

Wallace Stevens Joins the Justice League

By Ed Frankel

I always wanted to be a member of the Justice League,
 Crusading for the idea of supreme order
 In a complacent world,
 Even if I had to be one of those
 “Who serve who also stand and wait,”
 Like Lothar, Mandrake The Magician’s companion,
 Or Alfred the Butler, in Batman’s cave.

I always wanted to make love to Wonder Woman.
 She would come home after a hard day,
 Peel off those high, red, boots,
 Those starry shorts and change.
 I wouldn’t mind being the house-husband
 if she would leave her wonder-bracelets on.
 I would give up my position at Hartford Life,
 If I could write poems like these all day long.
 At night she’d slip off her bracelets
 And tell me everything she’d done that day,
 Stories you wouldn’t believe, about the arch villains—
 The Cheetah, Angle Man, The Silver Swan,
 Her paper sweetheart, The pilot, Steve,
 Foiling Baroness von Guenther and the Nazis,
 In the DC comic books,
 During the war years of nineteen forty-three.

On weekends in my pied-à-terre in the city
 She cooks casseroles of extinct and obsolescent grains,
 Souvlakis, well-done lamb, and pungent cheese.
 She rubs my back after we make love
 And sings to me in ancient Greek
 From the Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries,
 Her alto voice refumed in laurel smoke
 Thickened with wild honey and mare’s milk.
The plays were chanted, Wallace, half-sung, you know.
 I get to hear her talking, singing in her sleep.

I can’t disclose, as I gave my word
 All the things she told me, but making love with her
 Was like communications across the species.

An encounter with a Vargas calendar girl--
 Rita Hayworth or Dorothy Lamour--
 With inside connections to the ancient Greeks.
 Her skin was cool, supple, a certain
 Tensile strength, a gravity to her touch.
 No subterfuge or guile, she fathomed irony
 With the sense of humor of a nun,
 Despite those tight and starry shorts,
 Her love was dutiful but sere,
 like a sybil, I suppose,
 Her mind was occupied with other things.

Face up to the chances, Wallace,
 She told me once,
You must go out into the world.
Your life is waiting for you.
Your wild poems will not stand in
For all you want to love.
 But I would remain at the window across from the Waldorf,
 Where through the chill-night reflection of my translucent self,
 The city lights display like stars, above a beach,
 Where Wonder Woman walks by the sea,
 Trailing her magic lasso in the sand.
 From the corner of my eye I see
 The bat signal flash over the Gotham night
 Calling in the Justice League.
 I see Superman smiling at me as he squeezes
 A chunk of coal into a diamond.