

You loved your last book...but what
are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new
books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

The Philosopher Kings

Written by Jo Walton

Published by Corsair

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

THE
PHILOSOPHER
KINGS

JO WALTON



CORSAIR

First published in the United States of America in 2015 by Tor

First published in Great Britain in 2016 by Corsair

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Copyright © 2015 by Jo Walton

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

All characters and events in this publication, other than those clearly in the public domain, are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-4721-5079-0 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-4721-5078-3 (ebook)

Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd., Croydon, CR0 4YY

Papers used by Corsair are from well-managed forests and other responsible sources



MIX
Paper from
responsible sources
FSC® C104740

Corsair
An imprint of
Little, Brown Book Group
Carmelite House
50 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DZ

An Hachette UK Company
www.hachette.co.uk

www.littlebrown.co.uk

1



APOLLO

Very few people know that Pico della Mirandola stole the head of the Winged Victory of Samothrace. In fact he stole it twice. The first time he stole it from Samothrace, before the rest of it was rediscovered. That time he had the help of my sister Athene. The second time was thirty years later, when he stole it from the Temple of Nike in Plato's Republic. One of Plato's Republics, that is; the original, called by some the Just City, by others the Remnant, and by still others the City of Workers, although by then we only had two. In addition to our Republic, there were four others scattered about the island of Kallisti, an island itself known at different times as Atlantis, Thera, and Santorini. Almost everyone who had been influenced by living in the original Republic wanted to found, or amend, their own ideal city. None of them were content to get on with living their lives; all of them wanted to shape the Good Life, according to their own ideas.

As for me, I suppose I wanted that too, but with rather less urgency. I was a god, after all—a god in mortal form, for the time being. I had become incarnate to learn some lessons I felt I needed to learn, and although I had learned them I had stayed because the Republic was interesting, and because there were people there that I cared about. That was primarily my friend

Simmea and our Young Ones. When we'd first come here we'd been doing Plato's Republic according to Plato, as interpreted by Athene and the Masters: three hundred fanatical Platonists from times ranging from the fourth century B.C. to the late twenty-first century A.D. From the time we Children were sixteen, we'd held Festivals of Hera every four months in which people were randomly matched with partners. There were six such festivals before the Last Debate, and all six such matings I'd participated in had produced sons. Simmea had one son from that time, Neleus. And between us we had a daughter, Arete, born after the revisions that made it possible for us to be a family.

Making the Republic work had been harder since Athene stalked off at the end of the Last Debate. She had taken with her both her divine power, and all the robots except two. In the twenty years since the Last Debate a lot of things had changed. Worst was the constant warfare with the other cities.

The art raids had started because we had all the art, and the other cities wanted a share of it, and we didn't want to give any of it up. The real problem was that Plato had imagined his Republic existing in a context where there would be wars, and so training everyone for warfare was a big part of the way he had imagined his city. The guardians, golds, and auxiliaries, silvers, had been training to fight since they were ten, and yet had never fought anyone except in practice until the art raids started. The raids provided a pretext for the warfare it seemed a large number of people had been wanting. While many of us felt they were futile, they were popular, especially with the Young Ones. A city would raid us and take away some statue or painting. Then we'd raid them back and try to recapture it. They began as something like games of capture the flag, lots of fun for everyone involved, but of course the weapons and training were real. By the time it came to real wounds and death, everyone was committed to

them. People who had read Plato on war and bravery and the shame of turning your back on the enemy couldn't see any way to back down. So the five cities of Kallisti existed in a constant state of raids and shifting alliances.

The Temple of Nike stood on a little knoll just outside the south gate of the original city. By the time I got there, summoned urgently, the raiders had fled, taking the head with them. I didn't know or care about the head until afterward. Right then I was entirely focused on Simmea. She was still alive, but just barely—the arrow was in her lung, and frothy blood was coming out with every breath. "We thought it best not to move her," Klymene said. I barely heard her, although she was right, of course—moving her would have been fatal. They hadn't even drawn out the arrow.

Simmea's eyes met mine, and they were full of love and trust—and even better, that edge they had that said she loved the truth even more than she loved me. She tried to speak with what breath she had. She said my name, "Pytheas," and then something I couldn't make out.

I made a plan immediately, almost as fast as I would have made it normally. In mortal form, I didn't have access to my powers, and as things were, there weren't any gods who were going to pay attention to me or help, at least not in time. So I drew my dagger. If I slit my wrists it would take minutes for me to bleed to death, but if I slit my throat only seconds. As soon as I was dead I'd have plenty of time—all the time I wanted, once I was safely outside it. I'd go down to Hades, take up all my powers again, and manifest back here a heartbeat after I'd left. Then I could heal her. Indeed, healing her would be fast and easy. I would have lost this incarnation, but I'd been mortal and incarnate for almost forty years now. It had been fascinating and wonderful and terrible, and I'd be sorry to stop, but Simmea was going to be *dead* if I didn't save her.

"Pytheas, no!" Klymene said, and grabbed for the knife. It wasn't that that stopped me.

"Pytheas, don't be an idiot!" Simmea said, perfectly distinctly. And as she said it, or immediately thereafter, she took hold of the shaft sticking out of her chest and pulled the arrow out.

Before I could so much as cut my throat, she was dead, and not only dead but vanished. One second she was there, blood, arrow, and dear ugly face. The next the arrow was lying in blood on the mosaic floor of the temple. Her body had gone back to the time Athene had snatched her from—back, I believe, to the waters outside Smyrna, at the spot where the ship that brought her here had moved through time. Her body would have appeared there, somewhere in the eastern Aegean, and sunk between one wave and the next. She loved to swim, she was a swimming champion, she had taught me and all our Young Ones to swim; but she wouldn't be swimming among the wine-dark billows, she'd just sink down in their embrace. (I've often tried to find her since, to see her for just that one moment more, but it's like looking for one particular helium atom in the sun, trying to find an instant like that without knowing either the exact place or time. I keep on looking now and then.)

Death is a Mystery. The gods can't undo it. Her wound would have been a trivial thing for me to fix if I'd had my powers, but once she was dead, that was the end of it.

Klymene had my knife, and I was prone on the ground clutching the arrow. Simmea's soul too would have gone back to the time she left, and from there it would have gone down to Hades. Unlike most human souls, she knew precisely what to expect. We'd talked about it a great deal. She knew how to negotiate the underworld, and she knew how to choose her next incarnation to maximize her excellence. I wasn't at all worried about any of that. But after choosing her next life, she'd pass through the river Lethe, she had to. Once in Lethe she'd have to at least wet her

lips, and once she drank from Lethe she'd forget this life, and me. Souls are immortal, but souls are not personality. So much of personality is memory. When mortal souls pass through Hades they go on to new life, and they become new people with fresh beginnings. I suspect that may be the whole purpose of death. No doubt it is a splendid way for the universe to be arranged. Her soul will continue to pursue excellence for life after life, becoming more and more excellent and making the universe better. But she wouldn't be Simmea anymore, she wouldn't remember this life. She wouldn't remember me and all the things we'd shared.

Once I was back in my real form I'd be able to find her, watch all her different lives if I wanted to, and I did want to. But none of them would be my Simmea. Death of mortals I love is always hard for me to deal with. But this one was worse than the others. Since I was incarnate, I'd been there the whole time. There were no moments of Simmea's life left for me to experience. I had been in time for all of them. I'm bound by Necessity. I can't go back to times I've already visited, none of us can. I'll never be able to speak with her again, or see her rolling her eyes at me, or hear her calling me an idiot. She knew I was the god Apollo. She'd known for years. It just didn't make any difference. When she found out, practically the first thing she said was that it must be why I was so hopeless at being a human being.

It's easy to be adored when you're a god. Worship comes naturally to people. What I'd had with Simmea was a decades-long conversation.

I briefly considered killing myself and going back to Olympus anyway. But her last words and deed had been to stop me—she'd have figured out exactly what I was doing and why. She was extremely smart, and she knew me very well. She probably had some really good reason why I shouldn't do that, which she'd have explained at length and with truly Socratic clarity, if only

she'd had time. I might even have agreed. I tried to think what it might have been. My mind was completely blank.

As I couldn't imagine why she'd stopped me killing myself and saving her life, I naturally began to think about vengeance.

"Who was it?" I asked Klymene. "Did we get any of them?"

Klymene has never liked me, and for extremely good reasons. Nevertheless, she is the mother of my son Kallikles. Her expression now was unreadable. Pity? Or did she perhaps despise me? Plato did not approve of giving way to strong emotion, especially grief, and at that moment I was rolling on the ground, clutching an arrow and weeping.

"I don't know," she said. "They came by boat. It could have been anyone. These art raids have been getting worse and worse. They got away—the rest of the troop went after them, except that I sent young Sophoniba for you and stayed with Simmea myself."

"She always liked you," I said. I could hardly get the words out past the lump in my throat.

"She did." Klymene put her hand on my shoulder. "Pytheas, you should get up and go home. Will there be anybody there?"

The thought of going home was impossible. Some of the Young Ones might be there, but Simmea would never be there again. Her things would be everywhere, and the reminder would be intolerable. "I want to find out who they were and avenge her."

Klymene's expression was easier to read now; it was worry. "We all want that. But you're not being rational."

"Are there any bodies?" I asked.

"No, thank Athene," she said. "No Young Ones killed."

"Wounded?"

"Simmea was the only one."

"Then unless the troop catches them, this arrow is the only evidence," I said, examining it. It was unquestionably an arrow, made of strong straight wood, stained with blood now. It was

barbed and fletched exactly like all the arrows. We had all learned the same skills from the same teachers. It made war between us both better and worse. I turned it over in my hands and wished I'd never invented the things.

"The *Goodness* has been seen," Klymene said, tentatively. "That doesn't mean it was Kebes. It could have been anyone. But it was sighted yesterday by the lookouts."

The *Goodness* was the schooner Kebes had stolen when he fled from the island after the Last Debate. "You think it was Kebes?"

"It could have been. I didn't recognize anyone," Klymene said. "And you'd think I would have. But if they were all Young Ones . . . well, maybe somebody else in the troop did. I'll check when they get back. Whatever happens we'll be retaliating, as soon as we know who and where. And if you want revenge, I'll do my best to see that the Delphi troop is included in that expedition."

"Thank you," I said, and meant it. The arrowhead was steel, which meant it was robot-forged, which meant it was old. There were still plenty of robot-forged arrowheads around, because people tended to reuse them when they could. Steel really is a lot better than iron. Of course, we were living in the Bronze Age. Nobody else in this time period actually knew how to smelt iron, unless maybe off in Anatolia somewhere the Hittites were just figuring it out. There was no use thinking it might have been pirates or raiders. This was one of our arrows, and the expedition had clearly been an art raid, and that meant one of the other republics.

"Did they take anything?" I asked.

"The head of Victory," Klymene said, indicating the empty plinth where it had stood.

I expect you're familiar with the Nike, or Winged Victory of Samothrace—it stands in the Louvre in Paris, where it has stood

since its rediscovery in the eighteen-sixties. There's also a good copy of it actually in Samothrace. The swept-back wings, the blown draperies—she was sculpted landing on a ship, and you can almost feel the wind. It's the contrast between the stillness of the stone and the motion of what is sculpted that makes her such a treasure. But she's headless in the Louvre, because Pico and Athene stole the head, the head which had for a time rested in our Temple of Nike. Her hair is swept back by the wind too, but her eyes and her smile are completely still. Her eyes seem to focus on you wherever you are. The head reminds me a little of the head of the Charioteer at Delphi, although it's completely different, of course, and marble not bronze. But there's something about the expression that's the same. I suppose Athene and I are the only ones who have seen her with the head, at Samothrace, and without, in the Louvre, and then seen just the head, in the City. Nobody else in the City had ever seen any part of her but the head. I tried to comfort myself that in some future incarnation Simmea, who loved the head and had died defending it, would be sure to see the rest of her. It only made me cry harder.

"We'll get it back," I said, choking out the words.

"Yes." Klymene hesitated. "I know I'm the worst person to be with you now, and I would leave you in peace, but I don't think you ought to be alone."

I sat up and looked at her. She was the same physical age as all of us Children, almost forty now. She had been pretty once, lithe and graceful, with shining hair. She was still trim from working with the auxiliaries, but her face had sagged, and her hair been cut off at the jaw to fit under a helmet. She looked weary. I had known her for a long time. We'd both been brought to the Republic when we were ten. When we were fourteen she'd been a coward and I'd said it was all right because she was a girl, and she'd never forgiven me. When we were sixteen we'd shared the single worst sexual experience of my life, then had a son together.

When we were nineteen and Athene had turned Sokrates into a fly and everything had subsequently fallen apart, we'd both stayed and tried to make the revised original Republic work, instead of going off to start fresh somewhere else.

"You're not any worse to be with right now than anyone else who isn't Simmea," I said.

"How are you going to manage without her?" she asked.

"I don't have the faintest idea," I said.

"I wouldn't have thought you'd have tried to kill yourself," she said, tentatively. "It isn't what Simmea would have wanted. Your Young Ones will need you."

"They need both of us," I said, which was entirely true. The difference was that they could have had both of us. If I'd killed myself it would have been temporary. Oh, it would have been different being here as a god with all my abilities. Being incarnate made everything so vivid and immediate and inexorable. But I'd have been here and so would Simmea, and she knew that. Why would it have been being an idiot to kill myself to save her? She understood how temporary death would have been for me, how easy resurrection. If she'd let me do it we could have been having a conversation about it right now. There would even be advantages to being here as a god—there were all kinds of things I could use my powers for. For a start I could get us some more robots, unintelligent ones this time, and make everyone's life easier.

Naturally, I couldn't share these thoughts with Klymene. She didn't know I was Apollo. Nobody did except Simmea and our Young Ones, and Sokrates and Athene. Sokrates had flown off after the Last Debate and never been seen again. We assumed he was dead—flies don't live very long. Simmea was definitely dead. And deathless Athene was back on Olympos, and after twenty years probably still furious with me. If I'd killed myself and saved Simmea in front of her, Klymene would have been bound

to notice. As things were, there was no need to tell her. Even without that she had no reason to like me.

"The Young Ones will need you all the more without Simmea," Klymene said.

"They're nearly grown," I said. It was almost true. The boys were nineteen or twenty, and Arete was fifteen.

"They'll still need you," Klymene said.

Before I could answer, she saw somebody coming and stiffened, reaching for her bow. I leaped to my feet and spun around. Then I relaxed. It was the Delphi troop coming out. I bent down and picked up the arrow, which I'd dropped. It wasn't much of a memento, but it was all I had. "I'll go home," I said.

"You won't . . . you won't do anything stupid?" Klymene asked.

"Not after Simmea's last request," I said. "You heard her. She specifically asked me not to be an idiot."

"Yes . . ." she said. She was frowning.

"I won't kill myself," I specified. "At least, not immediately."

Klymene looked at me in incomprehension, and I'm sure I looked at her the same way. "You shouldn't kill yourself because you don't know that you've finished what you're supposed to do in this life," she said.

Not even Necessity knows all ends.