

Sue Lanzon

Something in the Water

Reading excerpt

[Something in the Water](#)

of [Sue Lanzon](#)

Publisher: Winter Press



<http://www.narayana-verlag.com/b13698>

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We sit in the shade of a hibiscus tree by the Aegean, eating lunch. A huge crow appears loudly overhead. Ignored by the scavenging cats crouched at our feet, it creates a tremor in the branches which ripples down, unsettling the cutlery.

Carlo leans across the table, crumbling bread between his fingers as if to tease the flapping shadow above. It flies off with a brief, protesting cry.

"Did I ever tell you the story of Apollo and the crow?" He pauses, one eyebrow raised. I shrug.

"In the days when crows were white, Apollo charged one with the task of watching over Coronis, his pregnant girlfriend. He didn't trust her, you see. He knew how faithless women can be."

He pauses again. "Shall I go on?"

I gesture haphazardly for him to continue, and reach for the ouzo.

"Coronis found herself attracted to another man and gave herself to him. The white crow saw everything. When it reported back to Apollo, who was in Delphi at the time taking care of business, the god was so disturbed by the news that he threw a divine tantrum, a jealous rage full of darkness. It was so dark in fact, and so powerful, that the force of it changed the colour of the bird's feathers and from that day to this crows are not white, but black."

I push my plate of cuttlefish away, the cats observing closely. Carlo picks up a tentacle and slowly bites off the tip. I watch the line of his jaw, wondering at the random collision of energy and matter that has created such a perfect interruption of space.

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"The gods were a dastardly lot." He smiles happily, as if he knows something I will never understand. "They treated women abysmally, it's true."

He takes another piece of fish from my plate. The cats scratch the ground in anticipation.

"Not only gods, but heroes also. For example, Peleus chased Thetis to the ends of the earth, so mad was he with desire, and, when he finally caught up with her in those waves down there, he assumed the form of a cuttlefish in order to trick her, to have his wicked way. And you know, of course, that the fruit of their union was Achilles."

"I've always had a soft spot for Achilles," I sigh.

He looks at me, ruefully.

"That's a terrible joke, even by your standards. It would be nice if you took me seriously now and again."

On this friendly isle, where humans, goddesses and sea creatures once intertwined, the idea of metamorphosis is never far away. As I shed my city skin, I find myself changing daily into a more primal being who doesn't care very much for the complexities of life. But I rouse myself slightly in my chair and scratch my head.

"Thetis was a very bad mother," I reply. "She dangled Achilles in the fire to try and make him immortal. She'd already lost six children working that particular stunt. Peleus, the nurturing father, had to snatch him from her, to rescue him from her mad ambition. Social services would have had a field day."

I sink back down, overcome by the effort of thought. Carlo licks the remains of the cuttlefish from his fingers.

"But it's interesting, isn't it," he says, "these stories of exchange and disguise, this... shape-shifting? What does it

tell us about ourselves and our relationship with the world?
What do you say?"

The crow flies in again from the south, its voice drowning out my lack of response. Carlo turns to look. The cats notice all the food has gone and defect to another table. Carlo turns back to me, his face full of light - like Apollo, I think, like a god kissed by the sun.

Later, having stopped for a drink at a cafe on the beach, we are accosted by an English woman who has overheard us talking about homeopathy. She wants advice. Carlo suddenly develops an intense fascination with a nearby postcard rack; I am forced to converse with a stranger. She tells me she's on holiday with her children and gestures to a large brood of assorted shapes and sizes sitting under a wide umbrella, eating ice cream. Her youngest child has got a foot full of sea urchin spines and she's wondering what to do. I feel a sharp, discordant grief that my children are not here; that we've left them in London with their very capable grandmother and dared to escape. Is it grief, or merely guilt? Is guilt a commodity I have acquired from the gods or does it make the very idea of gods redundant? Does it matter? Should I care? To respond to this woman and her child's needs, to say anything intelligent at all, requires a presence, a commitment from me which I would much rather dedicate right now to admiring the sun on my ever-darkening skin and the line of Carlo's jaw.





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& Other Tales of Homeopathy

208 pages, pb
publication 2012



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