

## An Exhibit by Grief, the Sculptor

*Evan Allee*

***Erechtheion. Caryatid. Kore***  
***A, B, D, E, and F***  
**Alcamenes and his circle**  
**420-515 BC.**

***caryatid***  
**Purchased from:**  
**Thomas Bruce,**  
**7th Earl of Elgin, 1816.**

Alas—Grief, the Sculptor, cannot find you if your eyes  
have not been carved yet. You cannot see it  
and it cannot see you—insentient and soulless  
without windows to peep into. There is no river  
without ducts to leak through,

But you cannot fault the Mediterranean's throat: open  
to drink in the north-flowing Nile. Grief has tools  
to find your impossible loss obstructed in stone,  
to point and chisel your vision towards Athens  
where, across the sea, Daughter

C is still missing.

Do you dream? The Sculptor will not force you to sleep; you struggle  
to find it, but the Sculptor can't make you when you prefer the grating  
of your own bones as you writhe, your neck a swivel—essentially,  
you will shave yourself down—but the Sculptor can wait. It is patient,  
and there are others who are less obsessed with restoring

Erechtheion temples to their fractured youth; the Golden Age  
of unpromised lives ahead of you—poised still lives posed  
for acid rain to pelt until mercy moves them into a windowless room  
with an empty space for a faceless maiden who is tucked away,  
a wall at her back rather than the pillars of her sisters.

Fuck that. Go ahead—look away. Bite off more than you can chew,  
tooth chisels buried into stone bruises that feast and feast and *feast*  
through the bones of your deteriorating reality. *Go*. Waste away  
in your memories—after all, denial is a river  
and you are well on your way to sinking.

**Menelaus and Patroclus (or *Ajax and Achilles*)**  
**Roman origin, restoration**  
**by Pietro Tacca and Lodovico Salvetti**  
**1st century CE, restoration late 16th century CE.**

When you wake,  
the Sculptor will be ready to hold you.

Without a mouth, you cannot sing  
your dearest harmony. Think,  
*Carve, O Grief, the wrath of Achilles*—though,  
even the Sculptor is wary of you. No, not even grief  
can pierce you. You are godless and crude; your fingers  
curled around a phantom spear only you are treacherous  
enough to wield. Could they love you with these deficits?  
They, whose devotion rivalled an oath from the River Styx?  
Avernal eye for an eye, command the Sculptor to fill  
your empty hands with dragon teeth to sow. Swear  
you won't drive it through your own throat. The Sculptor  
will have to hold you in order to free you, and you  
are far too eager for someone who is being chipped away at. Yes,  
the Sculptor molds you, but a tooth chisel is no match  
for your incisors. The Sculptor is no match for you—for the Rage  
of Achilles is a museless song. It is feral, but you are groomed  
and classically trained for war. It is a song only a lyre  
has the tune for. It is Thanatos's shadow looming  
over your most dear, it is you slashing your spear  
through an army of statues, it is a dry throat screaming bloody,  
murderous. A cry that pierces through even the densest  
of trenches, the deepest of oceans. Devotion  
will rip Thanatos's wings from his spineless,  
psychopompous shoulders and kill the Sun  
before it can liquify the cartilage and marrow  
to match your hollow soul. This is no hubris; this  
is vengeance. But it is a gloriless blaze, touching Helios's chariot  
back to Earth. It is voider than Chaos's room: this sunless field,  
this ashen pyre, this half-filled urn with space for you,  
because a hero's journey is worthless without someone  
to return home to. Not even your rage  
can keep the Sculptor from molding

your dreams, where your most dear and you are aged. Gray,  
not ash and ashen-faced. In this nightmare, the mourning doves  
are singing, and your dearest's rousing inspires the Sun,  
and you bake in it. Together, you bake in it, and separating  
one from the other is a feat more futile than sifting  
through cremains, that golden urn  
whispering as you wake,

*For what it's worth, I would have loved  
to live a long and unremarkable life  
with you.*

***Priam Supplicating Achilles for the Body of Hector***  
**Giuseppe Girometti**  
**ca. 1815-25.**

Your bone-bruised knees can be reshaped  
for as long as you have the dignity  
to crumble, but the Sculptor

cannot graduate past the clay  
until you are finished crawling.  
*Here lies the sunken stone*

*of supposition*; the balances of Fate  
so absolute in the face  
of your *what ifs*.

Around the walls, you would retrace  
the sprinting heels of your deceased.  
It is true that Death comes in threes.

*Complete his fourth circle*—perhaps  
you will find your child in one piece. Perhaps  
you could usurp that Fate. Tune

that spindle like a lyre, caressing  
lively thread with tender musicality;  
your portrayal of Clotho's callous-tipped fingers

as you string your own reprieve. Knit  
one hundred rows of life into a blanket  
while Lachesis is not looking—all this

for the long life of your regurgitated baby  
lying bloody and unperforated, birthed  
from the throats of rabid dogs.

But Atropos is not called “The Inflexible”  
senselessly; of course she would recognize  
your inability to find your feet, the stiffness

of a weary frame, that razed expression,  
like hooves had gouged your jaw slack,  
like chariot wheels had plowed wrinkles

into the ploughs that served your child’s body  
like swill. Like an animal, how far would you crawl  
to return their body back home? Perhaps

you would follow the dirt trail mowed  
by their body. Perhaps dragging yourself  
across enemy lines, no Trojan horse—

just you  
on all fours—bartering to Death,  
will grant you pieces of your deceased.

Commination is not a question; you are here  
for a concession. Eye-level with that heel,  
you would choose to kiss the hands

that carved your son from Earth  
if only to hold the remnants of him. Forehead  
to Death’s foot, *Relinquish him.*

You would provide him skin-to-skin  
that leaves you shivering. You would cover him  
in the same blanket  
you brought him home in.

*Danaïd*

**Auguste Rodin, carved by Jean Escoula  
ca. 1885-90.**

Lift your head and let the acid rain fill  
your waterline. Who are you? Can you fill

the basin and face yourself? It is a ceaseless task,  
living, but you have made it this far. You can fill

the holes in the sieve you have become, but you need to rise.  
You have convicted yourself of mortal sin, these delusions fill

the holes in your soul where new dreams could be molded.  
This bed cannot become your grave; you need to eat your fill

even if you would prefer to choke on the plaster. Drown  
on dry land and keep drinking. Think of this as a prophecy to fulfill

until you appear more human than statue—or appear at all,  
even if you are puddle jumping in shoes that you can never fill,

because at least you are here. A plaster mold of who  
you used to be, yes, with a smile that doesn't quite fill

out, but you have made it this far in the face  
of despair, and isn't that a tall order to fill?

Unfold your forehead from your ribs. You will always  
be a sieve, but it is more than possible to fill

your basin enough to find reasons  
to keep finding reasons to fill

in your fractured pieces. The Sculptor cannot make you whole again,  
but it will remind you who to live for; why you need to fill

and fill  
and fill.

***Prometheus Bound***  
**Nicolas-Sébastien Adam**  
**1762.**

There will come a point in eternity where you build rapport  
with the winged torture that greets you in the mornings  
with your blood still stained  
over its curved beak. A point where you wonder  
if the only apotheosis applicable to you  
is the quiet in the night where your insides  
regenerate anew.

There will come a point in the night  
where the absence of sound drives your head  
back into the rock. That quiet in the night  
where you recite the names of whose living  
you outlived. The quiet in the night  
where the stars shoot  
themselves in the foot, yet wish  
to be wished upon, cry out, burn up,  
preach to the choir, screech  
to the birds, bark  
at the dogs, curse  
the Gods.

There will come a point in cursing  
where you wonder if Grief  
is yet another ruler with a capital G.

my God, i am  
carving myself  
down to the bone. let me be  
a work of art.

This point isn't at the bottom of the Nile,  
or inside that golden urn, or at the heel  
of Death, or fused into bed,  
or chained to a rock  
as the Sculptor carves a fresh liver for you  
in anticipation for the eagle that comes  
every waking day  
to raze through your ribcage.

There will come a point where the morning  
is, rather than a heavy chain, a familiar weight. In a way,  
you are in two places at once: somewhere you've been  
and somewhere you will go. Your eternity is laid out  
on a stone, served up, eaten alive. It is the pinnacle of your existence,  
this toil this pain this proof that someone existed, repairing a  
cage pried apart rib by rib to the gyrating inside of where it  
hurts, where it really hurts—not the superficial thing that  
protects the thing that really hurts, because grief is stored in  
the liver, you see, the organ that repairs itself behind a brittle  
shell with slats perfect for talons to render through or perch on  
to get a better view of this ill-furnished room:

<i>There</i> is someone	damned	in the trench where my sternum is	
	missing	in the third rib from the left,	
	stolen	in broad daylight,	
	broken	in crevices like graves,	
<i>there</i> is someone	dead	and I hold them	<i>here.</i>

You can't help but flex your hands,  
wave the bird down. *Nothing's changed.*  
*All you can eat.* It is the only one who knows  
what your abscess tastes like, who knows  
the gnawing hunger of missing who lives  
only inside of you. It is a regular.  
It is your only visitor. Is grief eating you  
alive? Do you like living  
with your arms outstretched,  
like one of those countless limping stars  
will grant you the wings you wished for  
when you were feeling your miniscule best?

Maybe you,  
reader, mourner, voyeur,  
listen for the whispers in the wings.

don't look for me in them.  
there are five stages  
and i am center  
at every one

There will come a time where  
apotheosis could be this breath.  
An adrenaline crash.  
A decision.  
A bath.

An iron ring  
fashioned from the bounds  
of your torment, made for you  
to look back at, not down upon,  
to ground you, not chain you to the ground.  
Living isn't done by playing dead. Grief  
is not a death sentence; this exhibit  
does not lead to an execution.

Apotheosis is not  
marveling at marble  
in an echoey room, waiting  
for the clatter of chains  
to become the warble  
of a loved one's voice returning back to you.

Apotheosis is not  
something anyone will ascend you to.

There are five stages  
for you to feast  
your eyes on. Pick  
these statues apart. Eat  
them up.

Pace  
or peruse  
or pass by,  
but move.  
Keep moving.