

GALATEA

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I saw enough of women that I knew
They and all of their wiles were not for me.
I loved their beauty and their sometimes wit,
But saw that underneath a danger lay
More subtle than the Sphinx at her cunning best:
I would not barter peace for such a risk
And compromise integrity by vow.
I was single, and chose thus to remain.

Still, I was lonely, and I longed for one
Equal to all my needs and aspirations.
She was a fantasy so well designed,
That nowhere did I find her in the flesh.
Then ivory came, the purest and the best,
So smooth you'd think you'd touched a woman's
skin,

And working with it, I foresaw my mate,
In ivory perfection carved and shrined.

I sculpted smooth her body with the skills
An artist in a lifetime learns to use
So well his work can counterfeit the life.
Slowly emerging under my hands as truth,
Lithe in conception, pure in aesthetic grace,
She formed as I had dreamed, without a flaw,
And stood at last as if about to speak
Words I'd been waiting all my life to hear.

But mute as mountain marble she stood there,
Voluptuous but voiceless. How she teased
Commitment, like a prized Palladium!
Those who beheld her sometimes bowed in awe
And left perhaps believing in her power.
I, too, succumbed; slowly she drew my heart
Out of its cold confinement, made me think
That underneath the surface there was life.

Polished perfection, yet without a voice!
I spoke to her, but she could not respond.
I stroked her face, but it revealed no warmth.
I longed to see her move, to raise a hand
In graceful, fond, appreciative response.
What agony it was to touch but not to know!
Possessing surface yet deprived of depth,
I saw my own creation as a curse.

And so I prayed to Aphrodite, she
Who afflicts us with those Eros-arrow wounds—
Wounds new to me I could not heal myself.
My prayers were for life to come to her—
The perfect mate, wrought by my mind and skill
Which deftly brought her into being, but
Could not enliven, granting speech and love
Or movement with the latent grace I gave.

Then one day at my work I heard a sound
Behind my back, a sweetly gentle voice
Singing the syllables that make my name.
Startled, I turned, and there the statue stood—
No sculpture now, but glowing with the life—
Eyes flashing fire, cold ivory flushed with rose,

And garments billowing loosely as she moved
Towards me from her niche across the room!

I called her Galatea; she was mine,
Yet now no longer owned, for with the life
Came soul and personality and will,
Though mind as yet was empty and confused,
Demanding still creation at my hand.
After the shock of seeing her alive,
I set about the task of tutor, bent
As artist on completion of my art.

But she was now no wood a man could carve.
Yielding as sandalwood, yet fiercely proud,
Reluctant to assume imposed design
When urged to countershape against the grain,
Her psyche grew in ways I could not tend
Into a self I had not made or dreamed,
Armored with inviolate integrity,
Fulfillment of a fantasy too small.