



Artemisia I: The Coyness of Queens

Costas Komborozos

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Write the words. Write about her. Not me, her, he says. I realize that I am imagining this moment of selflessness on the part of the king. I imagine Xerxes saying that Artemisia was better than him. And then I remember how the Persian king once said that Artemisia's display of courage and bravery in battle testified to how men were created from women rather than the other way around. Now, Xerxes motions for me to continue telling his story, which he somehow views as inseparable from the life of Artemisia. Imperious laughter echoed down the corridors of her unconsciousness. Artemisia felt herself rising from deep sleep, glimpsing an inferno raging across a dark sea. Measured footfalls punctured the airy silence of dreaming. The doors of a palace swung open in ominous unison, letting a dark tempest sweep across the gold and marble interior. The war was coming. Artemisia felt the seismic thrust of the dark storm's airy sword. She felt the seamless calm enclosed within the soothing white walls being shattered. Her girlhood now seemed like a distant citadel swallowed whole by the unrelenting storm. The wind was now fiercer than ever, and Artemisia felt herself grow Amazon-like in the face of the unabated storm. The jewel-encrusted crown that her father Lygdamis had placed on her head was now gone, swept away by the storm. The wind plucked memory after memory from her disarrayed mind. Then utter certainty spread throughout her, emboldening her and pushing her to remain firm. Artemisia was now a warrior-queen, gazing defiantly into the dark storm. She marched toward the blackness. With every step forward, the storm retreated. Within moments, she saw the storm withdraw itself into a remote, obscure distance. Artemisia wondered if a part of the storm had entered and twisted the entrails of everything she knew. Now, she felt the same dark wind, only this time it breathed intangibly from a glorious distance. General Themistocles of Athens was readying his naval force to face the Persians at Salamis. Mardonius suggested that the Persians attack the Athenians at sea. Artemisia advised against this course of action. Now, the Persians were preparing for a battle at sea.

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