am thankful to be writing a morsel of words for those who want to listen and put together the pieces. Those who come after us might only find fragments and maybe the manual on how to patch these bits and pieces together. Is this letter, just like a manual, filled with secret codes?

Love,

Cal

Mi/rage 2

Pan will run until out of breath. At one point he will have almost caught the creature. He manages to touch her right leg but she escapes. He hopes he does not have to use his pistol. But, just like the journalists predicted he will end up using it. It is the only way he can catch her. Having a pistol is not against the law but every inhabitant knows that it is better not to use one. He knows no tree will obstruct his view. He steps in those light patches, to the black sacred trees that give off the scent of flowers that bloom every two months and are about to wither. But Pan knows well, that he should not go near them. But yet he steps in. Because this is the best spot to see her writhing. If there were trees, he could hide. That day he wished that there were trees and that he could remain hidden. But he does not keep himself from stepping in. The primordial creature will run right in front of him, teasing him. She looks towards the darkness.

And Pan will wait for that moment when he can pounce.

Slander 2

Cal's eyes remain emerald green just like her departed friends knew them. They had succumbed just like the other inhabitants, going away one by one. A wave of suffocating heat keeps rising, killing everyone in its wake. But now, even the inhabitants that are left, think that the existence of the creature is a myth. Pan wants the primordial creature for himself. They do not believe that he wants to catch the creature and feed them all. Pan was never one to share his gains and they will keep getting thinner while Pan remains thick. They keep hearing that Pan is trespassing where he shouldn't and the black sacred trees with the scent of flowers have disappeared because of the constant encroachment.

The news

In a little bit, Cal and the journalists will find out that Pan did want the primordial creature for himself. He will not be feeding any journalists, chefs, sweepers, teachers, inhabitants, fishermen, or those who walk without stopping. They will find a scribbled note addressed to them. They will find out he is carrying a pistol he has no license for and that everyone knows he should not be carrying. They will find out that he is trespassing and because of him the black sacred trees with the scent of flowers might never bloom again.

And it will be Cal who will be broadcasting the news to the four corners of the world.

The third letter

Ma,

This might be the last time I write. Yes, writing for everyone to see, not just a letter to you. I feel I'm nearing the truth. Cruel forces are making sure to cloud the truth, but somewhere Pan (and maybe his friends) are doing the opposite; that which is not right and is prohibited. I am very afraid sometimes but someone has to take a stand. Someone has to tell him to stop what he is doing. We have long known that he is trying to catch the primordial creature for himself. He is decimating any hope that any tree will grow again. He is stepping on sacred ground. I will share with you what I have known for a long time. And when the time comes the journalists and I will broadcast all we know so everyone will be aware of what is happening. When the time comes, Ma, I will be thinking of you. I am doing what you have always done. Do you remember when I told you this? I told you, I would speak out. I could not speak like you, in your hoarse voice rising like a peal of bells, but I spoke out. I also told you that I would keep

searching for the truth that we lost with every disappearing tree, I would continue to shout out the truth that has long disappeared from our shores...I feel I am near.

Lots of love,
Cal

Mi/rage 3

Pan can see everything between some shriveled leaves from the surviving black trees. Pan will see everything. They will be less sacred than the trees whose flowery scent is more like chrysanthemums in a catacomb. Pan knows where the primordial creature lies and he will shrewdly observe her. He feels her eyes on him and he will look in her direction, almost into her gaze. He will see her dash across, writhing with the night, and taking any form she so desires. He sees her squinting emerald eyes. Exactly like Cal's. Face to face with her, he will know she is not a primordial creature, and he will grab the pistol and fire. And he will leave her, fanned out on the ground.

The discovery

On the island shaped like a fish, the doctors will be long gone, screaming of a sun that burnt all creatures, the journalists will come before any of the inhabitants from the tail of the fish. Their hearts will be in mourning as if they lost their loved one. The sweepers will emanate from the mouth of the fish. They will clean up everything. And the teachers, fishermen, and those who walk without stopping will follow them. Not everyone will appear. They will first see Cal whose face is green as if the color has seeped from her eyes. From her mouth, she will utter the words she has wanted to say and her hands will be like a rosary of syllables. Words will be bubbling out of her mouth like froth. The froth will be hot and glowing and it will burn to a crisp.

The end

There will be a day of mourning because, on that day, words died.

The journalists

Her friends will continue to write the truth with the few words that remain. Cal will be remembered by the flowers drawn in the dust and in the heavy air. She will remain on the tongue of those journalists who never risked anything. But long after her, there will be those who start using more words and they will persist in finding the dirt. Until they find no wall

stopping them.

The present

When Pan was questioned, he insisted that he was searching for the primordial creature for all the inhabitants. What he will never say is that the primordial creature he was searching for was Cal all along. What he will not say is that he knew it was her but he still aimed and pulled the trigger. And he aimed and shot because he knew it was her. But maybe the primordial creature was always her, with the long hands and feet. Her hair and eyes were the color of green that resembled the gems that were bought and sold. Pan knew how to read but he did not want to read about himself. And what he definitely did not want to read about was the truth. And especially, Pan will not say that Cal was speaking the truth, that if he had not gotten rid of her, she would have continued to broadcast the truth about the secrets hidden in the sacred trees.

Pan will no longer be a hunter. He will become one who walks without stopping, leading the inhabitants to the last days. Without words or salutation.

At the very end

In the summer of another time, there will be the beginning of the era of the scorching summers and a few of us inhabitants will still be here. The dry fields will not resemble any from the past. The hot eternal summers will cover large patches of ground that resemble nothing. It will be summer and summer and summer and summer. All that will be left is a hot summer, season after season. There will be no four seasons followed by the next four seasons. There will only be a dried crust left: yellowed canes and those dark trees. The hot sun that used to amaze us will burn every verdant area left. At times a moon the shape of a misshapen balloon will appear. No stars or clouds will remain visible.