

# Immanence

the journal of applied mythology, legend, and folktale

FALL 2016 VOL. 1 NO. 1

[immanencejournal.com](http://immanencejournal.com)

## THE MYTHIC PRESENT





# Urban Romulus: How the Myths Have Shaped My Life

## Introducing Romeo

Dick Russell

In late March 2015, I attended a gathering of the Youth Mentoring Connection near downtown Los Angeles. High school age inner-city kids, mostly African American and Hispanic, came together on the last Friday of the month to “let their hair down” about their often troubled lives.

When I arrived around six p.m., about forty boys and girls were milling around in a large conference room having pizza. A lean, good-looking black youth, around six feet tall, approached me and extended his hand. “I’m Romeo,” he said, and introduced the pretty Hispanic girl standing next to him. Before long, we all took folding chairs and assembled in a circle. About half-a-dozen were older men and women, apparently mentors. A white, kindly-looking man, who I guessed to be in his fifties, addressed the group. “I’m Tony,” he said; “Sawubona.” Many in the room seemed already familiar with the Zulu greeting, which he explained translates as *I see you*. The response was, “Yebo Sawubona,” which means, *Yes, we see you too*. The youth expressed this in unison.

On a table in the center of the room stood a glass tank half-filled with water and surrounded by different kinds of shiny stones. Tony asked whoever wished to approach and place a stone in the tank, telling the brief story of a person to whom they chose to dedicate the night. “To my mother,” one said, “who is in the hospital with cancer.” Many others came forward, and each moment felt poignant.

It was time to divide into separate groups. Tony asked all the males to stand and honor the young ladies as they departed for a room across the hall. Then the guys fell silent as Tony began to speak. He’d decided to use Homer’s *Odyssey* as the theme for the night. The ancient Greek narrative, he explained, was where the word “mentor” came from. That was the name of the Greek sailor who, when Odysseus had to go off to fight in the Trojan War, had taken care of his son Telemachus for fifteen years. *The Odyssey*, Tony pointed out, was also where our word “odd” originated, as well as “sirens.”

After telling the tale up to where the sirens beckon Odysseus’ men to

shipwreck, Tony paused. “Can anyone in the room pick up the story?” he asked. Romeo did not hesitate. Not only did he continue precisely where Tony left off, but he proceeded to summarize the entire remainder of the *Odyssey*. Wow, that’s an interesting kid, I thought to myself. Later, when Tony opened things up for conversation, Romeo raised his hand to speak.

He was seventeen and trying to finish high school. He revealed that his girlfriend in the next room was pregnant. He needed to focus on having a baby, and what he wanted for the child. He spoke of his difficult home life, and the four times he’d been in “juvie,” juvenile jails. But he did love to read. When he was twelve, as punishment he’d been forced to study—almost memorize—the dictionary. And he discovered that he especially took to mythology. In fact, he devoured it. “And I know *all* the myths,” Romeo said.

I was familiar with the pantheon of gods and heroes, as the biographer of James Hillman, founder of Archetypal Psychology and author of numerous works on the importance of mythical figures. But the fact that this boy expressed such interest, and so articulately, was fascinating.

At one point, I spoke—initially about the boys’ honesty and willingness to tell a group containing white outsiders like myself these tough truths about themselves and their home lives, then about some of my own recent problems. “I’m no stranger,” I began to say—but Romeo completed my sentence. “To misfortune,” he said. I nodded at him in recognition.

\*\*\*

When I told the story the next day to a close friend, she wondered if Romeo might be interested in going to the Getty Villa in Malibu, a museum filled with Greek and Roman sculpture rooms. I got his number from a fellow at the Youth Mentoring Connection and called him. “Have you ever been to the Getty?” I asked. “What’s that?” Romeo responded. I told him and added, “If you don’t think it’s weird, I’d take you there next Sunday, you and your girlfriend or friends if you want to bring them.” He said, “That sounds nice.”

So on a morning in early May, this Caucasian male in his later sixties drove for the first time in his life into South-Central LA and pulled up in front of a woodframe house. The woman who answered the phone turned out to be Romeo’s grandmother. “Romeo’s not here,” she said, “but he told me you might be coming.” I stammered something about whether I should wait in the car. “Oh no,” grandma said, “I think you better come in.”

She lived out back in a very small space. “He doesn’t really have a father,”



she explained. "His father's in jail and his mother's in Vegas. I just took in Romeo's girlfriend, too. They're going to have a baby, and *they're* babies! I'm trying to keep him in school. He's really smart, you know."

After about twenty minutes, Romeo showed up, along with another boy and the younger sister of a third. We piled into my car and headed off. In response to my questions, it turned out that Romeo had never been to a zoo, never been on a boat, never even seen the ocean! When we reached the Pacific Coast Highway, he and the others marveled at the surf crashing against the shoreline. The entrance to the Getty Villa loomed along a hillside. "*Villa* means 'mansion' in Italian," Romeo told the others.

Once inside, all he wanted to see were the sculpture rooms. We walked up to the first glass case. Romeo looked at the ancient marble carving, turned to me, and began describing the entire myth—which gods were represented, how they were related, what their significance was.

He proceeded to do this for the next two and a half hours, everywhere we walked. I was stunned listening to his accounts. He related each myth in the language of today, speaking so eloquently that before long people were following us around the museum. "He's such a wonderful tour guide," one woman said to me. "Ma'am, he's never even been here before, he just loves the myths!" I responded. "Well, he's a genius," her husband said.

When we came to a wall listing how the Greek gods metamorphosed into the Roman, he closed his eyes and had his friends test his knowledge. It was flawless. When we finally departed, I told the kids that they could each pick out one book in the gift shop and I'd buy it for them. Not surprisingly, Romeo selected *The Greek Myths* by Robert Graves.

That memorable day marked the beginning of what became an odyssey of my own, as a mentor entering what increasingly seemed the mythic realm that Romeo and his friends inhabited. I introduced him to another organization, InsideOut Writers, where young "alumni" of the juvenile detention system came together regularly to pursue an ongoing interest in writing. Romeo's prose astonished the group.

But please judge for yourself....

**Dick Russell is the author of twelve books, including *The Life and Ideas of James Hillman, Volume One: The Making of A Psychologist*.**

## How the Myths Have Shaped My Life

Romeo Keyes

The myths had an early place in my life, and I always remember them having an allure for me. I come from a troubled background, so perhaps they were used as a coping mechanism. I don't think that myths are false, but I believe the human mind is so powerful that, due to a collection of people believing in them, they actually came about. And I find it amazing that humans (and gods) can go through such awe-inspiring trials and tribulations and still make it through. It inspires me, because it leads me to believe that I can do it, too.

You see, in their early years most kids hear of Snow White and Rapunzel. My bedtime stories were of gangs, shoot-outs, and people that got killed who were close to our family.

I was born on the night of September 15, 1997, at 6:06 pm, in Sunrise Hospital on the east side of Las Vegas. On my mother's side, they say, I'm Creole: Spanish, French, and Black, from Louisiana. I have Blackfoot and Cherokee blood through grandparents on both sides of my family. My dad's dad comes from Belize.

My mom was repeatedly abused by my father, both verbally and physically, and finally she got tired of it and left. Before this, they were inseparable. A modern Bonnie and Clyde if you will, they roamed Lake Elsinore, Perris, Riverside, and South-Central LA, robbing many people. After that, my mom always had a substance abuse problem. She could never really stop, not even while pregnant. She found a rundown motel to live in on Fremont Street in Las Vegas, a room with no lights adjacent to the glimmering Vegas Strip. My three older sisters lived with us. That didn't last long before we were taken away by Child Protective Services. At first they sought to keep us together but that soon changed. When we were separated, I began to lash out.

I was in and out of various foster care homes, abused and mistreated for years. My mom would sometimes send me clothes, but they'd let the other kids wear them. Or I'd have to wait until everybody else was finished before they'd let me eat. When my oldest sister aged out of the foster system, she finally got me out. By that time I was emotionally removed. When I'd go to the park, most kids were out there playing. I'd be sitting up on a high vantage place, playing with a stick and watching people.

I noticed that I was having dreams. Dreams telling me things not common





Romeo holding a bow that he fashioned from a redwood tree branch, at the Mendocino Men's Retreat hosted by Michael Meade. Photo taken by Dick Russell. 2016.

← CONT. FROM PAGE 49

to an eight-year-old. I would dream about leading battles, setting up strategies, carrying war banners. I'd walk through a sea of warriors and they'd all salute, then I'd get on a horse, tell the bannermen to leave their spears and we'd ride. I don't know what we were riding for, but it seemed to be for a purpose. I'd awake with strange chills, like I had lived before in another time. Later, when I became a reader, I could tell which period from a certain armor they wore.

When I was eleven or twelve and first came to my grandma's in South-Central LA, I woke up telling her about a man who had appeared in a dream. I didn't even know what salmon was, but he had on a pink suit. I'd said to him, "Do you like pink?" and he'd said, "Salmon." He was telling me how things used to be, what he wanted from me, things to avoid in life if I wanted to make sure I'd be straight. I told my grandma, "This dude told me to tell you that he's still watching you and he ain't went nowhere." He said it exactly like that. She started crying. She said, "My dad wore salmon suits, that's all he wore." In the dream, when he turned around there was a car, like a cherry-colored Camaro that he got into and drove until it disappeared. That was his car, too. My grandma was shocked.

Then a prophetic dream told me that something big, someday, was going to happen. It was going to change the world. And I was going to have a part in it.

By fifth grade, I had been kicked out of school and beaten and grounded several times. I got in so much trouble and suspended so often that my TV would get taken away a lot. So all I had was books. I developed a passion for reading.

After I'd exhausted all the books around the house, I began stealing them from the library. Then I started getting reckless and taking entire bags full of books and running for it. I know what you're thinking. What type of kid steals library books?! Well...I did. Soon I had my own personal library. When I finished those, a *Webster's Dictionary* someone had given me allowed me to develop my speech patterns, learn new words and about all kinds of things that intrigued me, from animals to places to cars.

In detention one day I picked up a book called *The Odyssey*. Later I was given my own copy, which I adore to this day. It taught me the meaning of perseverance, of never giving up no matter what comes against you. I was introduced to Zeus, Lord of the Sky; my favorite, Ares, the God of War; and a few others. I was captivated, not religiously but simply emotionally.

I began looking for all things Greek, reading book after book, even finishing the Percy Jackson series by author Rick Riordan. He translates the myths into a



more today version for young people, and I wanted to know how relevant these were to the original. What I noticed about the Greeks was their tendency for tragedies. I began to see relevance to the numerous tragedies in my short life, from Hercules' twelve labors to Achilles being emotionally withdrawn but creating a seeming invulnerability.

**“I BEGAN LOOKING FOR MYTHS TO RELATE TO THE FIGHTS I WAS GOING THROUGH AT HOME AND AT SCHOOL.”**

By the time I was in the sixth grade, I could recite the entire Olympian Pantheon as well as their respective responsibilities. I had nothing further to learn from Greece, so I began expanding my reach into a civilization similar but more structured, disciplined, warlike—the Romans! When I turned thirteen or fourteen my world had expanded. Conflicts began to arise. I began looking for myths to relate to the fights I was going through at home and at school. The Romans were a beautiful culture. Their gods mirrored the Greeks: Zeus–Jupiter, Mars–Ares, Hephaestus–Vulcan, and so forth. But the Romans revealed aspects that were either unknown or not shown in Greek culture.

Ares, while disgraced, hated and feared by Greeks, was revered, honored and appreciated by Romans as their patron Mars, god not just of war but justice, military strategy and honor. This taught me that someone's outlook on you does not define you as a person. Like Ares, I felt I was looked at as an abomination—but that didn't mean I was one. I soon was able to name the Roman pantheon and their Greek equivalents.

So I began looking into Norse mythology. Reading of Bor, Odin, Loki, Thor, Hella, and Frey, Norse myths became like food for me, and I ran through the refrigerator. After that I turned to Africa and found pharaohs and something strangely familiar: Egypt, where these gods were curiously close to me and held

my attention. I always felt like a kindred spirit with the Egyptians. I started reading hieroglyphics to understand more of their culture.

I became familiar with treachery at that point in my life—and what better story than Osiris's wedding to his sister Isis, when his treacherous brother Set betrayed him and fashioned a gold coffin portrayed as a gift that only the greatest god could fit inside. Many gods tried and failed, and eventually only Osiris was left. He got up from his throne and approached the coffin. As he rested in it, the door slammed shut and chains appeared from nowhere. The coffin was filled with molten lead, killing him. Osiris came back to life, taking his throne as King of the Gods while his wife carried his son Horus, God of justice and falcons and conveniently the sky as well. Set eventually dismembered Osiris and threw the pieces all over the world. Once Isis had gathered his pieces (minus his genitalia—that's another story), she had him restored and he later became God of the Dead.

The other thing that captivated me was the idea of death. To Greeks, Charon ferries your soul to the Underworld across the River Styx to await judgment. The



*Crossing the River Styx*. Oil on panel. Joachim Patinir. Circa 1480-1524. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



Romans have Mors, which derives from the same Latin prefix as in “mortuary” or “mortician.” He is the God of death (not God of the dead—that would be Pluto), ready to hunt you down and take you to the Underworld. In Greek he would be called Thanatos, the personification of death. He is Hades’ lieutenant. Whenever Hades wants somebody and their time is up, he sends Thanatos out to get them. Various means are tried to stop him—tell him to come back later, bribe him—but this never works out in the end. It’s a strict code in myth that you cannot cheat death.

Scandinavians have their colorful myths. They say that when you die, if you have proved yourself a warrior on the field of battle, a Valkyrie descends onto the battlefield and takes the worthy to the halls of Valhalla, where they feast and train in preparation for the final battle. Ragnarok, where the chaos wolf Fenrir, son of Loki, will obliterate all the Norsemen, taught me to be practical and that death was unavoidable and even imminent. But I also came to believe that the soul lives on and that you live more than once—that we *are* immortal in a sense, we’ve just adopted different identities for different centuries.

Heroes depicted in ancient myths rarely have happy endings; something always goes wrong by the end. I gained a sense of what death is at an early age: friends dying around me, even my own brother. Toby wasn’t a direct family member. He was white. But as far as I was concerned, he was blood. His mom was addicted to drugs and couldn’t care for him. You never see a white person in an African American street gang, but Toby was allowed and he became a legend. He was fourteen when he was shot and killed in an altercation about drugs.

From my bedroom, I heard the last shot and ran outside to find Toby lying in a pool of blood. The next day, my mom made me go to school. I didn’t change my clothes, which had blood on them. At the end of the day I snapped. I destroyed the whole classroom.

After Toby died, things deteriorated. Before that, I would never think to go commit a crime. Now I stopped caring. I became a rebellious kid who had a problem not with authority but those who wield power with bad intentions and make people suffer. So I ended up on the wrong side of law enforcement, and at the age of twelve I was arrested for robbery. My offense was taking a bike. My mother told the neighborhood kids to call the police, then feigned a mental breakdown and threw numerous accusations at me.

While I was being detained, an officer had called up my oldest sister. She had a friend in Louisiana who gave her a book about spirits. One of these was

**“HORUS TAUGHT ME THAT  
THE TOUGHEST SOLDIERS  
HAVE THE HARDEST BATTLES.”**

Ochosi, the spirit of justice in the Yoruba West Africa tradition. He helps those who are being punished unjustly. My sister advised me to read about Ochosi and then pray to him. I remember thinking, what do I have to lose? A voice answered, “Your freedom.” But I did it anyway. I felt an instant change. I felt content. The worries melted like ice.

The next day, the judge released me. It would be a few years before I encountered Ochosi again.

\*\*\*

My mom took me back in like she had a few times before. We’d always had a really bad relationship. She’d push me down the stairs, bite me, whip me with extension cords, whatever she could grab. I didn’t know until I was a teenager that she had been diagnosed bipolar/manic-depressive. I could’ve shown my teachers all the parts that were covered in marks. But I had a sense of loyalty, I wasn’t going to betray her. She was still my mom.

Having to battle your family must have been what Horus experienced. From his birth he was faced with adversity. Set pursued Horus and his mother like my own mother persecuted me. If I wanted to leave my mom’s house, I had to stop being scared of her. After facing her, I moved in with my older sister. Horus taught me that the toughest soldiers have the hardest battles.

I didn’t meet my dad until I was fifteen. When I was born, I’d come out light-skinned, olive-colored, like others on the Creole side of my mom’s family. My dad said he thought I was a Caucasian man’s baby. When I was thirteen we went through a child support battle and he never showed up. He was in prison for a long time. When I did come under his supervision at fifteen, he taught me everything you should never teach your son. Shooting at people, selling drugs, dealing with cartel people—a fifteen-year-old should have no part in that world. I just played dumb.



When I think about my dad, what comes to mind is Zeus and Ares. Ares is unwanted; Zeus hates his son, who has all the traits which Zeus has himself but tries to hide. His son is just like him, only he stands for war and his father stands for justice. The only time Zeus paid attention to his son was when he was in trouble. When he snuck into Aphrodite's bed chamber and had intercourse with her, and Hephaestus found out and caught him in a golden net, then Zeus complained, "Oh, what have you done!" But when Ares was doing all these things to get his attention, nothing. I related to that.

My dad pointed a shotgun at me once. He was drunk as hell, almost shot me. But when he's sober, he acts so much like me that I can't stand him that way either.

How I feel is, blood makes you related, loyalty makes you family. People expect us to be a normal family—family values, quality time, things like that. But in the Olympian pantheon especially, even if they're immortal, they're still like a mortal family. Family is messy, eternal families are eternally messy. But you're tied to them. We always have family disputes, fighting or arguing over little things. One of the pettiest arguments among the immortals led to one of the biggest conflicts in human history—the Trojan War. Over a golden apple! A beautiful city was lost, people were slaughtered, Achilles was killed.

When they put my dad away again, I was flown back to Vegas and returned to juvie. After being detained for a month, I volunteered for a program they call "The Hero's Journey." Based on Joseph Campbell, whose books I'd read and liked. We left at five in the morning in a van for an eight-hour trip into the mountains past Tonopah in Nevada. My first two weeks I hated it. The rest of my two months there, I adapted and loved it. We learned skills. I went rappelling, learned how to shoot bows and arrows even from horses, make traps and shelters, slide down mountains. We were also near an Indian reservation, where I prayed to Mother Earth. This was the first time I really ever got out of the city, and it changed me a lot. If you dropped me off in the forest today and came back for me in a month, I would still be alive.

I've always liked nature spirits. Gods like Pan, the god of the wild, son of Hermes. Or the Dryads. Or the nymphs. Or the Oceanids. The house my grandma still lives in is sixty-six years old. So is the tree that her father planted in the front yard the year she was born. I think it's an oak, it's big as hell. There was always something between me and that tree. Even before my grandma told me the story behind it, I was fond of it. I used to climb it as a kid, and also sit inside it. Not long ago, she was going to cut it down. I said no, I don't care if this is your house, that

tree was planted for you—and I'll take care of it.

Both my brothers were gang members, but I never became one. If I made a commitment like that, I knew I would honor it, accept the promises that come with joining a gang: do whatever you must to benefit your gang, even kill someone or spend your life in prison. It was all around me, but somehow I still had hope of something different.

It wasn't that I feared death. I knew from an early age that mortality is inescapable. I've had bullets go by my head and graze me. I figured I might as well live hard and burn out early; maybe death is a release. But I was never suicidal. I never grew tired of life. And I think it does have to do with the myths. The gods and heroes went through struggles more prolonged and monumental than mine. I'd go into a courthouse and see a picture of somebody sitting on a chair that reminded me of Zeus on a throne. Or if you've ever been to an ER and seen the emblem of a staff twined with two snakes—that's the symbol of Hermes, the Caduceus. These things are descended from the Greeks, one of the most vibrant cultures in history along with the Romans—although the Caduceus wasn't supposed to be used for medicine, because that god is Asclepius.

One morning I was waiting for the 5:55 am bus for school when a white Prius drove past, eerily slow, with two occupants I could barely make out behind the tinted glass. It circled the block two or three more times after that. Maybe they were verifying me? My older brothers had enemies. Could this be some type of retaliation against them?

I had plenty of time to make my escape, but I didn't. Two men pulled up a final time and asked me if I had a problem. In my arrogance, I asked them the same thing. They proceeded to hop out of the vehicle and attack me.

After the fight I got up to make my way home. I looked down at my white T-shirt. It was torn and I saw an enormous red blood stain. A passerby warned me that I should probably go to the hospital. I refused. I never got stitches.

So today I have an everlasting scar on my chest right above my heart. I had always felt like Achilles, but in that brief moment all that I had lived through could have been taken away. After all, where did Achilles wind up in the end...the Underworld. In my anger I had lashed out and was so hot-headed that someone pulled a blade and cut me numerous times and I hadn't even noticed. Now I reflect on humility, derived from *humilitas*, relevant to *humilis*, which can be translated as "humble."



In Greek mythology, Aidos was the Goddess of humility and modesty, among other things. She was a close friend of Nemesis, the Goddess of divine retribution as well as balance. Remembering this allowed me to gain a sort of closure about the people who attacked me. Fate has a funny way of working out—what they do will catch up to them in the end.

I wonder often about how Fate works. At first, I chucked a lot of misfortune in my life to Fate. In Greece, there was Atropos (sometimes called “the inevitable one”) who cut the mortal thread spun and measured by her sisters Clotho and Lachesis. I didn’t think much about what I’d be when I was twenty-one, because I might not make it past sixteen. But I also read of heroes like Odysseus who defy Fate and accomplish their goals. Maybe I could change what was expected of me.

\*\*\*

I ended up, for my last two years of high school, at my grandmother’s place in South-Central LA. That is where I met Stephanie, who changed my life. I relate it, in a way, to how Theseus and Ariadne came together. She was a princess, and Theseus a prince from another city. Every year her powerful father, King Minos, had a contest. He would bring in a thousand Athenian kids and set them loose in the maze, a labyrinth, where they would be devoured by the Minotaur, half-man and half-bull. Nobody had ever survived the labyrinth.

Theseus was due to go next, but Ariadne had fallen in love with him at first sight. She gave him a ball of red yarn: “Unravel this for every one of your steps through the labyrinth and you will know your way.” Once he came out, he had to marry her. He told her, no problem. There are differing accounts of how Theseus slew the Minotaur.

To find Stephanie, I had to come to a location that was gang-infested, a park under the control of the notorious Latino 38<sup>th</sup> Street Gang that doesn’t like African Americans. There was always a fight, but what made it different that night was my strange presumption that nothing like that would happen. I went with two friends to play basketball. Stephanie was staring at me from across the park. She was beautiful, like nothing I had ever seen. She came over and talked to one of my friends. She smiled at me and I smiled back.

I’m a fan of William Shakespeare. I liked his plays in school when I read them. Of course I read the one with my name. Since I came to be with Stephanie, I’ve often found relevance: our age, the problems that arise, the bickering families. I’m just trying to prevent the same outcome.

She was seven months’ pregnant when an incident happened in a store near where we were staying. It was a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. My friends and I weren’t stealing anything, but one of the girls was rude to the Asian owner and he demanded that we leave. The man ended up spraying mace in my friend’s face. My friend lost control and started beating up the owner. I tried to break it up, but it was too late. The whole thing got captured on a store camera, which the owner’s daughter took to the news media. Three TV channels aired the story of a “savage beating,” never mentioning the mace that provoked it. My friend wasn’t caught, but I wound up being arrested and charged with assault and robbery. An older friend raised bail and I was released to await going to court. My daughter was born three days later.

We named her Cataleya, after a beautiful species of orchid. Some things in this world are truly beautiful. One is hearing a baby’s first cry. My daughter coming into this world gave me a sense of belonging. I thought I’d seen it all, but this showed me there is more to life than all the shit I’d been through—that it can get better.

As the three of us moved in with my grandma, I faced a series of delays before my pre-trial hearing. I could be facing three to five years simply for being present at the scene.

Before one appearance, I went to see Orland Bishop, a youth mentor who once helped bring about a truce between the warring Crips and Bloods. He spoke of how I had to break the pattern that had for so long followed my family and friends. He finished by performing a beautiful ritual with a candle and a prayer. When I sat down again, I had never felt so calm in my entire life.

Before my pre-trial hearing, I had a dream. I was standing in an empty field in a rural setting when suddenly some warriors began to appear. One grand warrior stood before me, a big athletic-looking African. He told me that it didn’t matter what anyone else might think about an action. What counted was whether you believed you were innocent. He then asked how I felt about what had happened. I told him I was innocent. The warrior let out a cry. All those present who believed me guilty were dispersed. When I woke up, I was sure the warrior was Ochosi.

On the stand at pre-trial, the store owner realized from watching the full store video—not the shortened version that had appeared in the media—that I had done nothing to harm him. The judge dismissed my case for lack of evidence. Afterward I went over to the owner in the hallway and apologized, telling him we’d never intended what had happened. The man burst into tears.



Ochosi had my back.

\*\*\*

Promises and Destiny held a lot of power with the Greeks. If you failed on your word, the gods of fate would catch up with you. You might go to Tartarus, the deepest darkest part of hell. I think about this sometimes, in terms of our society today. For my whole life I've been at the mercy of people who abuse their power.

I feel it's true that those who cannot remember history are doomed to repeat it. I watch somebody walk by a homeless person and look at him in disgust—not knowing this man's situation, where he came from, what he's gone through. If we humans could be more empathic to each other, actually help each other instead of just trying to *make it*, then the world would be a better place.

Today I feel like I'm working toward something beyond my crisis lifestyle. My dad's been in prison for half his life and I don't want to follow those footsteps. I want to be somebody who stands up for those who don't have a voice. I have a lot of anger inside me, but now when I get mad, I realize that sometimes it's really over nothing. How I interpret something might not be how it was meant. I know I'm changing because I actually think about consequences. Most of my life I've just been living moment to moment. But if I sit there and reflect on things, giving myself time to think, that's peaceful. My world is expanding, so I guess my mind is too.

Odysseus, Achilles, practically every hero from whatever pantheon you name had to go through a struggle. Some of them lost family members. Some of them lost themselves and lost their minds. But in the end, they found that it was worth it.

I recall a trip I made with my mentor to the J. Paul Getty Villa. The museum has statues from Rome and Greece, and I noticed some Etruscan in there as well. The place was breathtaking. I instantly recalled practically everything I saw from my books and began to recite about the statues, where each was from and the stories tied to them. I went from exhibit to exhibit, floor to floor, until I finally noticed a group of people following me. They asked if I was a curator, or if I worked there. I told them no, but the idea intrigued me. I had always wondered, with the things I learned: is there a career for people like me who commit myths to memory? I'd assumed not. But you never know. I'd like to pursue it.

In the meantime, I guess I became a storyteller.

**Romeo Keyes is an up-and-coming mythologist living in South-Central, Los Angeles.**

