

Attys. The Boy

Daniel Bolton

Attys departed at dawn. The port gleamed behind him from the sunrise; it were as though he chased the star, while abandoning home. Since youth, he had felt a rather strong affinity for the sea. This, quite plausibly, was due to its elegant minimalism, which contrasted well with the needless social complications that consumed him in the city.

It was at sea that Attys did his best thinking. He was not a sailor by choice; Elpis had forced him, as it was a source of pay. This was her quoth reason. However, if the truth were known she had become weary of Attys, his temper, and general disposition. Therefore, she sent him away on a voyage of roughly one month. He departed in late July and returned early in September. While away, the haze of the city behind him, Attys began to find transparency with nearly every thought. Moreover, he gained understanding.

Attys took with him a stark black raven he had acquired and trained as a boy, and each day he bid the raven to carry a scroll in its beak that was to be deposited in the garden alongside the home of Elpis. These scrolls contained intense apology and love, but they were never regarded by Elpis- the intended recipient.

Elpis indeed felt relief in solitude, but briefly- for she had a suitor. Jetur had been an acquaintance of Elpis, but the moment Attys set sail the frequency of his visits grew exponentially. Since Jetur was the son of Akmon, a wealthy politician, and Attys was but a lowly minstrel, the mother and father of Elpis encouraged his courtship.

Attys' absence left Elpis with vast liberty. She and Jetur courted frequently. The raven came at noon, and she always had to burn the scrolls before Jetur arrived at the garden to visit, followed by pleasant sandalwood incense. He brought for her lavish gifts from the east, and exotic plants from the gardens in Babylon. This warmth totally masked the scars Attys had left.

Still aboard ship, daunting dreams soon imposed themselves unto his sleep. Mostly, they invoked storms, and consequently episodic death. These were the type of dream that one feels upon awakening, carries throughout the day, and is unable to formulate a ground regarding their truth or import. Attys could bear this no longer.

He begged the captain:

--Take us back to port, sir; the heart demands it! The captain furrowed his brow and said:

--You are valued in this crew, boy. And I suppose our catch is passable. Very well, I give you my word- you shall see the port by sunset.

Attys jumped onto the pier and began to sprint. For seven miles, he ran. He passed the market, the village, and the church. Feeling the weight of curious or offended eyes upon him, he pressed onward. Before long, he found himself below the terraced hillside upon which rested the residence of Elpis. The aroma of the gardens permeated the acrid and offensive odour of an exhausted sailor. Ignoring the serpentine pathway, he climbed the hill.

--Elpis! I have come only to give you my love. I sent a scroll everyday in futile and squalid effort, with hope that they might reconcile my shortcomings. No apology or defence will rectify me. I love you, and that is all that will be said on my behalf.

Elpis looked at her feet. --There is another love for me, Attys.

--Jetur!

--I am sorry.

--No, impossible! It simply cannot be!

--Be calm. He will be here soon. I ask you to leave.

--Please Elpis, I beg of you!

--No, Attys, you failed me.

With tears quickly welling in four eyes, Attys pleaded,

--With a final embrace, I shall leave you.

And so they held each other, and Attys skulked back to the city. He tried to drown reality with ale, but it was as useless as the scrolls. Song could not even help him now. His beloved lyre was refuse. He became despondent and inconsolable in the weeks that followed.

Again Attys chased the sun, but alone.

□ □ □

More and more did Attys begin to seek solace in the ale, and the sea, too. In hardly a year, he had known all the land that Alexander had traced his blessed digits alongside. It was in Persia- or what we now know as Persia- or perhaps even Egypt that Attys discovered the luxury of the hookah; the sailors had stolen into a private den once and taken air from the coils. The mind, consequently, was expanded. Attys, and many of his fellow seafarers for that matter, took with him a large silken bag that contained in it the very leaf that had influenced them.

This, he thought, would keep the nights shorter, and thoughts somewhat less acute- if not altogether distorted. It became something of a mechanism with him, as he felt more akin with his crew, with himself. Rarely did the captain find him clear-headed. Alas, this is the life to which he had given himself.

That having been said, it should then be noted that Attys had, in many other ways, improved. He was permitted to read through the captain's books at times. The captain, though a fairly educated man, had little interest in formal learning, where Attys did. Therefore, his mind grew. It may be a coincidence or it may be a result of behavioural and authoritative influence, but he agreed with the captain, and rejected much of what society had built. Attys felt that there was much more to be appreciated in one star than in all the books in Athens.

Nevertheless, he read, and was fascinated with mathematics, science, too. In fact, after some playing with numbers he began to formulate many new (and it may be said, generally ridiculous) thoughts concerning the world around him. After some extensive works, he became a respected thinker on the mainland and consequently resigned from his vessel.

--I understand fully, said the captain to him, and should you ever need my men or me, you know that this ship docks just as does Lyra rise. As Attys ran memorized facts and equations sparked by the captain's reference through his head, the man spoke with a light but nonetheless cynical twinkle in his left eye, whose cataract and possible carcinoma of the lid displayed not so much a tired or even old countenance to the boy, as he was merely a boy, as they did make him venerable and generally trustworthy to Attys.

No matter how busy his mind became, there was a lightness in his chest, where an intricate coffer of feeling had been but where now only a complementary system of muscle and valves lay. It was Elpis. As one might expect, she did, with time, come to realise the true goings on of that summer, and she was shameful. Unfortunately, Attys was haughty and rather obstinate at times. He refused her calls until an illness came upon her, until time- whatever time really was, is, or will be- until time suddenly became of extreme and unaccountable value.

Her bed began to feel of death weeks into the outer edge of life, which was strange. The pretentious flowers strewn about did little the mask the odour, or appearance, really, of disease. When they would talk, and this was often, Attys did not listen. He stared and was pallid most of the time. When she spoke, Elpis never actually listened either. Both acted as though every precious word had been recited from a tablet set in the face of a very important building during a small but exclusive ceremony, and they were content.

There were no secrets revealed nor any profound statements exclaimed. After departure had been accepted, Attys had little care in his actions. Nevertheless, once, the question of her mistake had been mentioned. Now Attys had the chance to repeat what he thought only the sea would hear. In an act of vengeance, he took down every petal or every flower and burned them before her. (The bedroom had no exterior wall, and was adjacent to the garden.)

--They had beauty. He did not so much as blink when regarding the ashes:

--They were beautiful until fire. They were licked with flames and now in such an absence have fallen into powder, to ashes, and become grey and neutral. They will return to earth, and new flowers will bloom by spring. He looked up at her and said,

--These ashes are not missed.

As he stormed out of the estate, Elpis began to feel an incendiary gradient of regret wash through her veins.