

HYMN I

On a high rock overlooking the grassy plain of Ethiopia, a young man waited.

Everyday since he was old enough to do so, Phaethon would leave the safety of the palace of King Merops while darkness still blanketed the world and some light yet lingered in the constellations.

With spear and bow in hand, he would cross the open spaces of the grassland, and ford the broad rivers, risking lion and crocodile to reach the edge of the forest where the land rose and rocks from the last great making of the world thrust upward to the sky.

The climb to his chosen eyrie was not an easy one, but he had strength in his limbs and a will to reach the top.

Phaethon, golden-skinned and auburn-haired, waited not for beasts to hunt, nor enemies to waylay, nor the young women carrying water upon their heads that he might abuse their bodies.

He waited for the sun.

The whole of Phaethon's existence revolved around that first, soul-warming glimpse of golden light to pour out of the east every day with divine constancy. And never wavering in his devotion, he watched it, his hands gripping the edge of the rock above the deadly precipice, anticipating that first brilliant crack at the far edge of the world.

It was with a longing, and a lingering sadness, that Phaethon watched the light of the world turn all to colour - the emerald of the plains, the silver of the rivers, the blue of the oceans, and the browns and yellows of earth and mountain. He needed to feel that light as his body needed air to breathe or water to drink. The light was sustenance for his very spirit.

When the light rushed upon Phaethon, he felt it rejuvenate him, fill him with power, and pride, and other inexplicable emotions. All about him life exploded, and he revelled in it.

Flowers blossomed, flights of birds shot into the skies, and beasts crawled from their dens to welcome each new day. The rising sun drove

them all, created anew with each rosy dawn.

Phaethon stood, his tunic thrown down, his arms outspread to the world until, having reached its zenith, he could feel the sun moving on. The young man breathed slowly in and out, images of rushing rivers and snow-capped mountains flashing suddenly behind his closed lids - wheels turning, as of fire and streaks across a singed sky.

Then, blinding light.

When he awoke, he was on his perch near to the edge. He sighed and gathered his belongings - his tunic, bow, and the spear around which a serpent had wrapped itself. Gently, Phaethon slid it off and the serpent lay there in the last light of the sun.