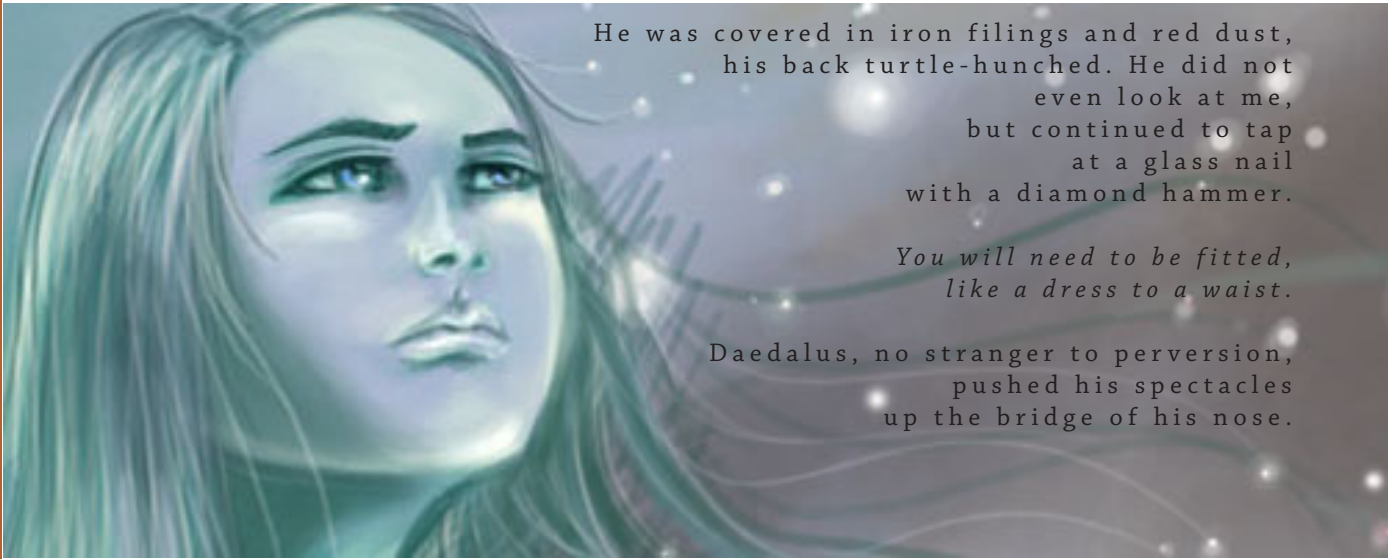


Pasiphae's Machine

by Catherynne M. Valente

I only needed the bull to set it going:
a bone key turning,
a hide bolt locking
into place.

I went to his house like a spice-buyer,
clutching my elbows. Away from my husband
for the first time since he fished me
thrashing from the sea
with a line of spider-silk
and a terra-cotta hook (my mother
had no better: the sun shone on her waves
and she found herself a blue ball,
full of queens.) I ran my hands
over mason jars and silver gears,
tin-and-ivory wings with harnesses of linen,
floor-tiles, serpent-jaws,
pipes and joinings
like white arms clutched in jeweled fists.



He was covered in iron filings and red dust,
his back turtle-hunched. He did not
even look at me,
but continued to tap
at a glass nail
with a diamond hammer.

*You will need to be fitted,
like a dress to a waist.*

Daedalus, no stranger to perversion,
pushed his spectacles
up the bridge of his nose.

My arm looks so small
in the bronze vise—the lynch-pin
slides through the delicate
fish-pale bones
of my wrist.

Every month
he widens the punctures.
I can hold six bolts in me, now,
crossed like rafters
through my breasts.

He lays a copper spine to my back,
knobbed with wire.

He fixes discs to my knees,
bowl-curved and singing.

He closes up my head
in a sphere of horned gold—
I did not want eye-sockets;
he smoothed them over
with lead, soft as wet sand.

Every month
he grinds the saw-toothed moon
along my shoulder blades,
and shunts another bolt
though my ankle,
my navel,
my mouth.

I gleam, rivet to spike
to bone:
latitudes hinged by stars.



I only needed the bull to set it going:
a battery of horn and gristle,
a switch of tail and hoof.

He left me on the dancing-floor,
whorled in super-conducting coils,
plated in mis-matched metals
which did not look unlike
a heifer's patched skin.

I waited. The birds kept clear.

Steam fogged the tin withers,
in the close, in the dark,
in the cloud of breath,
the bull closed the circuit,
and the bolts ground into motion,
moving in me like light,
a skeleton of glittering pistons
clattered into place—
bull-belly lifting up,

pins jingling, high and sweet,
and oh! The slick shove of them,
the sigh of bronze against bronze,
and I did not need the bull
but I will take it:
twins to batter this dusty island:
a bull-child and his favorite toy.

They will lie so sweetly,
thumb curved into wall,
nub-horns and a tiny, soft tail
within an infant labyrinth
of bronze and skin and silver,
angled and folded,
like the legs of their mother
finally buckling
under so much weight.



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