

SERENDIPITY

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A Tale in Four Reconstructions

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serendipity /sɛr(ə)nˈdɪpɪti/ *n.* the faculty of making happy and unexpected discoveries by accident. □ **serendipitous** *adj.*
serendipitously *adv.* [coined by Horace Walpole (1754) after *The Three Princes of Serendip* (now Sri Lanka), a fairy tale]

The Concise Oxford Dictionary

Chapter 1

Things unlooked for

It is late July and the weather is hot. The heat is not of the muggy English variety with thunder at the end, but the Mediterranean kind: clear blue skies and unrelenting sunshine. There haven't been more than a few drops of rain for weeks, and the air outside smells of hay, not because there are any farmer's fields nearby, but because the grass is drying where it grows. This is deckchair-in-the-garden weather, it is not the time for old books and deep thoughts. But here I am, in the library, writing. I chose the library not through some authorly conviction that it is the best place to work – it is not very well stocked in any case – but because, bar standing at the bottom of the garden with your phone in the air, it is the only room in this place with a decent internet connection, and I want to fill the gaps in my account as quickly as possible.

What I had intended to write during the holidays – if the weather had been more conducive to rational thought, and I had not become hopelessly tangled in my subject – was an article on the lost boys of Greek myth. Very briefly, my thesis was this: after centuries of church-led heteronormativity and decades of feminist enlightenment we expect stories to be about men and women. In any given story, we assume male-