

# *A TAIL MADE OF GIRLS*

Undergraduate students' rewritings  
of classical myths



*Edited by*

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction:</b>	
‘We Are All Singing’ by Gerardo Rodríguez Salas	1
‘My life with Jupiter’ by Carmel Bird	5
<b>Andromeda</b>	
‘Three is never a crowd’ by Sara Ahmed Abdelkader	13
<b>Antigone</b>	
‘A decent farewell’ by Maria Charalampous	19
<b>Aphrodite</b>	
‘The apple of discord’ by Celia Cardona Ligeró	23
<b>Ariadne</b>	
‘Ariadna abandonada por Teseo’ by Andrea Nieves Jiménez	29
‘Outside the labyrinth’ by Lucía Pérez Iglesias	32
‘The golden thread’ by Elvira Gallardo Hidalgo	35
<b>Arachne</b>	
‘Web of lies’ by Candela Sierra Rodríguez	39
<b>Artemis</b>	
‘The moon’s diary’ by José Antonio Ramírez García	45
<b>Britomartis</b>	
‘Tangled’ by Elia Morilla García	55

## **Calypso**

'A shadow in Ogygia' by Izan Huertas Medina 61

## **Cassandra**

'Prophecy' by Neta Goldfein 67

'Maybe one day' by María Pérez Béjar 70

'Cursed' by Elena Ocete Pozo 73

## **Danae**

'A golden diary' by Lorena Castellanos Gómez 77

## **Daphne**

'Disclaimer: This is not a love story' by Irene Moreno Puga 81

'Who is running?' by Daniel Molero Cifuentes 83

'Daphne revisited' by Virginia del Carmen Casares Soldado 85

'The pointless arrow' by Cristina Fuentes León 88

'An arrow, by the way' by Paola Sánchez López 89

'Flecha dorada, punta de plomo' by Eva Ríos 91

## **Demeter**

'Indoor plants' by Ahinoa Vílchez Bonel 99

'Di-mater' by Esther Fernández Arredondo 103

## **Electra**

'Querida mamá' by Elena Flores Soto 109

'Revenge is a dish best served cold' by Inmaculada Alonso Olivar 114

## **Europa**

'A pitiful white bull' by Carmen Hidalgo Varo 119

## **Galatea**

'Si nace niña' by María Teresa Morales Morales 123

## **Ganymede**

'The waste land' by Marina Gori 127

## **Hyacinth**

'How I became a flower' by Lidia Ocaña Santiago 137

## **Hydra**

'The hollow' by Malena Padovan Sánchez 143

## **Icarus**

'Wax and fire' by Alba Delgado Almenara 149

'Icaria' by Andrea Nieves Jiménez 152

## **Leda**

'Nasty, naughty bird' by Beatriz Romero Velasco 157

'Domino effect' by Ruth Salvatierra Gascón 159

## **Lysistrata**

'To women!' by Aitor Morientes Simal 163

## **Medea**

'A woman's burden' by Kiril Shishkov 169

'Medea's last words' by María José Carmona Quero 171

## **Medusa**

'A statue in the house' by Andrea Escudero Miranda 177

‘Medusa y la égida’ by Luna Saavedra Cortés	180
‘We are all Medusa’ by Margarita Oliver Correa	187
‘An exemplary party’ by Silvia Moreno Urbano	189
<b>Mnemosyne</b>	
‘Heart of gold’ by Alexiel Reyes Martín	193
<b>Myrrha</b>	
‘Mirage’ by Gerardo Rodríguez Salas	203
<b>Narcissus</b>	
‘A yellow narcissus’ by Aleksandar Krasimirov Ganchev	207
‘My secret regret’ by Christina Miranda Porras	210
<b>Pandora</b>	
‘Fingerprints’ by Sandra López González	213
‘Don’t’ by María Luisa Aparicio Olivares	215
‘New Eden’ by Alba Bastante Sánchez Carnerero	217
‘Hope’ by Maria Luiza Dobre	219
‘Pandora’s Truth’ by Tamara Lew Halstead	220
‘Deceit’ by Ana Hidalgo Palomino	222
<b>Persephone</b>	
‘White membrane’ by Molly McGirr	229
‘A pomegranate a day keeps Demeter away’ by Lisa de Witte	235
‘White poplars’ by Vanessa Roldán Romero	240
‘A place to return’ by Marina Ortega López	244
‘Goddess Almighty’ by Salma M <sup>a</sup> Corral Morjani	248
‘The rootless little plant’ by Raquel Maturano Fernández	250



‘Six or twelve?’ by Luis Baone López	252
‘Blood pressure’ by Clara Herrero Celdrán	253
‘A whole new world’ by Sinadora Lagou	256
‘The abduction of Paige’ by Andrea Gallardo Hernández	259
<b>Phaethon</b>	
‘Water in the sun’ by Esteban Ruiz García	263
<b>Philomel</b>	
‘Phil and the black-billiard table’ by Daniel Lozano Medina	269
‘Dinner time’ by Elena García Guerrero	275
<b>Plato</b>	
‘De la oscuridad a la luz’ by Noelia Lirola Rueda	283
<b>Psyche</b>	
‘The three labours of Psyche’ by M <sup>a</sup> Victoria Fornieles Verdugo	287
<b>Semele</b>	
‘Ashes’ by Victoria Galdeano Olmedo	297
<b>Sisyphus</b>	
‘Mountain’ by Jorge Vallejo García	301
<b>Tyresias</b>	
‘Who am I?’ by Marco Arrabal Centurión	307
‘The opposite of sex’ by Juan Molina López	309



## Introduction: We Are All Singing

In *The Penelopiad*, Margaret Atwood rewrites Penelope's myth from a feminist standpoint—as suggested in the title, an alternative non-epic or parodic epic for women. However, the twelve murdered maids, who weave with Penelope this alternative storytelling, end up stealing the narrative in spite of their invisibility in the title and in what we traditionally call History. In Atwood, the maids not only dismantle the patriarchal dimension of the literary canon—as represented by Homer and his hero Odysseus—but also stand as an alternative and strong communitarian voice—in Greek chorus fashion—a literary sorority that gains a voice through popular genres, 'like a trail of smoke, like a long tail, a tail made of girls, heavy as memory, light as air' (192).

The dyad *tail/tale* suggests the maids' empowerment beyond phallic strategies, just holding hands and conforming a long tail made of girls, a long tale told by women. In doing so, they manage to 'see through' all of Odysseus' 'disguises' (192). Stephen Benson summarises this subversive strategy of rewriting classical myths when he wonders if fairy tales—and any myth by extension—'as miniature carriers of conservative ideology of gender' can be 'appropriated to critique, and imagine alternatives to, traditional concepts of gender and its construction, given the history of their role in the installation of these very traditions' (2001: 37). Angela Carter adds to this idea when she considers that myths and folklore are 'extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree' (1983: 71).

This volume, born in this spirit, collects a selection of stories creatively written by students for the elective course *Gender and Literature in English*—Degree in English Studies, University of Granada (Spain)—which I started teaching in 2013. The reading and analysis of texts in this course aims to visibilise gender issues in three thematic blocks: women's studies, critical studies of masculinities, and queer theory, with a special focus on recovering women's historical and literary memory through a diachronic revision of feminist literary theory, thus tracing women's genealogies and gender-based archives—such as Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, or Adrienne Rich's *Twenty-One Love Poems*, the latter for a lesbian genealogy.

In actively retrieving this memory, one of the central aims of the course is the study of texts that rewrite classical, patriarchal myths from a gender perspective. After theorising Elaine Showalter's difference between 'feminist critique'—texts written by men with a misogynistic effect on women— and 'gynocriticism'—texts written by women and their role in constructing genealogies of women writers—we explore in class women's texts that openly rewrite classical myths, such as Mary Wroth's 'Sonnet 77,' May Sarton's 'The Muse as Medusa' or the afore-mentioned novella by Atwood, *The Penelopiad*.

For seven academic courses since 2013, my teaching of these texts, all of them of my own choice, follows an active methodology where students are given study questions

for each of them, which we then discuss in class. Through collaborative learning, they are given an active role—what is called *active learning classroom method*—not only in discussing the texts—where I am one more of the participants, aside from a facilitator of learning—but also in rethinking the literary process as they end the course not only as students and readers but also as writers themselves. This course practises then ‘learning-facilitation’ rather than ‘pontification’ (Kelly, 2016: 3). As part of the final evaluation, students have to produce a short story rewriting a classical myth from a gender perspective. They have absolute freedom in choosing and approaching the myth, and they can keep it in the *illus tempus* of mythology—or indeterminate temporality—or bring it to a contemporary setting.

After seven academic courses collecting students’ stories, and beyond classroom experience, this is our ‘tail made of girls,’ made of students who, like the maids in Atwood’s novella, tend to be invisibilised when it comes to results in teaching innovation projects. In this book, they gain voice, the floor is theirs. They have the possibility not only to revise and question the literary canon, but this volume becomes a safe place to fantasise and provide alternative readings of patriarchal texts that have a projection outside the classroom, dealing with atemporal as well as contemporary issues. Benedict Anderson’s *imagined communities* find in students’ fiction a perfect correlation with their more direct preoccupations and gender awareness while and after undertaking this course. This volume is witness of the power of lifelong, integrated learning, our tapestry of words woven collectively.

Since this project had a communitarian spirit from the beginning, it has found a collaborative drive not only among students, but also among other lecturers who, like me, believe in active learning methodologies. Since October 2021, with Adelina Sánchez Espinosa as the main researcher, I have been part of a research project—together with Beatriz Revelles, Pilar Villar, M<sup>a</sup> José de la Torre, Ana M. González, M<sup>a</sup> Ángeles Grande, Miguel Lorente and Angela Harris—aimed at implementing responsible teaching laboratories with a gender perspective looking for the interaction of literary and visual cultures as agents in social intervention,<sup>1</sup> with a special focus on issues of memory and gender violence. As stated in the draft for this project, the aim is to implement pedagogic and responsible practice (Haraway, 2008; Revelles-Benavente & González, 2017: 1-2), which in the classroom implies an *inverted workshop*. This methodology aims to elicit and promote horizontal knowledge with students, who become a proactive group of critical agents capable, as stated in the project proposal, of questioning power relations in our society. This methodology promotes criticism and social action inside and outside the classroom to face the continuum society/university with intra-action (Barad, 2007). The present volume and the responsible classroom pedagogy behind is my contribution to this project of excellence.

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<sup>1</sup> The title of this project of excellence granted from October 2021 to June 2023 by Junta de Andalucía (Proyecto I+D+i - Plan Andaluz de Investigación, Desarrollo e Innovación PAIDI 2020) is ‘Laboratorios de enseñanza responsable con perspectiva de género: La interacción entre culturas literarias y visuales como agentes de intervención social’.

The stories here collected are students' free rewriting of classical myths from a gender perspective. The question that unleashes all of them, which is taken from May Sarton's poem 'The Muse as Medusa,' also covered in class, is: 'How to believe the legends I am told?' Most of the students respect the *illus tempus* of the original myths but actively offer a gender variation; others bring the myth to date. In all cases, there is a critical revision of the memory imposed by patriarchal bias invariably present in classical mythology, thus allowing alternative versions where mainly female characters are allowed to explore other territories beyond imposed domesticity and limiting gender roles. Often the issue of gender violence enters the rewriting, so that students openly tackle it. Not only do they make readers reflect on it but also envision fictional situations of retribution and/or imagined territories free of violence. These stories prove the power of writing beyond the paper, as students recreate fictional scenes that are nurtured by social action that resonates with their own life experiences.

In organising the stories, I decided to group them under the names of the Greek mythological characters that they dialogue with, in alphabetical order. Most of these characters are female, which shows students' awareness of gender issues, and when they choose traditional male heroes—like Hermes, Icarus or Phaethon—their hegemonic masculinity is critically revised. In some cases, such as Persephone, Pandora or Medusa, there is a high number of stories showing the popularity of these myths among students as well as interesting examples of Bakhtinian *polyphony* and *heteroglossia*. This multiplicity of voices is completed with the publication of some stories written in Spanish. Although the tales were meant to be in English, as part of a course taught integrally in this language and aimed at the study of texts written in English, students were allowed to choose Spanish if they felt that writing in English would inhibit their creativity. Apart from collecting, selecting and editing the stories of this volume, I contribute with my own rewriting of a classical myth, which I published in the Australian journal *Meanjin* in 2006. But my story—the teacher's story—is integrated with that of students, following the same alphabetical order. In this book there is no Penelope with class privileges. In this book, we are all maids.

And yet, I wanted to open the volume with the story of a very special guest, who not only kindly accepted my invitation to be part of this project, but also wrote a story from scratch specially for this book. Australian writer Carmel Bird, whose story 'Getting My Mother's Sewing Machine Across Bass Strait' is part of this course schedule and has several times participated in students' discussions online, contributes to this project with her story titled 'My life with Jupiter,' an original contemporary twist located in post-pandemic Rome with a dazzling and wildly entertaining Juno as narrator. The present volume opens with this tale. It is our way to thank Carmel for her generosity. We are honoured to have her onboard in this trip to Ithaca. Maybe we are maids. Maybe we are sirens. But we are heading to a new Ithaca. Our Ithaca.

Even the image I selected for the cover has a story. When we were analysing Sarton's poem, one of the students sent me this image that somehow reminded her of the powerful poetic voice in Sarton, a woman who presents herself 'as naked as any little fish/Prepared to be hooked, gutted, caught' but, thanks to Medusa—who is not a

monster, but a muse, a source of inspiration—ends up being ‘clothed in thought’ and, like a fish, this woman swims her way in the ocean, ‘still in a fluid mystery,’ and concludes: ‘your silence is my ocean’. The image selected for the cover of this volume portrays a woman resolutely staring at her past with the eyes of a fish. This is what students have done: look at the past differently, with visionary and critical eyes, with the eyes of the fish swimming freely and creatively in Sarton’s poem, questioning past legends. I recovered this image that was sent to me by that student, but I could not find the author. After some research—I thank Fernando Medina for the help—I located the artist: Susana Blasco, a graphic designer, illustrator and collage artist, who devised this image—number 46—as part of her series *Antihéroes*. Susana gladly granted me permission to use the picture for this purpose and so the circle is closed.

As in Sarton, we turn that face around and it is *our* face. Medusa does not turn us into stone, but rather inspires us to explore, to question, to look with different eyes, our own (fish) eyes. My students have worked hard and have explored an unknown territory. At the beginning of each course I could see their weird looks when I said they had to write a story—‘I am not a writer’, I could imagine many of them thinking. But then they proved they could write. They gave voice to all those women who never had a credible voice in our legendary past. Those voices resonated with students’ own social concerns. And in the process we shared more than just formal teaching. As in Anne Sexton’s poem ‘In Celebration of My Uterus’, also covered in class, we form a literary community where there is no Judas. This is our ‘supper’ and ‘kissing,’ our ‘correct/yes’. In this book we have formed a community of self-care, lifelong learning, critical thinking, creativity. And, as in Sexton, we are all celebrating a more inclusive literary genealogy. We are all singing. Together. Everywhere.

**Gerardo Rodríguez Salas**

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## My life with Jupiter

It's come to this. Nine days of community service. My crime? Letting a peacock roam around a church without a leash. Yes, apparently I unleashed a peacock in a place of worship in August CE 2020. Huh! The church is built on the hill where once upon a time there stood a temple dedicated to me. So naturally I believe I have a right to wander about in there accompanied by my bird, with or without a leash.

Rome was just coming to life after several months of lurking indoors for fear of the transmission of a plague. People seeking pizza and gelato again. People climbing the stairs up to the church again. On their knees. And now I am supposed to sweep those stairs with a straw broom three times a day. Really? Not likely. The other part of my sentence involves spending an hour a day with some kind of Analytical Bullshit Man. He is called my 'therapist,' and it didn't take me long to mentally chop that word into its obvious parts. He doesn't scare me, and of course he would be in the kind of trouble he never dreamt about if he started up raping me. Actually, I am quite enjoying my times with him. I lie on his couch and he sits in his armchair, looking at me with his steady brown eyes over his tortoiseshell eye-glasses from time to time, and we exchange bits and pieces of stories. His are sometimes quite interesting, a bit dull, but not really relevant here. He has suggested I do a 'writing task' every day, documenting some of my recollections. Starting with the fact that I married my brother, Jupiter. Something he pretends not to disapprove of. His actual distaste hovers in those big brown eyes. One day I might just tickle his nose with a peacock feather. He calls me June and I call him Anal. That made him smile. Nice teeth. I call my writings 'Recollections of My Life With Jupiter.'

So here I go, not turning up for work with my broom, but sitting instead at a little table, under a blue and green umbrella, on the pavement outside a café named *Aesop*, after a Greek storyteller who used stories to teach lessons. He told an old story about a peacock that asked me to give him a beautiful voice. Naturally I refused, pointing out to the bird that I had already given him that amazingly beautiful tail instead of a nice song. The lesson Aesop found in the narrative was that all creatures need to just work with what they've got. He had, I think, a rather dull approach, old Aesop, but his work is to this day very popular. I had in fact decorated the lovely tail with glittering eyes in honour of poor old Argus. Which leads me to an anecdote about my husband.

### *Recollection One*

As everybody knows, Jupiter had trouble keeping it in his pants. I was forever having to deal with the business of his girlfriends. This time it was Princess Io. Jupes imagined he could trick me by disguising Io and turning her into a white heifer then tying her to a

sacred olive tree. As if. I got the giant Argus with his hundred watchful eyes to stay there with the poor thing and let me know when Jupes was in the area. But my beloved husband knew what was going on, and he commissioned Mercury, disguised as a shepherd, to get in there and slaughter Argus. So yes, Mercury put Argus to sleep by playing on his famous musical pipe and tapping each eye with his magic wand. Then he cut off Argus's head with a crescent-shaped sword, and tossed his giant body down a cliff. Sad and grisly end of my watchman.

Then I realised I could do two things at once—I could honour Argus by decorating the peacock with his eyes. Brilliant solution. The third thing I had to do was get one of the Furies to torment the eyes and mind of the little white cow, and send her weeping and moaning all over the world. Until Jupes got to hear of it and begged me on his knees to undo my wandering cow-curse and let the stupid girl have her humanish body back. He promised never again to go chasing after girls. I knew that was bullshit, of course, but I decided to release Io. So there she was, all dainty and pretty and human again. White as the driven snow. Years later she had a son, fathered by you-know-who, but by then I had better things to think about.

And I had a peacock with a legendary tail all decorated with glittering eyes and a raucous rusty cry. Win-win.

Anal was quite pleased with the story, but he pointed out that it comes back to the matter of the peacock, and he added—as add he must, by law—that it was the presence of the peacock on the loose that got me into trouble with the authorities. And furthermore, he said, what was I doing about sweeping the steps? Fuck all, I said. And he said I need to take the matter more seriously or I will end up in serious trouble. Serious, serious, I said, and I waved a peacock feather above my head as I lay on the rather uncomfortable couch. That afternoon I did in fact go up to the church and mime a little desultory sweeping with the straw broom, accidentally tapping the backsides of a few of the faithful who were making their way up the steep long staircase on their knees. I have to be careful, actually, in case I accidentally transform them into trees or birds or beasts. Then I *would* be in serious trouble.

I should explain that Anal believes or imagines I am a more or less harmless human lunatic. He has no way of comprehending who or what I truly am. I could at any moment transform him into a tortoise or something. I resemble a witch with a broomstick, you know, but he considers this to be just a kind of Halloween vibe I have taken on for my own entertainment. And boy, does he enjoy it when I open up about how I managed the sexual transgressions of Jupiter.

### *Recollection Two*

Diana and Apollo were the famous twin children of a Titan woman, Latona. And yes, my husband was their father, wouldn't you know. I am guessing you have never even heard of Latona before, since I made pretty sure she disappeared from history. When I



learned that she was carrying twins, I sent her into exile, and then I summoned the monster poisonous serpent Python up from the centre of the earth and commissioned him to follow her around everywhere. Scary! Oh, the restless, useless wandering across the planet Earth, pursued by the scaly huge ugly old Python. And him all green and blue and slimy. It looked as if Titan Woman was never going to give birth to those twins while Python chased her from pillar to post.

But wait! Arriving on the island of Delos, she managed to persuade the people there that she could make the place the richest island on earth, if only she could settle down and produce the twins. It's actually just a rugged granite rock about a mile and a half square, so you can understand how desperate the creature was. Leaning against a palm tree, she gave birth. The island did get pretty prosperous, as it happened, but it was looted twice, and in the end everybody left and it just went feral. These days tourists love it because the famous twins were born there, and because there are plenty of ruins to put on Instagram and so forth. You can't stay there overnight, and you can't swim there either. So that's possibly a bit of a downer. Although nothing stops a tourist when they put their mind to it.

Latona had to set off again once Diana and Apollo were born, leaving Python behind, and she and the babies wound up somewhere under the blazing sun in Turkey. Parched and almost fainting, all she wanted was a drink of water. As she bent down to drink from a little lake, she found herself surrounded by angry locals who demanded that she leave the water alone and be on her way. In fact they began leaping about in the water and stirring it up with branches from the trees, until the lake was nothing but mud. Apparently Latona summoned her strength and hurled a powerful prayer to the skies: Let them live forever in the lake! she said, in her best commanding tone.

With that the people's voices grow harsher  
their heads shrink into their bodies  
their eyes bulge, their skin goes green  
their mouths are open wide  
they are leaping, croaking frogs  
glugetty-glug croaketty-croak  
muddy eck  
stassey

As you may know, Diana and Apollo lived long and useful lives. I never had much to do with them, and I have no idea what happened to their mother after she did the thing with the frogs. I quite admired that, actually, in spite of everything. But of course there is plenty more to add to the catalogue of my own husband's faults.

It sometimes seems to me that Anal admires most of the things Jupes does. And remains secretly critical of my responses. He stereotypes me as a revenge maniac, and seems to be ok with the serial adulteries of old Jupe. I decided to try to shock him with my memories of the time the old king of the gods transformed into a woman in order to seduce a woman. Yes? Anal didn't comment, but I could tell that he rather liked the idea of the rape, and didn't care one bit for my rather artistic reaction. I thought he wasn't even supposed to have an opinion. What would I know? Sex is sex as far as Jupiter's concerned. Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, swans and cattle—you name it. A frog in the hand.

### *Recollection Three*

You remember Diana, born on Delos? When she grew up she was surrounded by a faithful group of beautiful young women, nymphs, who were dedicated to virginity. And among these virgins was the ravishing water nymph, Callisto. Her very name means 'beautiful.' I should not have said 'ravishing,' should I? Oh well, I've said it now. And yes, who is this quietly observing the charms of the delightful Callisto—I am sometimes admired for the sarcasm in my voice—but the great god himself, Jupiter? Unable to resist the luminous vision of the virgin nymph, and wishing to take her with unaccustomed ease, what does he do? He slyly transforms into a nymph himself, and delicately advances upon and embraces Callisto. Girl on girl. Here we go again. Fertile nymph; potent god. The pregnancy becomes clear to Diana as the nymphs are bathing in a spring, whereupon a furious Diana expels Callisto from her group. Off the nymph goes in shame and sorrow and eventually gives birth to a son, Arcas.

When all this became clear to me, in one of my more enjoyable rages I made sure that Callisto's smooth pale skin transformed into the coarse hairy texture of a great big shambling bear. Yes, bear. Sharp claws, huge teeth, wet black nose, sad and beady eyes. Would you believe it? When Arcas was a teenager he met his mother the bear in the woods, and as he was about to do for her with his spear, Jupiter suddenly intervened. He turned the pair of them into a constellation of stars in the firmament. Check out the Great Bear and the Bear Warden. Oh, what do I care? I never really look at the stars.

Anal is quite keen on astronomy, and tells me he likes to visit the Vatican Observatory at Castel Gandolfo. So one day he reports back to me on the wonders of Ursa Major. The man is a fool. I listen patiently, alert and clearly interested as I lie there on the stupid couch. I can no longer tolerate all this nonsense. It's time for Anal to go.

So in the middle of the afternoon I slowly stood up, grabbed my straw broom, and lifted a couple of feathers from my peacock, who was sleeping in my large and fashionable shoulder bag. I tapped Anal on the head with the broom and swiftly brushed his spectacles with the feathers. In no time at all he became a fairly small tortoise moving lugubriously across the mosaic floor. Carefully I tied a ribbon around him. Another ribbon I tied around my peacock. And yes, proudly I walked with them

up the long, long staircase to the church, picking my way between the pilgrims. We entered the building, and I could hear the ancient singing, could detect the historic incense. I felt the ghosts of the stones of my own temple beneath my feet. Happiness.

But there in a gloomy alcove, who should I spy but Jupiter. Leaning against a pillar, staring into the eyes of a well-known Italian movie star. Business as usual.

**Carmel Bird**



ANDROMEDA



## Three is never a crowd

My parents thought that I had left with a man, and that it was only the two of us. They could not be any more wrong.

Everything started when I was born, and my mother, Cassiopeia, started to boast about how beautiful I was compared to the rest of the Nereids. And she did not only say it when I was born, but when I turned 15, or whenever she had the chance. She would say: 'Oh, how blessed I am that my baby Andromeda is more alluring than any other Nereid my eyes have seen,' which made the Nereids very mad until they complained to Poseidon.

Every now and then, Poseidon would ask my father, Cepheus, to sacrifice beautiful women for him, so that the feelings of jealousy or envy would not blind the rest of women from his kingdom or make men fight over them. It came a time when Poseidon asked my father for someone very special to be sacrificed: me. Can you imagine? So, one night, while I was asleep, Cepheus came into my room and took me away. To sacrifice me, he had to take all my clothes off, and tie me against a big rock that was on top of a cliff.

I did not wake up until a big splash of water crashed against my whole body, and I started screaming. It was so cold! 'Help! Anyone around?! Help me!! Can someone...' But everything went black. A big wave made me lose my conscience. It was then that a ship was sailing close by, and someone came and saved me from Poseidon, and his powerful waves.

'Hey, can you hear me? Are you okay?' a woman asked while I was still knocked out, when I suddenly started coughing the water from inside my lungs. We were inside his cabin.

'What happened? Why were you tied up?' She gave me clothes to wear. 'I don't really know, I was sleeping in my bed and next thing I know is that I woke up in the cliff, naked and the waves crashing against me.'

'That sounds like someone wanted to get rid of you. Are you aware of any enemies?' Once she asked that, I started thinking who would want me dead, or out of the way. Crystal clear. 'Now that you ask... Probably the Nereids.'

'And the question is... Why would they want you dead?'

'Well, since I was born my mother has been bragging about my beauty, blah blah blah, and probably that pissed the Nereids off, and I don't know...'

'If it helps, I think your mom is right. You are really beautiful.'

'Hmmm... are you really hitting on me? After almost being dragged by the ocean, and die?'

'Umm... No, I was just stating my opinion. Indeed, a fact.'

‘Uhhh okay, can I leave now?’

‘First of all, you are welcome for me saving your life, and second, wouldn’t you like to know who wanted you dead and why?’

‘Sorry! You’re right. Thank you... I’m not sure if I want to know who is after me.’

‘If you don’t want to know who is after you, how are you going to be able to avoid it next time? Because, honestly, I don’t think *that person* is going to give up on killing you or sacrificing you after just one try.’

‘I think you are right. How do you suggest that we should approach this? How am I going to discover the truth?’

‘Well, I know people who can gather that information for us, but first you should wear some clothes, and have something to eat.’

She gave me some clothes she had in the closet—bigger than my usual size, but I was thankful to be fully clothed. We had some soup and some talking, which helped me get to know the person who had saved me. She told me that everyone knew her as Perseus, but her real name was Alessa. Her father, Zeus, had loathed her because she did not feel herself a woman, so she started dressing up as a man and called herself Perseus, which comes from the Greek “pertho” meaning to destroy. She wanted to destroy the labels of how a person must look based on the gender that they were born with. After all that talking, I really admired her as how strong she was, and how she did not care about others, or even her father, she was being herself in her best way.

A while after, somebody came and talked to her, they were whispering, and she looked a bit worried, which made my alarms go off.

‘What is going on?’

‘I don’t know how to say this, but... we know who tried to kill you, and you are not going to like it.’

‘Who? Spit it out!’

‘Your father...’

‘Excuse me? What? What do you mean? Why would he?’

‘Well, Poseidon asked him to, because your beauty is making everyone so upset around you that he decided to get rid of you, to calm the Nereids down.’

In that precise moment when I heard that, I froze. My own father had betrayed me.

‘I can’t believe it.’

‘Do you want to face him? What do you want to do?’

‘I do want to face him! And I will do something more!’

I wanted to know why he would sacrifice his only daughter to a god, he could have helped me flee our town.



A little after, we went to my parents' place, planning on confronting him, but he would only come up with the excuse that it was a god, a superior race that was asking him to sacrifice me. He had to do it, it was his responsibility.

'Then, I will not come back home, I am staying with Perseus, so that you won't try to sacrifice me again.'

'You can't live with a man without being married, that is one of the laws of this town, young lady, you can't, everybody will know, and I am not going to let it happen.'

'Well, if it takes to get married to not to be with you under the same roof, I will do it.'

We left the place abruptly, because I could not stand being in front of the person who brought me to this world, and also tried to make me disappear from it. We got back to Perseus' ship, and started talking.

'Hey, sorry about earlier, and the whole marriage thing without consulting you at all, but please help me here.'

'Yeah, about that... I feel flattered, and I bonded with you very smoothly, but there is someone in my life.'

'Do I know her? Or him?'

'Hmm... you probably heard of her... Does the name Medusa ring a bell?'

'Oh my God! Yes! She is a legend for me. I really admire her. But wasn't she dead? Because the news I heard said that you killed her...'

'Not really. I only beheaded her to make everyone believe I was a strong man, and I was capable of doing what they ordered me, I know it sounds stupid, but I managed to keep the head, and I apologised to her for doing this, and we got to know each other and, well, we fell for each other.'

'That is so sweet! Can I meet her? Is she on this boat? Because I just got the perfect plan!'

'Yeah, sure, she is downstairs. What plan is this?'

'Oh trust me, we all are going to like it.'

We went downstairs, and I started to tell them my plan, and they agreed to help me. Next morning, we sent a person from Perseus' crew to spread the news of our wedding, to make them all come to my great day, which would be held during the next full moon.

They days passed until the full moon was up high in the sky, and so the ceremony began. All the Nereids appeared, so did my father and my mother who sat on the front row. The ceremony started, and at some point, my father stood up.

'I do not want you to marry this man, or any other man! You have to be sacrificed!'

At that moment, all the Nereids stood up as well, and started screaming 'Death for Andromeda!', and at exactly that moment, Medusa's head appeared from Perseus

back, and because of the full moon, she was stronger than ever. Medusa petrified everyone. Because of this, the whole town turned into sculptures. We chose to stay.

‘This story is for you to know, little girl, that you should not let any other human being tell you what you can do or who you can be, because that is your choice’

‘Hey, you! Leave my daughter alone, and stop saying stupid things to her!’

**Sara Ahmed Abdelkader**

# ANTIGONE



## A decent farewell

Sometimes people believe that just because I'm a member of the royal line of Thebes I could at least have a saying when the king takes decisions, especially when it is about my brother. It turns out, I don't. I acknowledge that the civil war in Thebes in which my two brothers were opposed to each other was wrong but still it doesn't mean that he doesn't deserve to be buried. I insist that he has to be buried respectfully despite Creon's orders.

How am I supposed to do this? My uncle is not going to listen a word I say. He is not going to change his mind and we all know that a woman's word doesn't count, especially when it is against the law. Even if I beg him, he won't change his mind. But I am his niece, right? And I'm engaged to his son. I will be able to change his mind, right?

Now that I think twice, I don't think that I'll manage to change his mind. No woman can. As if I don't already know how my own interest, the interest of a woman, comes incommensurable with the functions of state power. While men are able to leave home, become citizens and claim the throne, a woman like me is supposed to stay behind and act as guardian of the divine law of the household. Thus, as a woman I have to reclaim my brother to the household gods. However, even that is now taken away from me and I'm not even able to give Polynices an honorable and proper burial.

What is even worse is that I'm alone in this plan. My own sister is afraid and worried since I want to steal his body and do the burial in secret. She is afraid to disobey the men who expect highly of her. She feels that women are ruled by men because they are weak. I know that asking her to disobey the law and give a proper burial to Polynices is something that has its consequences but who else would I ask for help? To be honest, I do understand her behavior and I can't blame her. Asking her to defy the king's order is something that is going to put her in danger. Creon gave Eteocles a proper burial. He is wrong in not giving Polynices a burial as well.

Even though I'm alone in this I don't care. I think it is better this way. I have Ismene. She is scared and so I am, but only by going against the rules of society and the orders of the king I can change things. And I don't know if I'm solely doing it for my brother anymore. I do respect my brother but I'm also mad at him. He is a traitor after all. He should be punished. I know that he doesn't deserve not to be buried but he deserves a punishment. Everyone expects me to be the respectful sister, and everyone expects from every woman to be respectful towards their brothers and generally men, but I can't hide that I'm mad at him. Both of my brothers had the chance to claim the throne each year, but they preferred to argue about it and that ended in civil war. They had the opportunity to claim the throne while I can't even have a saying or express my opinion about something.

Maybe the burial of my brother is just the excuse. I do care about him, and I want to give him a proper burial. But I think now what I want more is to go against the king's orders, and going for the burial gives me this chance. I know that they are going

to find out, and probably this will lead to my death. However, this is probably my only chance to assert myself.

I knew that when the king found out about the burial, he'd blame Ismene for it even though she didn't really help me with anything, but I couldn't let her take the blame. I couldn't let her die with me. I couldn't imagine another woman dying. I confessed to Creon. I confessed that I had buried Polynices. The king even tried to give me a second chance by asking me if I knew that what I did was against the law and with confidence I simply replied to him 'yes'. Even though I was scared I didn't show it. On the contrary, I defiantly refused to show a weeping face like my sister. I stood up and spoke out for what I believed it was right. I wanted to set an example for Ismene and encourage her with my behavior. I didn't know if this was the right thing to do because my behavior would lead to my punishment, and I didn't want the same for her, but I just wanted to show to her that I could stand up to the king.

After my confession Creon decided to bury me alive instead of killing me. He believed that by not killing me he'd pay minimal respects to the gods, but he didn't really know what was awaiting him. I didn't expect it either but my death led to his sufferings. The only thing left for me was to die. And who is ever ready for their own death?

I'm sad about my sister and about Haemon. I don't want to leave them. My life didn't turn out to be as I expected. But after my brother married my mother, I didn't really have high hopes for the future. We are a cursed family after all. Even though I'm paralyzed by my past I hope that my actions and my decisions will allow me to overcome this fateful repetition of my lineage. I believe this is the only way for a new beginning but ironically it will start with my own ending.

With my death I want to show that I, a woman, could lay the ground for a political space where speech and action could take place. I want to embody a new beginning. A beginning of the political as it will be known years after my death and not as it is known now in my days in which women are denied access to public things.

I want a different future.

**Maria Charalampous**

APHRODITE





## The apple of discord

It has always been like that for me. ‘Aphrodite my love, your hair doesn’t look straight enough today’, ‘Aphrodite, go easy on that cake, otherwise you will put on some weight’, ‘Oh, my dear Aphrodite, straighten your back as we have previously discussed. Do you want people to think you are some sort of elderly woman with a bright beautiful young face?’ Those words were like the alphabet for me, always on loop in my head, and even though I used to despise it when I was a child, I ended up assuming that my mother wasn’t being too strict on her manners nor forbidding me to do anything. She was protecting me, caring about me.

I won’t lie and say that I wouldn’t have liked to do what any other seventeen girls did, like eating more than one slice of pizza whenever I went out with my friends, or that I wouldn’t have liked to forget about my body posture and how others perceived me for more than five minutes, but those were things I simply couldn’t allow myself to do. It was a fixed thought, deeply rooted in my brain.

‘Aphrodite, one day you’ll see, when you are crowned Miss Greece and win that prize, you’ll truly see the value of your beauty’. I liked to think that maybe she was right, not about the Miss thing but about me seeing the ‘value of beauty’, whatever that meant, but I didn’t use to care too much since I had been listening those words for as long as I can remember. Even to this day I perfectly recall being a five-year old little girl playing with the dollhouse Santa Claus brought me, my very first dollhouse, and hearing those words coming out of her mouth. I would hear them as if they came from a long distance and then were instantly placed in the very back of my mind. As if I were underwater. It was like white noise; it can be annoying at first but, if you hear it long enough, you just get used to it and it becomes almost inaudible.

My mother had always wanted to be a ‘Miss’. She used to tell me these stories about her performance in front of her mirror when she was a teenager, how she would pretend she was in a catwalk, being acclaimed and later crowned in front of everyone. I thought I came to understand her, maybe not so much on the Miss thing but I was thankful she had always worried about my looks since a very early age. I’m pretty sure that if she hadn’t I wouldn’t even have had my first kiss yet, which I remember as if it was yesterday.

I was fifteen and it was with the most gorgeous boy in high school, Lucas. At the time I didn’t really fancy him and I secretly had a crush on my lab mate, Axel, who wasn’t exactly a work of art and my close ones, my friends and of course, my mother, would always tell me that considering my beauty I shouldn’t settle for any less than ‘a Lucas’, so I never revealed my feelings for him to anyone. Lucas and I never really talked for more than fifteen minutes, but it was assumed by everyone that the two most attractive people in high school had to end up together at some point. It was like a silent covenant—neither of us talked about it but it was meant to happen, like a sort of ceremonial tradition.

One day after school we shared a little peck. At that moment I decided that if that was what kissing was like I wasn’t missing out on anything and I would be completely fine with the fact of not kissing anyone ever again. Not because it was awful, but because it was dull and unexciting, and I used to think that experiences that imply

more than one person being together should always produce something in you. At least a little spark, which Axel achieved by only looking my way.

Trivial stories aside, one day I got home from high school and my parents were waiting for me so that we would have lunch together, which was pretty rare since I always used to eat on my own while they were already on something else. Also, they had prepared my favourite meal and welcomed me with a warm tight hug and this high-pitched ‘hello sweetie! How was school today?’, which I can assure you was not the usual welcoming. They didn’t lose their time and began to explain the reason of their excitement, how they wanted me to participate in the next *Miss Greece* contest as soon as I was of age.

To be honest, I don’t know why they had prepared such a show to ask me when I had assumed that was my destiny a long time ago. At the end of the day that was all I had: beauty. And I guess I had to be ok with that. My mother’s face lit up and they went on with their rambling on how important beauty was and how I would be the most beautiful of my opponents, which I frankly hoped. I had not conceived a world in which I was not the prettiest—it almost seemed to be an attribute that belonged to me—and also I didn’t know if I could handle the disappointment on my mother’s face if I didn’t win.

‘A woman without beauty is like a lamp without a light bulb. Rather useless’, said my father, half-jokingly half serious. My mother would always agree when he said stuff like that. I could see it in her eyes; it made her feel desired. As if she had been chosen among others for this greater quality.

It was already a month until the contest, *Miss Greece 1999*, which would consist of a competition between twenty six women who had to show off our beauty and looks in a catwalk on beautiful luxurious dresses and then give a little speech concerning why we should be chosen as winners. After that, the general jury would select three of us and the fashion designer and beauty expert Paris would, by his own, crown one of us as the winner of the competition.

That last month things started to get tough. My mother was constantly checking on my meals so that I wouldn’t eat more than I was supposed to and she forced me to cut my hair, which I had been growing out for years and absolutely adored. ‘Do you think she is going to win if she looks like that?’ I heard my father in the back. She insisted, scissors in hand, that no one would crown Miss a girl with her hair as dry as straw. I locked myself up in the bathroom, crying on the floor with the remaining strands of hair in my hands, wondering why an eighteen year old girl could not decide on the appearance of her hair, why what was supposed to be a blessing was starting to look like a nightmare. I understood, or rather I wanted to understand my mom. She wouldn’t do anything to hurt me, she loved me and was only trying to do what was best for me and my future.

But then again, things didn’t get any easier. I found out that a girl from high school, Athena, was going to participate in the contest as well. I never noticed her before but, from that day on, I could not stop staring at her every step. She looked effortlessly beautiful, that kind of beauty that only another girl who had been accused of being so could recognize—there was nothing effortless about it. She had beautiful long black hair, as long as mine used to be before my mother cut it off. I started to feel anxious, as if I couldn’t breathe properly. As an instinct, I wanted to cut her hair too. I wanted the contest organisers to suddenly write a statement saying that it was a new rule to have your hair cut above your breasts in order to be able to participate. I even had the

urge to go on with that lie to her right in that instant, but the little rational part in me realized that I would look like a psycho and a fool. Desperate. That's what I would look like and actually, that's how I felt: desperate. And ashamed.

I had always compared myself to other girls, though. That's something natural, I guess. Even as a child I used to hear my mother and aunts while lurking behind the living room door discuss if the new neighbour's girlfriend was prettier or uglier than his ex, and sometimes when my aunts left, my mother would ask me if she looked thinner than my aunt Imane. Also, every time I turned the TV on I would see disputes over this female artist being hotter, thinner, taller than this other one, so it was only natural that I had that on me too, that I would compare myself to others and that I would compare others among them, or so I thought, but not like this. I had never felt this sense of worthlessness while comparing myself to anyone. Perhaps it was because I was going to compete with her soon, perhaps because with the competition I was starting to realize I was not the only 'pretty girl' in the world, as I had been led to believe. That my only quality was not exclusive to me. The feeling that thought created in me was exasperating. It was causing me to repulse myself and others, and it was starting to drive me absolutely crazy.

For that entire month, the competition was everything that existed in my head. I was sleep deprived because of the worry and whenever I could sleep I had awful nightmares in which I lost the contest, missed half of the daily meals, and spent a lot of money in cosmetics that didn't even match my skin type. One morning my mother told me that I looked 'tired, weak, pale and that the dark circles under my eyes were horrendous'. I couldn't possibly understand anything; now that I was more invested in looking good than ever it wasn't enough for her. I was destined to be a failure.

My mother grew more and more obsessed. She kept buying newspapers and magazines every day to see who was going to be a part of the competition, and I could see how she slowly began to lose hope. 'History repeating itself', mumbled my father while sipping his morning coffee with that condescending look that having his glasses placed on the tip of his nose gave him. He was making reference to how my mother never won that contest and foretelling how I wouldn't either. I could see the pain in my mother's face when he said that only to continue drinking from his handmade clay mug with a blank expression. As if after all those years she was still the one disappointing someone and not me. My heart ached.

Perhaps that was the trigger, and days before the contest my mother contacted Paris without anyone but me knowing and bribed him with a huge amount of money in exchange for me winning the competition. She told me beforehand that she would not be able to stand the humiliation of me losing, that she had told everyone about the contest and had to make sure I got this one. Maybe in some other moment I would have found my mother's idea crazy, which, do not misunderstand me, I did, but the level of desperation, competitiveness and misery in my soul was so huge that I just needed to take a break and agreed without giving it a second thought. Paris agreed on her conditions and warned her that she had not been the only one trying to bribe him, but she had been the one that had offered the highest amount of money and that the deal would stand as long as the jury chose me to be among the three best ones, since he could only choose the winner.

The thing that I remember the most about the day of the contest is that I had this fiery desire to be crowned mixed with guilt and shame. All twenty six of us paraded giving our best smile, our best look. When we finished, as every of the girls gave their

speeches, I looked around me and had this realization. I really wanted to win. There was nothing in this world I could possibly want more in that moment than winning, and the thought of it made me feel miserable. It made me feel a prisoner of my body and a subject of the other.

I let out the biggest of the sighs when I was chosen among the three finalists. It was me, Athena and another gorgeous girl called Hera. I looked down to the first row only to dedicate my mother the most bittersweet of the smiles. She looked delighted, almost triumphant as she tightly grabbed my father's arm, who looked rather bored, the same expression as when he played *Scrabble* with us. He really didn't care, or if he did he made sure I didn't have the satisfaction of noticing.

All three of us went on with our final speeches. Hera promised that if she won she would transmit her power to the country. Athena promised she would transfer her intelligence and wisdom, and I promised love. At the end, as we expected, and by 'we' I mean my mom and I, Paris proclaimed me Miss Greece 1999. My mom jumped in excitement, tears rolling down her face. I stayed in the spot, paralyzed. Athena looked sad and exhausted and her face started to frown as if she was about to start weeping. Hera looked at me with tired eyes and an expression that suggested that she rather detested me.

Did I feel any better after winning this competition? After winning against these two girls? After seeing them destroyed and consumed? I definitely didn't. I saw these girls' families coming towards them to cheer them up, their mothers hugging them in an attempt of consolation. As an instinct I found myself caressing my forearm. If it was an attempt to console myself too or an attempt to remind me of how touched I was I have not decided. I felt a huge void inside of me, so huge I could almost swear it hurt. I felt it in my chest, threatening to eat me up. I did not feel like I had won something as I was supposed to. I felt I had lost the sense of who I was—if I ever knew who I was—of who I wanted to be. I felt that the search for beauty and approval had eaten me alive.

A week later my father arrived home with a newspaper whose headline stated 'Miss Greece 1999 contest was rigged', where Paris was accused of having been 'discovered in suspicious business' with the winner, that is, myself. He, being under pressure, confessed himself guilty and was sued and involved in trials where he didn't have much in his favour to win. The newspaper stated that I would also receive news on a lawsuit soon.

Also, during those days Athena and Hera were invited to several TV programs where they proclaimed to despise both Paris and me, and swore that they wouldn't stay quiet. They would take revenge on the both of us.

To this day, I can say that at some point I thought I would finally value beauty as my mother repeatedly told me I would, but that was until I had to slowly become aware of its shadows. The expectations because of it. And now the only thing I know for sure and certain is that I have lost myself in the way of finding approval for it.

**Celia Cardona Ligeró**

ARIADNE



## Ariadna abandonada por Teseo

*Una alternative al cuadro de Angelica Kauffman*

*... no me ata nada aquí.*

*No hay nada que guardar,*

*así que cojo impulso*

*y a volar.*

El Kanka

En la tierra de Creta, en época del rey Minos, vivía un padre, de oficio inventor. Tenía dos hijos, una muchacha llamada Icaria y el joven Ícaro. Dédalo, así se llamaba el padre, servía a este rey, de carácter amargo, guerrero, violento. Dédalo creaba infinidad de inventos admirables, algunos por orden del rey. Como probablemente ya sepas, lector/a de este relato, Creta mantenía una guerra *quasi* permanente con Atenas, la ciudad civilizada por excelencia. Para asegurar la paz, los atenienses debían entregar a siete hombres jóvenes y a siete doncellas para alimentar al Minotauro—monstruo feroz, con cabeza de toro y cuerpo humano, que no comía pastos como podría pensarse. Era fuerte, robusto, todo un macho-tauro devora jóvenes, tan agresivo y peligroso como solitario. Este animal necesitaba, por supuesto, un hogar, no reconfortante, no agradable, no hogar. Esta fue la misión de Dédalo. Nuestro inventor *servicial* creó un laberinto, perfecto para exasperar al macho-tauro y para conceder un último hálito de esperanza al que, creyendo que podía escapar, caía en la redes del hombre-animal y era destruido por él.

El rey de Creta, que parecía disfrutar de ese espectáculo de pseudo-canibalismo pactado, poseía una joven hija, Ariadna.

*Ariadna piel de ninfa,*

*diosa tejedora,*

*¿quién forjó tu destino*

*si no tú, rebelde costurera?*

Siempre he imaginado una Ariadna encerrada, castrada de amor y oportunidades. He imaginado una Ariadna aburrída, acomodada, infeliz.

*Ariadna, halcón en jaula de oro*

Cuando Ariadna supo de la llegada de Teseo, heredero de Atenas, quedó prendida de él. Nunca diré enamorada.

—¿Sabe usted algo sobre ese hijo de Atenas?—preguntó Ariadna a una de sus criadas.

—Dicen que Teseo es tan valiente que nadie podría acabar con él. Quiere tanto a su pueblo que sacrificaría su misma vida por detener lo que su padre, señorita, hace con esos pobres jóvenes.

—Es lo pactado, sin más. No veo más valentía en él que en cualquier otro. Veo descaro y un comportamiento muy poco adecuado para el hijo de un rey. ¿Qué pretende, destacar ante los demás? ¡Ja! No tengo el privilegio de la espada, si es un privilegio. No tengo el privilegio de matar, si es un privilegio. Soy una princesa tejedora, creo cosas, no las destruyo. Vivo en un palacio y sería un privilegio vivir aquí, si pudiese vivir en cualquier otra parte. No me considero víctima de mi padre, no lo considero padre. Y ahora, dejemos de hablar, parece que Teseo viene hacia palacio.

Ariadna sacó la cabeza por la ventana de su casa. Era Mayo y hacía frío. La gente se aglomeraba al paso de caballos y personas descalzas, vestidas de blanco, como si una tela fuese a representar el estado de pureza interna de estas personas. ¡Ja! El grupo sonreía, como si tuvieran la certeza de que aquel paseo iba a ser un mero trámite y no una sentencia de muerte. Esperando que alguien los salvase. Se sentían como una ola de cambio, como si un hombre fuese a cambiar lo que había creado otro. Es entonces cuando Teseo miró hacia el palacio, tenaz y orgulloso, saludó. Ariadna escondió su cabeza dentro de la casa otra vez. Sonrió.

—Como si ese fuese a salvarnos. ¡Ja!

En su habitación las horas pasaban y, sin más, creyó una buena idea salir y conocer qué ocurría con aquella gente. Es cierto que Ariadna había sentido pena por todos aquellos que morían devorados por la mascota de matar de su padre, pero también la sentía por la criatura misma y por ella en concreto. ¿Había sentido Ariadna alguna vez cariño por el Minotauro? Probablemente más que por su mismo padre. Podría ser el minotauro una escisión más animal y más drástica de su padre, más natural y más básica, como su mano derecha y su ejecutor pasional. Pensaba Ariadna, ojalá hubiese sido la escisión y no el total, quien hubiese compartido cama con ella cada noche desde la primera vez que se reconoció en el espejo. Preferiría ser comida por una bestia que seguir encerrada en esta jaula cada vez más lujosa, cada vez más difícil de enfrentar.

Fue entonces cuando, vistiendo de blanco también y descalza, como mimetizándose con el resto, se acercó a Teseo. Aunque es cierto que Teseo tenía cierto perfume a novedad, bajo esa capa de aroma superficial, Ariadna seguía oliendo la misma peste animal que había apreciado durante años en su padre y en el Minotauro. Sería más joven y, aparentemente, más noble, más intelectual, más exótico, novedoso, diferente, más abierto, dispuesto a cambiar una norma impuesta, anti-sistema, diferente, diferente, diferente, *diferente...*

... pero Ariadna sabía que lo *diferente* no tenía ese olor, ni ese color, ni esa forma.

Con eso—y *con todo*—Ariadna consiguió pactar con Teseo su fuga. Ella lo ayudaría a enfrentarse al Minotauro y a escapar del laberinto con vida, siempre y cuando



la llevara con él a Atenas. Aparentemente, el plan se ejecutó con éxito. Habiendo matado Teseo a la escisión del padre, sentía Ariadna cómo se desprendía todo miedo y su peso corpóreo era más ligero. Seguía siendo un halcón, pero ahora podía volar— aunque hubiese preferido volar sola—en compañía de Teseo.

¿Sentía Ariadna amor por Teseo?

Ariadna sentía amor por su libertad y, en ese momento, Teseo era liberador.

Al llegar a la isla de Naxos Ariadna vio cómo esa libertad era coartada—y su libertad plena—cuando vio que Teseo la abandonaba.

Mucha gente cuenta que Ariadna quiso quitarse la vida, otros piensan que se fue con el dios Dionisio y tuvieron una descendencia plena.

Yo prefiero pensar que, como buena tejedora, Ariadna tomó el ovillo que le dio a Teseo para escapar del laberinto, y con este, manchado de sangre y con restos de su vida pasada, empezó a tejer su propio futuro.

**Andrea Nieves Jiménez**

## Outside the labyrinth

Every story has a beginning. But to tell my story, I must first trace it all the way back to my ancestors' tale. My name is Ariadne, daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë, rulers of Crete. My father, son of Zeus, was known for his irascibility and bad temper. Because of my father's mistake, my mother was punished by Poseidon, who made her have an unbridled passion for an impressive white bull. From this union was born my half-brother, who lived all his life secluded in a labyrinth.

As you may well know from history books, in those times the relations between Crete and Athens were not good. My eldest brother, Androgeus, was killed in Athens out of envy and that triggered a war between the two cities. My mother, who was known for her close connections with witchcraft and the occult, caused the Athenian population to drown in poverty. To overcome this crisis, King Aegeus swore loyalty to my father and promised to hand fourteen young people every nine years to feed my brother. I imagine that in present times it would be frowned upon for young men to be sent to a certain death, but in my time this was not the most reprehensible thing you could find. It didn't seem entirely fair to me either, but I was also considering my brother.

My brother is a whole new story. Everyone was afraid of him, but I used to visit him. After all, he was a prisoner of his own condition. I never considered how morally reprehensible that sacrifice was until my father's 45th birthday. My father, reeking of wine, babbled about how a certain Theseus was going to be devoured by the Minotaur in a few days. My father hated Athens because, after Androgeus' death, he had no other male descendants. I am aware that in your culture you are becoming less and less spiritual and you prefer facts. In my era, we used to believe that every person had a spirit, called daimon, who protected you from the day you were born and visited you on that same date every year. I am sure that my father's daimon did not show up that year, because that was the day I decided to betray him.

It was not until a few days later, thanks to the whispering of some maidens, that I found out who Theseus was. According to them, he was King Aegeus' son, and he had never lost against any rival. At that moment, I realized that was my only chance to run away from my father. If I could get Theseus out of the labyrinth, I could leave Crete with him and would no longer have to endure his angry gusts.

As I have already explained, I was very familiar with the labyrinth. I oversaw bringing him food and entertaining him as much as possible. My parents despised him. For my father it was a living proof of his wife's infidelity, and my mother was disgusted that she had conceived such a monster. Many nights I would stay up telling him stories, as it was pleasant company, though he could not participate. You may wonder how I could facilitate the death of my own brother. Frankly, it's not justifiable. I always felt

guilty, but my father's character reached a point that it boiled down to him or me, and my brother was never going to be able to live in freedom.

I was known as Ariadne, the purest. As you can imagine, I had no experience with palace intrigues nor with men. The moment I saw Theseus, I admired him. Not only in sight of the possibility of a future away from my father, but because he represented every conceivable manly quality I could think of. I went ahead with my plan, was infatuated with him, and handed him the golden thread with which he could find the labyrinth's exit. Once he left the labyrinth, Theseus asked me to run away with him to Athens. I won't lie. I would look better if I said I took advantage of him to run away from my father's palace, but that was not entirely the case. I was fascinated by Theseus and his courage, and we ran away from Crete, leaving a legion of Cretans claiming me alive behind us. Naturally, the poor adherents of my parents thought I had been kidnapped. How could Ariadne, the purest, run away with a man? How could an innocent kid plan something that Machiavellian against her own father? Just as it happened with Helen or Proserpine, no one could ever think that we would voluntarily go with a man. None of them thought that we also had desires that we let ourselves be carried away.

During the crossing of the Aegean Sea, everything was looking rosy. I was expecting Theseus' child, and everything was going great until we reached the island of Naxos. There I laid down on the sand to rest, tired from months of travelling. When I opened my eyes, I realized that there was no sign of Theseus or his ship. I was flooded with shame. I felt humiliated. Despite my loyalty and intelligence, Theseus had abandoned me. I laid in the sand for days, the hours passing one after the other without my awareness. I wanted to merge with the sand and stay there forever. Up to that point the only male figures I had met had treated me like dirt, all except my brother the Minotaur.

At that time, I was overwhelmed by a deep sense of guilt. I remained on that island, waiting for my destiny to arrive, be it life or death. The muses told me that at some point a good and pure love would come, but I didn't believe in that anymore. I don't know how many moons passed before I saw a carriage on the horizon. I could distinguish a deity-like man surrounded by his followers. There I was, lying on the sand, when he approached and introduced himself as Dionysus.

I knew that he was born from the leg of Zeus, and that should say a lot about a person. He was the god of wine and good life in general, the most unrestrained god on Olympus. Therefore, I didn't take him seriously at first, especially because I had heard about his bacchanals, parties full of wine and diverse substances which made his followers go insane. They were known as bacchantes, and they were totally alienated by his presence. I don't know why, but he didn't have that effect on me. That's why it worked. He didn't have that sectarian effect on me, and I wasn't alienated by his presence. We had a relationship of equals. After a lot of effort on his behalf, I managed to forget Theseus and finally had a healthy relationship.

We left Naxos together and I attained immortality with him, with the Boreal Crown as proof.

**Lucía Pérez Iglesias**

## The golden thread

If I close my eyes, I still remember my father's face when he found out about my brother's death. He didn't cry, but I saw resentment and frustration in his expression. My mother spent days without eating and was sad, very sad. These emotions resulted in my father Minos, King of Crete, declaring war against Athens. Unfortunately for the Athenians, the defeat of Athens led to an agreement according to which seven young men and seven young women had to be sent every year as preys for the minotaur. To be honest, I don't like to talk about the minotaur. Today is the day. Today, seven innocent men and seven beautiful women are going to enter the labyrinth knowing their destiny: to be devoured by that beast.

To forget about it, I decide to take a walk when I come across a lovely boy in the backyard. I look at him and he looks at me. Is he the most handsome man I have ever seen? Oh, yes, probably.

'Who are you?' I ask him.

'My name is Theseus, and my father is the King of Athens'.

'What are you doing here?'

'I cannot tell you. If you want to know, come with me'.

I can't refuse, so I take his hand and we start walking. After a long talk in which he tells me his intentions, we end up kissing frenetically. The attraction is mutual. What am I supposed to do now? Theseus has come to my land to kill the minotaur but he doesn't know that the problem is not only to kill the minotaur, but also to get out of the labyrinth. Theseus needs my help and I am going to help him. The idea of killing the minotaur looks great.

I have a plan. I will give Theseus a ball of golden thread. He will unroll it along the maze in order to follow the way back. It would be easier if we had new technologies such as Google Maps, but it is not the case! I tell my plan to Theseus and he also thinks it is a splendid idea. There is no time to lose. On the way to the labyrinth, Theseus assures me that, after killing the minotaur, we will travel to Athens, where we can start a new life together.

I have to admit that it seems a bit hasty to me, mainly because he could also stay on my land, right? Sometimes I think that it is always the woman who must adapt to her husband's life, even if that means going away from her family, friends, traditions... However, after helping Theseus to kill the minotaur, I will not be welcome at home anymore. In this case, leaving with Theseus is not a bad idea. I trust him—or try to convince myself of it.

In a few minutes we arrive at the entrance of the labyrinth. Theseus kisses me and starts his mission. I feel sadness, I think I really love him. All this time without Theseus, I think about the disloyalty towards my father and the things I am capable of doing for love. In a matter of an hour and a half I recognise the voice of Theseus shouting my name. 'Ariadne! Ariadne! I am alive!' I look at the entrance of the labyrinth and run to hug him.

Over the following hours, Theseus tells me how the feat has been. First, he made the minotaur run after him to tire him out. Then, he killed him. As he had been unrolling the thread along the way, he followed it to return to the entrance of the labyrinth. Everything as we had planned. I obviously feel proud of him as he has defeated the monster that caused so much damage to innocent young people, but... The way in which he tells the story... It looks like I have not contributed anything to this plan. Still, I understand his excitement after killing the minotaur, so I forgive him.

A day has passed since we embarked for Athens and we are glad. However, the gods have prepared a heavy storm for us. Theseus forces me to go inside the ship. It rains intensely and fog makes it difficult to see. The next thing I know is that, due to the storm, we are going to disembark on the island of Naxos. I calm down, and finally, when we reach the beach, I lie on the hot sand and fall asleep.

I open my eyes and I don't see Theseus. There is no one around me. I am alone. From here, there are different opinions about what happens. Some people say that Theseus fell in love with another woman and left me, others say that Dionysius fell in love with me and made Theseus forget about me. Personally, I prefer the last option, but both of them are awful and ridiculous.

At night I usually think about how that golden thread, that love I gave, was so wasted.

**Elvira Gallardo Hidalgo**

# ARACHNE





## Web of lies

The muffled sound of the TV brought me back from my thoughts.

‘Welcome back to our show, I’m Dr. Mercury and today we have a program packed with juicy stories. We have a goddess whose daughter is obsessed with the Underworld.’

‘She’s just going through her emo phase!’, someone from the audience shouted.

‘Yes, yes, we’ll talk about that later,’ continued Dr. Mercury smiling. ‘We also have a poet who’s suing god Bacchus for the latest representation of his epic poem in which, according to him, the god adopted a rather improper and sexual undertone to bring the work to life. But before we get on with it, our favorite reporter, Fama, is here with the daily update on the most-talked-about issue right now involving the mortal and immortal realms. Hello, Fama darling, you look fantastic today.’

‘Oh, hi, Mercury! Thank you so much for having me again,’ said the lady sitting across from Dr. Mercury while batting the eyelashes of all her five eyes simultaneously. ‘We have some news about the “hairy” issue everyone’s talking about.’ Laughter from the audience ensued. ‘The situation has reached a new high as declarations from trusty witnesses have come out to light. Please, roll the video,’ signaled Fama.

‘Yes, I wasn’t there when it all happened,’ a nymph with pointy yellow ears said. ‘But I heard from a friend that they both got into a heated argument and all of a sudden, poof! She was an insect,’ she gestured with her hands. ‘Dean Minerva must have pitied her, though, and turned her back to human form.’

The TV now showed someone else speaking.

‘I was outside the class ‘cause I was next, and I could hear everything.’ This time it was a Dryad with curly green hair talking. ‘They *definitely* started yelling at each other and when they came out of the classroom, they went straight to Dean Minerva’s office. I hear her punishment wasn’t a complete metamorphosis. Apparently, she only turns into a spider at night and when the sun rises, she gets back her human shape.’

‘Oh well, I’m pretty close with her actually—’ Wait... is that my friend Lotis!? ‘From what people say, she apparently challenged Dean Minerva to a weaving challenge. The audacity! Challenging goddess Minerva herself! Honestly, I believe it. That’s how she is. Arachne has always been impulsive like that. But to think that—’

Yup, that’s me they’re talking about. Hello, I’m Arachne, and my life right now is a complete mess. Given all the rumors and lies spread about me I think it’s important that I, *myself*, tell my own story.

I should probably start from the beginning. Last year I started my art degree with a major in textiles. Everything was going great. I loved every single class; the professors were great, and I made lots of friends. Problem came when we were asked to weave a tapestry for our final exam in one of the courses. The only guidelines Professor Clio gave us required to incorporate a motif that told a story in the tapestry.

It took me weeks to decide, but a conversation with my friend Daphne set it. She told me how scared she was getting of Phoebus, who kept insisting to go out with her, and how he wouldn't accept "no" for an answer. That got me mad, so I started designing my pattern.

I divided the tapestry into three parts. The upper side was all dedicated to Jupiter and his "little adventures". I depicted Europa being kidnapped; Asteria pursued; Leda, Antiope, and Alcmena raped, all while Jupiter adopted the form of a bull, an eagle, a swan, a satyr, or even, in the case of Alcmena, disguised as her own husband. In the upper left corner, I put Danae and the golden rain, and I reserved a generous space in the upper right corner to show Mnemosyne being raped by Jupiter in the form of a mortal shepherd. The Muses were born from this abuse—I should mention at this point that the Nine Muses were the ones doing the critique on my piece.

The lower left side was left for Neptune. Scenes of Arne, Tyro, Theophane, Ceres, Medusa, and Melanthe being raped by Neptune transformed into such imaginative forms as a river god, a ram, a fowl, or even a dolphin. The right side showed Erigone being abused by Bacchus in the shape of a grape—yeah, don't ask—and Saturn choosing to transform into a stallion to rape Philyra. The lower central part was *all* reserved for Phoebus, who chose the trendy mortal shepherd shape to rape Isse.

Gods seem to like playing dress up, or should I say furry up. If only they used all that imagination to write erotic novels instead of taking it out on women...

The whole tapestry was woven in different shades of red with the motifs standing out in a more blood-like red color. The name I chose for the piece: abuse of the gods. Yeah, I set myself up. But you know what? I stick by it. I knew I attended a godly university and that this could be taken the wrong way, but I had to speak on it 'cause no one else was. And I still stand by it, I wouldn't change a single thing, if anything, I would add even more gods.

So, the day of the critique I was already expecting the worst, although a part of me hoped that they would understand what I wanted to portray. To my surprise, the Muses took it lightly and even praised me—they get art. It was one of the demigods—they're always the most annoying—that was presenting at the same time as me, the one who found it offensive and called Dean Minerva.

She came to the classroom to check out the woven piece herself. She kept it very low and didn't make a big fuss over it in the classroom, so we were definitely *not* yelling. She then ordered the Muses to take the piece down and politely "invited" me to go to her office and discuss the issue at hand. So, I did.

She started lecturing me. She warned me about what happened to mortals that messed with gods. “You do not want to end up like Haemus and Rhodope, the poor things. They were turned into mountains—you know that, right?—for comparing themselves to my father Jupiter and goddess Juno. Or end up a stork like foolish Antigone who thought herself so beautiful as to compete against goddess Juno. And for her vanity she was punished.” She told me all this while calmly making herself a cup of tea.

“But I am not comparing myself to anyone,” I tried to reply with the same calmness. “Nor am I challenging any god or goddess to anything. I am only expressing myself and my concerns. These are widely known stories. We study them at school! With the difference that ‘approaching’ or ‘making sexual advances’ get replaced by ‘seducing’, and ‘raping’ becomes ‘they had accepted’. But we all know that is not true.” I was failing at keeping calm and I could feel myself getting more and more agitated. “But all you care about is not staining the image of the gods, even if you know they are in the wrong. And what about those women, do they only get shame? Why when I try to shine light on the problem, you just censor me?” Minerva was looking at me attentively while stirring her tea and not saying a word. “We are told these stories as kids for Jupiter’s sake! Bedtime stories for us, times of agony for them.”

Minerva gave me the chance to apologize for what I had done. Why should I apologize for expressing myself artistically while making a social critique on something that should be talked about? Of course, I was not going to apologize, so she took it to the board and they eventually expelled me. When I was told the decision they had made, the only thing I could think about was my friends telling me how crazy I was for choosing to go to university in the immortal realm. I knew I was going to have to deal with gods and goddesses and their big egos, but I didn’t think it would be this bad. They didn’t pay that much attention to mortal students like me and acted as if their immortal relatives were superior to us. I don’t know why I thought Minerva was going to be different. She is not. She only cares about herself and her own kind.

I think I’ve debunked most of the rumors going on. Oh! The spider thing. I don’t even know how that came to be. The only spider I have in me is the tattoo of a tarantula on my left thigh. I guess they took my name too literally. I really don’t understand rumors. People just like to make stuff up, but it’s always us women who take the worst part, men are never called out. Women are punished, shamed and pushed aside when they’re innocent, and men are glorified for taking advantage and lying. That’s exactly what my piece was trying to denounce.

I won’t lie and say that those rumors haven’t affected me. Once news came out that I had been expelled, all social media were filled with my face. They talked about me at school. They talked about me on TV. I’ve been hiding at home for months now. I can’t go outside without people looking at me or screaming insults from across the street or even threatening my life. All the friends I made have lost all contact with me. It got to a point where I couldn’t even look at myself in the mirror without feeling guilt. I didn’t feel like painting, or weaving. I didn’t feel joy out of anything. I just felt empty inside. So, I tried to kill myself. I couldn’t bear the constant feeling of being watched; I wanted it to stop. My father found me lying on the bathroom floor of my dorm, unconscious and bleeding.

But I'm doing better now. I thought for so long I had actually done something wrong that is going to take me a bit to recover. My therapist, Psyche, has been helping me a lot and I feel like—

Wait, someone's knocking on my door.

'Daphne!'

'Arachne! Oh my god, I've missed you so much!' she hugged me effusively. 'How are you, love. Your dad told me what happened. I'm sorry I couldn't come earlier.'

'It's okay, I'm just happy you're here now. I've been doing better. How's everything outside? Is everyone still, you know, mad at me?'

'Actually, I also came 'cause I have something to tell you. First, I wanted to thank you. I know why you did it and I love you so much for it, Arachne, but I'm so very sorry that you had to go through all this. You did nothing wrong; I hope you know that.' Her eyes were getting teary. 'After everything went down, a lot of women and, you know, nymphs and stuff, came forward and shared their stories of abuse. And not only abuse from the gods! So many of them, Arachne, you couldn't even believe. It was both admirable and scary. It felt so overwhelming but seeing so many women there for each other without judging or shaming lifted a huge weight off my shoulders. I've kept in touch with some of them, and they told me they're creating an association for victims. And they want you to be part of it, too. This is all thanks to you, Arachne. You inspired thousands of women. We could call it *Arachnida*, if you want. Would you like that Arachne?'

Maybe I am getting my life back. Maybe it was all worth it. Maybe we can weave our way through to make a change.

**Candela Sierra Rodríguez**

**ARTEMIS**



## The moon's diary

Since I was a little kid, I was taught the art of archery when I showed interest in shooting and the gods went hunting across the forests of the mainland. It was then that I knew that—

Ok, it has been a while, but I fancied writing again. This morning I have been quarreling with Aethyma because I told her I wanted to write a diary about me, but when she saw it, she said it was not a diary. 'A dairy must be like a summary of what happens in your daily life. That is why it is called [diary]', she remarked. However, I didn't mean that. I wished to acknowledge in writing my childhood as I wished none to forget the oaths I took back then. So, Aethyma replied that was perfectly okay except for the title. I used an entire piece of cloth as the diary cover providing my best calligraphy in each letter. I won't utter how much time it took as reported by the clepsydra to finish the whole thing, but for sure, I am NOT going to change the title 'Artemis's diary' only because it is not really a diary.

And that was basically the whole issue. Although paradoxically, what I have just written is a diary-like format. Anyway, let's forget about this morning and focus on my goal now that I have time on my own as my nymphs are doing the cooking for lunch. Soon, everyone will know the values of Artemis.

I don't really care at this point but I am a bastard kid, just like many others. Father Zeus had an affair with my mother Leto so my brother Apollo and I were born after some complications as a consequence of Hera's anger. As I pointed out, I don't give a damn. For me origins don't matter. What is really essential is what kind of life you choose to live and I truly understood that when I was a little child. All of this began with hunting.

I used to go with the Olympians to the woods to get our food. Stags, rabbits, boars, even bears sometimes, they all were welcome for the feasts held by the gods. One day, Father decided to take me to the hunting when I was only five years old and, surprisingly, I remember I was fascinated by the display of weapons as well as by the slaughter of those brute beasts. In fact, when Father discovered a den of rabbits, I took the initiative and I remember getting a knife ready to stab those wild creatures. Father was certainly astonished to see that little girl eager to contribute to the loot. Thankfully, he didn't stop me; hence, I silently drew near the lair. The result was a bit embarrassing—most rabbits flew away—yet I managed to kill one baby. Full of joy, I showed the motionless corpse of my prey to Father and he caressed me etching a smile after looking at my achievement.

From that day on, Father noticed something and, subsequently, he determined to change my education. I was going to be trained in the art of survival!

After sessions and sessions of hunting, I tried several weapons, all adapted to an infant, of course. The one which caught my attention the most was the bow. It felt dynamic, agile and light. It is a flawless weapon owing to its aptness to be wielded from the distant and, on top of that, it is significantly straightforward to use although dexterity must be obtained through intense drilling. Furthermore, it is easy to carry, which gives it extra points. The only drawback is the handicap of the arrows. As opposed to close-combat weaponry, no ammunition means being defenseless, so I had to be careful. Nonetheless, whilst hunting, I could always pick up the arrows that didn't hit the target without major problem.

Time passed and at the age of twelve, I could master archery and I was worthy to be referred as an 'Olympian'. Father, after realizing I had such gift, started to overprotect me. He didn't want her beloved warrior daughter to suffer any damage or retaliation from anyone or anything. One of his two most terrible fears was revenge from Hera. The other one, that someone could harass me. That is why he isolated me from the Olympus and kept me hidden in the woods. My only contacts, apart from Father, were some forest nymphs, nothing more. I was basically reared by Father and I appreciate it a lot. Before going to sleep, Father narrated me old stories about the world. Wars, treasons, adventures, journeys, abuse... I was as amazed as shocked. At that time, I profoundly understood why Father sheltered me. Actually, something of this kind happened to me during that time.

One night, while sitting near the campfire Father had made, a mortal passed by and all of the sudden, without prior notice, he assaulted me and stripped me by force. Incessantly, I scuffled, struggled and grappled. But that mortal took advantage of my age to pin me down. I cried and shouted with such force as to remain hoarse until Father came luckily. Fortunately, before getting raped, Father disintegrated that scum with one lightning. I was trembling and twitching. My heart was beating briskly whilst I was gazing at my torn clothes on the ground. The frosty wind of the night hit my naked body, including the tiny tears of my weepy eyes, almost frozen straightaway when they slid on my tender cheeks. I would never forget that sense of feebleness, of belittlement, of powerlessness. Although the shock was too much for that little girl, Father could manage to calm me down momentarily. I wasn't able to sleep for days until I coped with the trauma. The tears I spilled for humiliation, for dishonor, for shame, will never fall into oblivion.

I really commenced hating those mortals and gods who appeared in old folklore abusing maidens. They were weak and fragile and I was not capable of putting up with that. I abhor them, the predators and the victims equally. I am totally aware my father is one of these harassers, but he had the decency to react and hide me from that world. I am not defending Him, but at least he worried about me as opposed to my mother and, thanks to Him, I am now the strong goddess I am. He saved my honor and I owe Him my whole life. Now that my morals were rescued, it was time to fight on my own with my bow, with my hands.



And so the day came. One morning, I sat on the lap of Father when I was thirteen and took my oath. I, no matter what, would always be a virgin. My hatred for men was and still is so intense, so deep inside my psyche, that none would ever touch me. None would ever tarnish me nor conquer me. None would ever stain my pride and I am more than delighted to stand up for my glory. I prefer dying on the battlefield rather than be submitted to a man. Therefore, I asked Father to assemble an entourage of nymphs because I wanted to live alone in the forest, forever, without the help of Him. But of course, I was conscious of my limitations and, as I was a little girl, I knew I still needed some companions in order to make survival more accessible in case anybody appeared out of the blue with wicked intentions.

Father, with tears in his eyes due to those noble principles of mine, didn't oppose to my desires and gathered some trustworthy nymphs to take care of me. In fact, he also asked Pan for hounds to help me hunting so he gave me seven female and six male dogs. At that point, I was ready for my hermitage. Father said goodbye and assured he would be watching me from Mount Olympus. After hugging me, he addressed his most reliable nymph, Aethyma, and placed his trust in her. Aethyma promised to safeguard me with her life and so, Father departed from the forest. A new phase was about to start in the wild. It was time to test my loyalty to my principles and see if I could pass them on to others.

Living together with the nymphs was, indeed, a pleasant experience as it currently is. They all are kind and friendly to me. We are all day long side by side, ready for cooperating. I am truly comfortable with them because they are transparent to me and none of us have malicious desires or depraved intentions that can ruin our purity or our righteousness. If I detected something off I would have to act accordingly, obviously. Anyhow, let's not think about that.

Just as for Father, Aethyma became my most faithful nymph and I deem her as my friend and why not to say it, as my mother, since she has been the one who has been looking out for me after Father's egress. Of course, we have argued yet we always make up with each other. I really value the life I have presently and I just wanted to write this down.

I think this is going to be the end for this diary. I believe my creed is clear. I don't know if someday I will take up this again but, I don't really care. What only matters is that this is Artemis and that, nowadays, she still lives according to her philosophy. Having said that, I am going to snoop what the nymphs are preparing for lunch.

Look at what I found here. I was cleaning the bedroom of my Lady when I came across her old biography. How cute she is. After reconsidering for a moment I have opted to continue this so I have added extra pages. From here on, it will become a true diary, albeit I will not be able to write on a daily basis. I believe this will be an appropriate way of lauding her.

*Pyanepsion, end of the month. Fall*

It hasn't been long for Lady Artemis to mess it up a bit. That bonehead of Buphagus. Honestly, not a surprise coming from the son of a titan. We have seen him prowling this forest several days but we did not think he could be so daring to attempt to make his lecherous thoughts real today. By the time he came near hazardously, I was holding my bow ready to attack, yet my Lady lowered my arm and stated self-assuredly: 'Give it to me'. I trusted her since now; she is not the little lass she used to be but a grown woman with the strength of her father. Poor Buphagus.

All of the sudden, Lady Artemis took him from the neck and punched him on the face. The bang was so strong that my Lady sent the titan far in the distance. Perhaps he went over one hippikon, I would say. The fierce battle continued throughout the woods until they reached Mount Pholoe. There, my Lady dealt such ferocious blows that she could knock him off without wielding her bow. Notwithstanding, that was not so satisfactory for her. With a broad grin, she began to smash his head with her bare fists. She carried on and on and on to the extent that she opened up his skull, spreading his brain on the snow. Nonetheless, she did not stop there. My Lady kept smacking the burst head of the giant. Her hands were bleeding but she did not cease until she cracked the whole mount, splitting it into two halves at the same time she made the earth shudder. After finishing, my Lady shouted towards the gray skies, with her eyes rolled, deeply engrossed. Her hands were totally smashed, her finger bones shattered. Hastily, I took my Lady back to the campsite and I started to treat her wounds. Currently, the young Lady is recovering from the surgery slowly, with her arms all bandaged. I shall not be able to write soon but I shall come back as soon as I can.

*Maemacterion. Fall*

A month has passed and my Lady is doing well because of her godlike nature even though she still has her bandages. Anytime soon, the rehabilitation will have concluded. In order to celebrate this, the rest of the nymphs and I agreed on arranging a feast for her. Originally, it was meant to be a surprise but my Lady caught us red-handed. Anyway, it is exceedingly knotty to enshroud a surprise binge in a rather small campsite in the middle of nowhere.

The young Lady was quite excited about all of this and so, she wore her white dress emblazoned with irises, her long strap sandals and her bronze ring on her slim fingers. In addition, I made a laurel wreath that she placed on her head keenly. I could not stop looking at her. She was so pretty dressed like that. The young Lady is very thoughtful to all of us and, although we have brought her up, she has also taught us many things. For instance, she has instructed every nymph but me—since I was already a huntress—in archery and hunting. Over the years, they all learnt how to wield the

bow, how to shoot arrows and the optimal corporal position for an adequate performance. We have watched over her, but the truth is my Lady has also safeguarded us reciprocally. Witnessing her so grown up, so charming, so beautiful, makes me want to cuddle her and to kiss her cheek and so I did when we were alone laying the cutlery on the table. Her first reaction was to push me and scolding me for what I did as she does not tolerate any kind of lewdness, not even if it is not lust but affection, since she does not want her dignity to be sullied by anyone. Quickly, she returned to the kitchen yet, after all, I could see her face blushed.

The banquet went on and everybody enjoyed the food and the company of each other. Before going to bed, we played the lyre and the pipe. After relaxing by gazing at the stars, we fell asleep outside.

Early in the morning, we all set off for the pond near the campsite to have a bath. We were nude refreshing our bodies in the water when out of the blue, we noticed a hunter with a pack of hounds that was ogling us naked. He presented himself as 'Actaeon' and apologized for the misunderstanding—although that lubricious gawking was not unintentional. Nonetheless, there was a person who was not pleased with that answer. My Lady, outraged, metamorphosed the voyeur boy into a stag and enraged his hounds to the extent that they started to bite their owner. But the punishment did not stop there. My Lady went out the pond and drew near Actaeon. Then, she ordered the dogs to tear him apart with their teeth. Afterwards, the hounds commenced stabbing the deer with their fangs, ripping up his flesh and muscles. One of the canines fancied the part of the stomach so it slit him open, scattering Actaeon's guts all over the grass. The rest of the pack flocked to his belly as well and began to devour his innards while the unfortunate stag was making a gruesome grimace because of the arduous pain he was suffering to the point that he dislocated his jaw. The hounds kept making their way through the insides of the deer, drilling his thorax until one of the wild dogs punctured his lung. Streams of blood splashed, staining the face and the chest of Lady Artemis. Subsequently, my Lady smirked and stepped on Actaeon's head whilst she was pulling his horns until she could uproot them just to hammer the sharp antlers in his eyeballs, thus putting an end to his miserable life once and for all.

The hounds flew away and Lady Artemis came back to the pond in order to rinse her blood-stained body. This may sound a little bit quirky but when I saw my Lady performing that festival of gore I could not avoid panting, grinding my teeth and biting my lip. My Lady and I are the same in this aspect. We love to enjoy squashing our foes; it is in our nature as huntresses. Barbarity runs in our veins, it is part of our essence. That is in fact one of the reasons why we live in a forest. Wilderness keeps us away from judgmental civilization and spawns a space where we can let our primitive savageness loose. We are not meant to be fit in an artificial ruling but we have been born to dwell in freedom.

Lady Artemis has finally recovered from her injuries and we have been able to make the key arrangements for enduring winter. The bushmeat has been conserved in salt, the leather clothes are available and the fur bedding is set. In the process of preparing all the amenities, we had some mishaps, of course. It seems the world is restless these days, curiously, due to two braggers. On the one hand, there was that dunce of Aura. I do detest her. Before becoming the tutor of Lady Artemis, Aura lurked the same forest where I was. She is also a virgin huntress—or so she says—and she has always been showing off her beauty and how every single Olympian has at least once been smitten over her. Instead of swaggering like that, she should be more focused on her huntress duties. I loathe her, with that face of hers, parading around my woods with those promiscuous gods and demigods. One evening, I ran into her while I was hunting with my Lady and on top of that, she had a solid loot of hunted beasts. She really gets on my nerves!

At that moment, I had to tell the truth to Lady Artemis although I did not desire any more conflicts. The fact is that Aura has been asserting lately that my Lady's body is too much womanly for being a pure maiden. In other words, she is doubtful about my Lady's chastity. After hearing such harsh words, my Lady and I arranged a scheme to chastise her for her scorn towards us. We passed weeks plotting until we made all the preparations for the punishment. Taking advantage of the fact that Aura was in a forest near a plain where a Dionysian bacchanal was taking place, we managed to make the god of wine drunk—issue that was not very tough—and we encouraged him to kidnap Aura. Dionysius, with our help, could ambush her. Defenseless, Aura was undressed and abruptly raped by the inebriated god while Lady Artemis and I were watching such mortifying act. Aura moaned with tears in her eyes and with naive blood coming out her genitalia. After all, she was a virgin. Without any mercy at all, Lady Artemis taught her a lesson she would not forget ever so, she took out an arrow and slashed her throat to make sure this little moron remained quiet the rest of her wretched life. My Lady invited me to do the last honors while she pointed at Aura's gash; hence I inserted my hand in her pharynx and succeeded in uprooting the tongue of the ravished damsel. As the saying advices, you should watch that part of yours. Watching Aura in such pathetic state made Lady Artemis go utterly mad. Rape was an extremely serious issue for my Lady and she could not put up with it. Wrath plus scorn overpowered the young Lady's fists which began to punch the fair visage of Aura until her nose broke and some of her teeth were pulled out. Abruptly, my Lady stopped unable to continue owing to the shock regarding Aura's frailty.

We thought that was enough discipline for Aura thereupon, we left that regrettable whereabouts and let Dionysius kept with the fun.

None should ever mess with me.

Anyway, the second and last setback was the matter of the Aloadae, two twin sons of Poseidon who had never stopped growing. They were boasting about reaching

the Olympus and kidnapping Hera and Lady Artemis. When the brothers decided to carry out their plan, none of the major gods were in Heaven. Fortunately for Hera and other Olympian goddesses, Apollo was there to forefend the assault.

This piece of news reached the ears of my Lady and suddenly, she panicked. Even though Apollo is her blood twin brother, she has a terrible abjection for him. Apollo was not only the favorite of the Olympians, but also of the common folk. He was the god of healing, light, poetry, music, dance, prophecies and even... archery. All around the world shrines were built to honor him, to pray to him in order to enlighten their lives. On the contrary, Lady Artemis was quite the opposite. She has always gone unnoticed and people identified her with hunting of course, but also with the moon, virginity and wild animals. Apollo is plainly the spoiled boy of the gods, including Zeus. Although my Lady's father has constantly looking after her, Apollo became swiftly one of his favorite sons when Lady Artemis departed to the woods. It is hard to resist the charm of a child prodigy. Therefore, Artemis became jealous of him and she developed a sort of fear for getting her affectionate position in Zeus's heart usurped by her twin.

Consequently, after getting calm, Lady Artemis understood this was a great chance for outperforming her brother. The defender of the Olympus was going to be her, so we head for the mount. When we arrived, the fight had already begun and Apollo was struggling with defeating the two giants. It seemed they were a hard nut to crack and the expectation was extremely high. My Lady, after realizing she could not win physically, started to brood over the best method to dispatch the colossi.

Eventually, Apollo was knocked off against all odds, causing this the horror among Heaven. But then, Lady Artemis appeared. In the moment in which the monsters were bragging about their feat, my Lady faced them and proffered a deal. She explained that she consented to become their wife, but only with the most competent of them. Lady Artemis displayed the finest deer I have ever seen and informed to two titanic brutes that the one who managed to hunt it could demand my Lady as her wife. The giants accepted the agreement and reckoned it was a splendid occasion to evidence which one was the most skilled. Lady Artemis released the lithe deer and the hunting began.

Despite the fact that the two huge twins had towering spears, the wild creature was devilishly elusive and it was able to sneak through the brushwood. The truth was that Lady Artemis, making use of her divine connection with animals, could lead the deer stealthily across the area. Cunningly, my Lady used her wit to place the prey between the two colossi and synchronously, they lunged their spears to perform an aggressive onslaught upon the wild beast. Nevertheless, they ended up impaling their weapons in their midriffs, thus they died eventually owing to the bloodletting and the severe traumatism.

My victorious Lady Artemis climbed the stairs of the Olympus and found awed countenances at what had just happened. Lying on the floor, there was Apollo, who had lost every spark of brightness. Suddenly, the cloudy sky commenced releasing gray water. Lady Artemis looked at her twin and recited what follows:

‘Glorious Sun, Eternal Light, On top of the sky raised upright, Warming the folk, praised by men, With a laurel wreath, He’s won again. Naively, ignores a fact that is known, That in the firmament, he is not alone.

In the heavenly forests She dwells, Quietly hidden, a round shape rebels, Poets of all kind at Her swoon, Elegantly dressed, emerges The Moon. Oh! Cocky Sun calmly you were humming, You never saw an Eclipse was coming.’

After uttering aloud these verses, my Lady looked at Hera and took my hand. Silently, we returned to the woods and set off for the campsite. When we arrived, the rest of the nymphs were waiting for us and had already cooked the dinner. Without realizing it, it was already night. Lady Artemis and I stared at each other. There was a beautiful full Moon lighting us up.

**José Antonio Ramírez García**

BRITOMARTIS





## Tangled

One Friday morning the sound of waves woke Britomartis. Steadily, she drew the curtains and attentively watched the view she already knew so well. She loved her hometown. Who would not want to live in a paradisiac Greek island? Her house was right next to the bay. Each morning she was awoken by the faint murmur of the sea, the sounds of the seagulls and the hollers of the fishermen. In the summer, the tourists appeared and rambled the place. The peace disappeared as if it had never existed. But even gentrified, she still loved her hometown.

She was lost in her thoughts when she received a call from her aunt, Artemis. Britomartis' birthday was that day. She officially turned eighteen. Artemis was worried about her niece's newly acquired majority. Britomartis despised her aunt because she was always so worried about her love life. Do you have a boyfriend? You have to make things right! Not like these girls your age, going out with the first boy they meet. What about waiting for the right one? What about marriage?

Britomartis had never had a boyfriend. But not because of her aunt's tips and warnings. She was just interested in many more things besides boys. She had to graduate, she had to travel, she had to paint her nails and she had to learn that intricate tofu recipe she had just seen in her favourite vegan blog. As you can see, she was worried about many relevant issues, none of them concerning the need of a romantic partner.

Britomartis was ready to party with her friends that night at the local pub. She could legally drink alcohol now that she was eighteen and was ready for it. The night was going just as planned when suddenly she noticed a cute boy eyeing her from the counter. This boy looked like he belonged in the last edition of *Men's Health*. He had curly black hair and was tall and strong, and Britomartis suspected that his masculinity was as fragile as the glass he was holding. She was initially uninterested but her friends were obsessed with how handsome this boy was. She finally gave in and had a drink with this mysterious man that looked like a Greek god. Well, more like a Greek king. His name was Minos and he was the son of an important politician. He was handsome, rich and powerful, and he was very aware of that.

Right away, Britomartis started to feel uncomfortable. They had nothing in common. She was a bit drunk and did not enjoy his commentaries and opinions on the looks of other women that passed by. She tried to gently apologise and come back with her friends but he firmly held her arm and made her remain seated. He was apparently calm, but Britomartis started to feel frightened. She could not reach for her mobile phone under his strict look. She could not shout surrounded by the loud music and did not know how to simply say no. She wanted to run, to climb the walls, to escape. But she could not. She could not even move. She felt imprisoned under his eyes and the grip of his hands. She kept frozen in the stool for minutes that felt like hours when he suddenly stood up and told her to go to his place. It was not an invitation. It felt like an order.

The girl was totally frightened but decided to move. She stood up and ran abruptly to the door. There were many people smoking outside so it was easy for her to blend between the crowd and undertake the quest of returning home safely. Soon she noticed she was being followed and decided to change the route as she did not want Minos to know where she lived. She decided to hide in a mount called Dikti that she knew well. She made her way up the mount, moving gracefully but frantically, just like a deer waiting to be hunted. How tiring it is for women to always be the hunted deer.

After the chase, she was exhausted and remained hidden behind a bush. When she thought it was over, she started hearing some steps approaching. Those approaching moves sounded like a tap leaking. Drop. Drop. Drop. One step and then another one. Each one closer to her. She was desperate and started to run again. Then, a cliff. Under her feet only the immensity of the sea. The sound of the waves, cloudy sky, and moonless darkness. She could not even see her reflection. Steps, closer. The arrow pointing at the deer's heart. She jumped. The sea welcomed her. First, a cold feeling. The feeling of being suffocated. Salty water, fear, confusion. Then, nothing. Unconscious. She felt as if she was dreaming, the waves gently rocking her.

When Britomartis woke up, it took her a while to realize she had not been dreaming. She was soaked and freezing, but she had been fairly lucky. Some fishermen spotted her unconscious body floating and picked her up. She got tangled in their fishing net. They thought she was dead, but as soon as she was placed in the boat she started coughing and shaking, as if some joking goddess had decided to instil life back into her body.

You might think that after this near-death experience, Britomartis was spared any more suffering. And if you think so, you are terribly naïve. The nightmare had just started. As a respectable young man, Minos was obviously not punished for his behaviour. Britomartis was alone. Alone and vulnerable. Who would believe her story? She was drunk and everybody saw her openly flirting with him. Why would he chase her? He was not desperate. The police took her declaration but discouraged her to file a law suit. The story was not credible. She had no evidence. Her neighbours started looking at her funny. How dared this crazy girl try to ruin Minos' reputation? Even some of her friends were sceptical. She was really drunk, she was paranoid, she just needed attention.

Britomartis was forced to leave her life behind. She was not welcomed anymore. Minos carried on with his daily routine, unbothered. He was able to keep his job. He continued going to the same pub. Waiting on the same stool next to the counter. Preying on some new girl. At some point, he even felt entitled to call Britomartis. He was offended when she blocked his phone number. He obviously did not understand why he was being rejected and chose to believe the evident reason: she was exaggerating.

Britomartis moved on. She met new people and spent thousands on therapy sessions. She changed her hair and started reading books by Bell Hooks and was reconciled with herself. She understood she had never been crazy. Eventually, she had a daughter. She was sincerely happy. Sadly, she still felt sometimes the presence of a ghost. This ghost woke her up in the middle of the night. This ghost tasted of salty water, shame and guilt. This ghost was really busy as it visited many women at once.

This ghost carried with it a mourning song. A part of Britomartis drowned that day.  
You never really experience life the same once you have been hunted.

**Elia Morilla García**



CALYPSO



## A shadow in Ogygia

*He swore his loyalty to me, he swore he would stay forever with me, but I was fated to remain alone forever, and fate is a power we can not fool nor avoid.*

As you may already know, I, Calypso, was banished to Ogygia by Zeus because of his doubts about my loyalty. His only reason was that, because of my father, he could not trust me. He *obviously* didn't have any other option but to banish me to a remote isle where no one could find me. Women always have to respond for men's acts, and this time I was nothing but a victim from my father's mistakes and his collateral damages, and Zeus' absolutism—let's not forget that. I couldn't do anything to prevent this, so I just obeyed.

Once I arrived in Ogygia, I started my journey to become friends with my loneliness. I had to get used to a totally different life, a life where I would only have to act for myself. Of course, I would have preferred to stay with everyone and be surrounded by the other nymphs, but let's be honest, I did not have to act according to any man's rules anymore. This was a little victory for me. Now I was mine for good.

Living by myself in Ogygia was not as bad as I thought it would be when I first heard the news. It was a beautiful isle covered by a permanent state of spring—seasons didn't exist here. The flowers were always bloomed, I had plenty of sources where to get food and water, and I did not have to pay for it or share it with anyone. I had better company than selfish, arrogant Gods, I had many little animals that would stay gladly with me, or at least they didn't complain. They wouldn't give me any orders, didn't bother me in any sense, they just stayed there next to me. Even more importantly, they didn't treat me any differently for being a woman—they probably didn't even know what a woman was.

It only took me a week to find a new routine. I'd wake up early every morning, eat some fruit, go for a walk to the cliffs, swim in the ocean... Actually, it can't be called a routine when every day was a different adventure for me. I couldn't know what I'd find in the beach, or next to the mountains, or even what I'd eat at noon. It might seem insignificant or trivial, but for someone who had always lived under the shadow of men, this tasted like freedom.

Everything was perfect and normal until one day something appeared at the beach. I was sunbathing on the sand when I saw a shape rise from the water. I didn't know what it was until I came close enough to examine it. I couldn't believe what I was looking at, it couldn't be true, but it was! The shape I saw reaching the beach was a man! It seemed he was the only survivor of a shipwreck, at least the only one that I could find. I waited for him to wake up. I don't know how I managed to find the patience to wait—I was so curious about him. I needed to know everything about him, how he ended in Ogygia, how he managed to survive, what he survived to, too many questions and no answer at all. He slowly started to open his eyes and take a few breathes, he looked very confused and tired so I didn't pressure him to stand or say anything. It was him who decided to tell me about what happened when he was back on his senses.

His name was Odysseus. Apparently he was travelling with his crew when the sea became violent. He tried to tame it but it was all in vain. The ship sank and he drowned in the sea. He tried to reach the surface but the waves were too forceful. The next thing he knew was that he was there with me, he couldn't figure out how he managed to reach the coast, he thought he would die in the ocean, but there he was. He told me he was pretty famous where he came from, but I hadn't heard anything about him in the past. I believed everything he told me, I didn't have any way to verify it anyway. He told me he was a merciful ruler, a man that hadn't found love yet, and needed to return to his land, but we didn't know by then that we'd fall in love. I hadn't heard of him, but apparently he did know about me. Silly me to think that he had fallen in love with me.

He didn't plan on staying long with me, but days passed and we started to get used to each other's company. When weeks passed he told me it was fine for him to stay for a while and rest since it had been a very long journey. I showed him the isle, explored every hidden corner we could find and he loved every part of Ogygia. I was reluctant to fall for him at first, I had suffered enough because of men, but he treated me as no one had ever done before. I should have known better.

Everything seemed perfectly fine at first, we did plenty of things together, we wouldn't leave each other's side. He'd always tell me his adventures and how he tricked everyone to get what he wanted, I thought he was so clever. It was then when I should have doubted about his claims—he fooled me as he fooled everyone else. Of course a ruler would have a woman next to him, it didn't seem weird to me when he told me he was alone, I just believed it. I was so ignorant. I knew better than this but I was making the same mistake again.

I don't know how, but Zeus found out that I had a visitor in Ogygia. However, it took him many years to find me and Odysseus. He hid me so well that not even him could find the isle. I shared seven years with Odysseus until Zeus finally found us and took Odysseus away from me. It was time for me to face my fate. I was doomed to spend the rest of my life alone in that isle. Everything that I used to like about that place turned against me, every part of the isle reminded me of Odysseus. I didn't know how to live alone anymore, I had to learn again. I couldn't believe that I had to go through all the same misery once again.

Odysseus succeeded to return to Ithaca where he belonged. Penelope was waiting for him. I didn't know about her by then, but after a few years, Hermes brought some news to me. Still today I can't find the motive that brought Hermes to sympathise with me, but he wanted me to know the truth. Odysseus was married to Penelope and had a child with her. He told everyone how a witch had haunted him and enchanted him to stay with her for many years, for him it all seemed as a few weeks. He claimed he couldn't appreciate the pass of time, how he aged. He got to fool everyone again, including me. I felt so humiliated, betrayed by Odysseus, I was consumed by pain, but I preferred to know the truth than to stay ignorant. He even allowed himself to make a fuss out of his mistrust about Penelope. He killed many for believing that Penelope had been unfaithful to him when he was the one that spent seven years with me!

Lucky for him I am not the witch he claims I am, because if that was true I assure you that I'd find revenge. However, I have to pity myself for the rest of my life because there is no way for me to leave this island. I hate Zeus, I hate my father and I hate Odysseus! No man in this life has brought me true happiness. Maybe it is better for



me to be imprisoned in this island, but without a doubt it is better for these three men that I can't face them.

**Izan Huertas Medina**



CASSANDRA



## Prophecy

Most people think they want to see the future. They assume it would make their lives easier. That they will be able to plan better, prepare better, get ready for what is about to come. Rid themselves of the burden of uncertainty and doubt. Live their lives in peace, always prepared, never surprised.

What they don't understand—what I understand—is that most things that will happen to them won't be very pleasant. They will grow old and sick. Their lovers will lose interest and betray them. Their children will grow up and abandon them. One by one, their loved ones will die, until they'll be left alone. Even in death they will have no rest. Their souls will swim in the Styx until the end of time, crying and moaning, longing for life or death—whichever will salvage them from the in-between.

Sure, there will be some happy occasions. Weddings. Births. Victories. Riches. But eventually, all of them will be followed by betrayal, abandonment, defeats, poverty.

Who wants to know that? Who wants to hear about that? No one. No one wants to know the future, not really.

But I have no choice.

'Well,' you might think, 'if these horrible things are bound to happen, at least we'll be aware. At least we'll be able to prepare.'

But for these sorts of things, you can never be prepared.

You see, when I was thirteen, I knew exactly how and when I would die. I knew my city would fall, my parents and brothers would be butchered, I would be raped by one man, and then another, my freedom would be taken away, I would be murdered with my infant children before I reached the age of twenty-five.

I knew it would happen. I was aware. But I had no idea how it would feel.

When you hear my name, the first thing that comes to mind is 'madwoman'. If you are kind people (maybe if you are women), you might think 'poor woman', or 'a victim'. But I never saw myself that way. You see, I never really cared about what other people thought of me. If I did, I would never have opened my mouth, never told anyone anything.

I was thirteen when the god of light got a hold of me. When we first met, he looked like the sun. When he spoke to me, I thought the sound of his voice must be the sound of the sun, if it had one. His words caressed me like the golden rays, his promises shone so brightly. He told me he could give me what all people wish to have but never get, and that I need only give one thing in return—myself. I promised I would. But I never did.

After it was all over, when people heard the story, they said it was my fault. That I shouldn't have made a promise that I couldn't keep. Bullshit. Show me at least one thirteen-year-old in love who has any idea of what she's saying. I was so young, and so blinded, and so stupid. I thought I wanted his gifts, I thought I wanted him. But when the time came to deliver on my promises, I got so terribly afraid. His light, which seemed so warm and welcoming, became too hot to bare. His tenderness became savage, animalistic, almost murderous. When he came near me, I didn't recognize him.

So, before I knew it, I ran into the temple, as fast as I possibly could, and clung to the wooden figure of Athena and swore to devote my purity to her. I thought I felt

the wood warm up suddenly, the arms wrapping around me, protecting me from him. And then the comforting darkness of the temple became an impossibly bright light, and that is the last thing I remember. Before I knew it, I woke up. My eyes were still closed, but I could see everything.

And the first thing I saw was fire.

I ran to the palace. I can still remember the warm dirt road beneath my feet, the bustle of the market, the feeling of eyes tearing at the flesh of my back as I ran, like arrows. Out of breath, I approached the dining table. My family was gathered around it, laughing, so naïve. So ignorant. My father, with his long, grey beard and his golden crown, sitting on his throne and teasing Helenus, who is quietly moving the food around on his plate, never touching it. On his right, Hector tall, handsome like a statue, smiling at the servant girls, making them blush. Paris, arrogant, foolish, pretty like a woman, boasting about his latest conquest. And my mother, quiet, noble, as if a bit distant from the rest, her eyes so self-assured, her hands lying gently in her lap.

The words slipped out of my mouth before I could catch them, flew into the air like vultures. One sentence after another, never stopping to take a breath, looking upwards at the golden ceiling, but seeing fire, only fire.

'You're all going to die. The Greeks will come with an army. The city will fall. Your corpses will be dragged through the mud. Mother will become a bitch. Father will be slain in his bed. Not one of us will survive.'

I felt as though I was waking up from a nightmare, and through the fog and the smoke I could hear my mother's voice.

'Cassandra, what on earth are you talking about? What has gotten into you? And where, for the love of God, have you been all night? Your father and I were so worried.'

My mouth couldn't utter the words. I could feel the shame washing over my body, like filthy water.

'It makes no difference where I've been. You have to listen to me.' My eyes shot towards Paris, with that stupid smug still hanging onto his face.

'It's you. It's your fault.' I ran towards him and grabbed his neck, screaming. 'It's your fault! It's your fault!'

My father's voice raged over the room. 'Enough! Go to your room. I will hear no more of this nonsense. And if you ever dare to lift a finger on your brother again, I will let him have his way with you. Now shut up. And get out.'

Before I was dragged away by the slaves, I looks into Helenus' eyes.

I could see he knew I was right.

Of course, later, when he would talk, they would listen. They would yield to his warnings and consult him, even if I had said the exact same thing before.

People say it was because of the curse.

But I can think of another reason.

I could not shut up. I tried. Lord knows that I tried. I told myself, over and over, that there was no point in speaking. They never listened, they never believed. And as the years went by, and the war started, their patience ran out, and they had me locked away in a dungeon, the madwoman, while my twin brother remained seated in his room, spoiled, his every whim answered, everyone gathered around him, slurping his words, clenching their thirst for answers. When the walls fell, he got away somehow, probably by betraying us. They say he married a beautiful woman, and had children, and became king. But I know his betrayal tortures him and tears at his heart every day. And that is enough for me.

When the Greeks entered the city, I ran into the temple again. Even though I knew what would happen, somehow, I had hope. I thought maybe she would save me again, as she did before. That she would not let anyone rape me. But as Ajax grabbed my arms and pinned me to the floor of the temple and lifted my skirt and spread my legs and tore at me so violently it made my eyes water, all my hope was gone. I just closed my eyes and waited for it to be over. I knew she would punish him, later, with an awful death. As if it made any difference to me, after it had already happened. Why didn't she save me, why didn't she prevent it from happening?

Wiping the blood from my thighs, I stepped out of the temple, sat by the side of the road, and waited. When their king came to take me, I didn't even try to resist. I already knew it would happen, and I was hopeless. I just sat on the road and waited for him to come and grab me. All the feisty, rebellious spirit I once had was gone. I just waited obediently for my fate.

But every night, on the ship, when he entered my chamber and lifted the blanket, I whispered in his ear the future that awaited *him* at home. His promiscuous wife. Her murderous lover. Their tormented children. His violent murder. Until he put his hand over my mouth and choked me, stopping just seconds before I passed away, never letting me drift away completely. Because, you see, as much as he hated to hear me speak, he loved it when I tried to resist him. I got the gist quite quickly and stopped fighting, but then he would only get more and more brutal, hitting me, choking me, twisting my arms, spreading my legs so hard I could almost hear my tendons tear, flipping me over and entering me from behind, until my instincts got the better of me and my body would start fighting on its own. And no matter how exhausted and bruised and sore I became, he would always come back the next night.

When we finally reached the shore, I walked onto the soil on which I was destined to die, relived. Peaceful. I already felt two sets of tiny little feet kicking me just below the navel. And I knew these two babies growing inside me would be my only comfort, even after they'd be killed in my arms. I knew that for once in my life, there would be souls on this earth that would love me, completely, unconditionally. That wouldn't call me crazy. That would believe me and trust me, as all children trust their mothers. When Aegisthus and Clytemnestra came into our room that night, I held them both close and sang in their ears, the lullaby my nurse used to sing to me. And I knew, after all the wrongs she had done me, Athena would be waiting for us at the gates of paradise, and that finally, I would have peace.

Centuries later, a German scientist would dig up our graves and find our skeletons, still held together as in the day they buried us. He would run and tell the world that he had found me, but hardly anyone would believe him.

Ironic, isn't it?

**Neta Goldfein**

## Maybe one day

I'm going to tell the truth never told. I'm cursed, so you may not believe me but if you do, let me tell you that I'm sorry because then you will be cursed too. I'm going to tell my story as I have always been told but now, I'm going to write it down. I always had hope that someone would listen to me and believe me, but my time is ending. I will not stay because I'm not immortal, but words are. So, let me start my story from the beginning.

'The most beautiful one,' they called me. That was my title since I was a child, as if it was part of my name. The most beautiful of the princesses of Troy was born. I was Priam's daughter, the king of Troy, and Hecuba was my mother, who was also gifted with beauty. As any other child, I was very curious, but I had the privilege of having the palace library at my disposal, so I spent most of my time reading about gods and goddesses—my favourite theme. Nothing changed in this period of my life: everyone kept saying that I was the most beautiful one of the princesses and that made me feel valued. Apparently, it was the most important thing and I didn't see anything wrong with that.

Suddenly, everything changed. My body changed as well as the way other people looked at me. They still called me 'the most beautiful one' but now not only women told me that. Now men also looked at me as if they wanted me. I don't know if I liked it at the beginning, but they taught me that it was something to be proud of, so I ended up enjoying it. I got used to those men coming and trying to persuade me that they were the perfect match for me. I found it a bit funny—who were those men to know what was best for me? I myself didn't know either, how would they know? I didn't trust these men, so I decided to ignore them.

What I couldn't ignore was the God that came to visit me attracted—he told me—by my beauty. He was Apollo and according to him, he had been observing me for a few weeks. I know I should have felt flattered and grateful because, you know, a God had noticed me! How many girls had dreams about that? Instead, I felt anger and embarrassment at the same time. Even if he was a God I felt like someone had invaded my privacy, I felt naked. However, he knew how to use words, and I believed every single thing he said, so those feelings suddenly disappeared, and I ended up really enjoying his company.

The next night he came back, and he told me that he had written a poem about me. Imagine how I felt, for the first time I felt truly appreciated! I was sick of men trying to seduce me with gifts and money, I didn't need that. He read the poem to me and I thought that it was the most beautiful thing someone had done for me. I felt special because, among all women in the world, he had chosen me. In the poem he described me like no one else had done before. I had always been 'the beautiful one' in the palace, and yes, he said the same thing, but with beautiful words that I had never heard.

I fell into his web of lies.



I was curious and, inspired by his poetry, I started to write too. He taught me all I needed to know to write poems like he did, but that was the problem. I couldn't write that kind of poetry because that was not what I wanted. I realized that I felt more comfortable if I wrote about my life in palace and the way people treated me. I guess that was just my style. I liked things to be more realistic, which doesn't mean that I didn't write about my feelings. Apollo idealized me and that didn't feel real. It was like something was wrong but I didn't really think about that, so I didn't notice anything in that moment. I was blind and I couldn't see what he really wanted. He was perfect, an impossible dream that came true, so I couldn't notice if something was wrong.

He came every single night for two weeks, and that was enough time to realise I had fallen in love with him. Then he told me about his feelings, or what I thought were his feelings, and that he would give me a gift if I felt the same way he did. Like a fool, I quickly said yes and he gave me the gift of premonition. However, one second later the face of Apollo changed completely, and he looked at me as if he had found what he was looking for. Suddenly, he came closer to me and started touching me. I didn't know what to do, I was frozen. Why was he doing that? My mother told me to be careful with men, that sometimes the only thing they wanted was a woman's body, but he was a God, why wouldn't I trust him? I should've listened to her.

I don't know how, but I was able to say some words. I told him that I didn't want him to touch me like that, but he said that I accepted the deal, so I belonged to him. I didn't understand anything. I had only told him that I loved him, what has love got to do with belonging? Fortunately, in the end I found the strength to move and I told him to wait, that I didn't want to do that yet. Then everything happened very quickly. I thought he would understand me but he got furious and started to yell at me so I threatened him to call my guards, they would keep me safe. After that I never saw him again, but before he left he made sure that my life would be ruined forever.

He modified my power of premonition. I would still see the future, but no one would believe a word I'd say, ever. That's what he told me and everyone, and of course I and everyone believed him because he was a God. I didn't have anything to say to defend myself, the blame was on me. Even if I wasn't cursed, what would I say? I let him enter my room and I agreed to make a deal with him. No one would take me seriously. I've seen this so many times. It's always happening. I didn't realize this injustice before, why is this so normal? It shouldn't be. How can they deal with this nightmare? Why doesn't anybody say anything? Why didn't I say anything before?

The next two months were the most horrible months of my life. I saw all the tragedies that were going to happen to Troy and I tried to tell my father but he didn't believe me. I knew I was cursed, but I had to try anyway. I wish I didn't try. I felt helplessness. I knew what was going to happen and still I couldn't do anything, I couldn't save anyone.

I wasn't there when the horse entered Troy. I knew what the horse was, and I tried to find help in Athena. I was begging for help when a man entered the temple and saw me. Then his face changed, and I automatically knew what was going to happen, with no need to foresee it. That time I couldn't move, not even say a word. I let it happen. I was afraid and he was carrying a sword, who knows what would have happened should I have dared to resist. He raped me. I'm not afraid to tell this now

because, as I told you, my time is ending. He raped me in a temple, with Athena in front of us. He wasn't punished, not even by the goddess, who saw everything. Suddenly he stopped. I turned back and I saw him on the floor, unconscious and hurt. My servant Agnes was standing behind him. She had hit Ajax with a stick.

'Princess,' she said, 'are you okay? Come with me, I can take you somewhere safe.'

She didn't seem nervous or upset. I didn't understand how she could be so calm. I didn't mind in that moment, that was no time to think about other things but finding a safe place.

'You can call me Cassandra.' I told her, 'Cassandra's my name.'

'All right, Cassandra. Come with me. We're hiding, you'll be safe.'

My heart was full of hope, maybe something good was going to happen for once. It didn't last too long, though. We were running when I had the premonition that something bad was going to happen. I knew that two soldiers would come and separate us by force, but I didn't tell Agnes because I thought that she wouldn't believe me. I should have tried. I don't know why, but she seemed used to these kinds of issues, maybe she would have been able to believe me. I'll never know.

I didn't need the power of premonition to know what happened to Agnes and my other servants. They were murdered by Ajax when he regained consciousness and found them escaping. I was taken to Agamemnon, king of Mycenae. I was announced as 'the beautiful one,' one of his great conquests, and I was obliged to live with that king and do everything he wanted for the rest of my life. Nothing changed after all. As always, he didn't believe my words either and I didn't expect him to do so, but I had to try.

As for Ajax, stories tell that he was punished and killed by Poseidon because he raped me in a temple, a sacred place. You're not going to believe that, are you? Of course not. What really happened—and I know because I saw it with a premonition—is that Ajax was protected by Poseidon. Obviously, he wasn't going to be punished, I didn't need premonition to know that either. Apollo then told everyone that Ajax had been murdered for raping me, the same way he told our story a bit different to what it really was.

I'm writing this now because I've seen my future and I know what's coming, and I don't want my story to be forgotten. Even if people won't believe me, I still have hope. Maybe in the future another Agnes will read this and believe me. Who knows? Maybe someday my story will be believed, and my suffering will end.

**María Pérez Béjar**

## Cursed

There are some stories that must be known. Now that I am dead, I can look back and put my story in perspective. I was born in Troy, in the royal family. My father was King Priam and my mother was Queen Hecuba. So, I was predestined since birth to receive aristocratic education and get engaged with any prince as soon as I reached my teenage years. But since I was a little girl, I stood out among everyone for my ambitious nature, my intelligence and a bit of rebelliousness. All of these made me a notorious woman in Troy, since, as is still thought sometimes, these features are not common in women. Some people would even call me insane.

When I grew up, I became a priestess for Apollo and for that I took my vow of chastity. My parents didn't really like that idea, as they wanted me to marry and they said that the family needed offspring, but eventually they let me carry on with my desire of being a priestess. I really appreciated my gift and I thought Apollo gave it to me because he admired my ambition and my skills but, as he later would tell me, he was in love with me. He tricked me to sleep with him, which I rejected multiple times, even though he knew I was a priestess and took my vow. But he didn't seem to care about it nor understand my decision. This infuriated him and as a consequence I was cursed in such a way that my prophecies wouldn't be believed. That's how my unhappiness and frustration started.

I recall walking down the streets or doing anything daily and being yelled at with such beauties as 'Liar!' Even my family, the only people I expected to support me, would call me names and avoided any type of contact. They thought I was insane to the extent that once my father locked me so that nobody didn't have to see me or hear me, but now I know he was doing it for himself—he was ashamed. This is one of the worst experiences I remember.

During all the time I was locked, I started to see some images: I could see my city, the people I know, and then I saw Paris, and suddenly I had a bad feeling about him. Later I discovered that I could foretell the tragedy: Paris would kidnap princess Helen in order to marry her—when she was already married to Menelaus, king of Sparta. This is how the Trojan War started and Troy was eventually destructed. I did my best to warn Paris not to go to Sparta, but nobody would believe me and he finally went. I really tried to call everybody's attention when Helen arrived at the city, warning about the enormous mistake of letting her get in. I also warned them about the Trojan horse or how the Greeks deceived us by making us think it was a present but it was the trigger that led to the destruction of my city, Clytemnestra's murder by her children, the future of my family, the death of my brother at war... but all of these premonitions were ignored and all my attempts to be believed were worthless.

After all of this tragedy I was alone, hopeless and helpless. I decided to look for shelter in Athens and I would usually go to Athena's temple. But I couldn't find any

relief or comfort. I remember being alone in the temple and hearing some weird noises, which made me think I wasn't alone. I kept on praying, but suddenly someone tried to grab me from my back. I tried to resist but he was stronger so I gave up fighting and that's how he forced me. I can't remember anything. My mind has forgotten it selectively. I just felt inferior, helpless, weak and I wondered how, after all I went through, something like that was happening to me. I don't even remember who he was, but, bearing in mind the background, no one would care or do anything about it. I was just another victim of a kind of violence that happens daily and worldwide and people simply wash their hands.

I remember the winter of my life being taken from here to there until I finally settled in Mycenae, where they took me as a concubine of king Agamemnon. I lived very apathetic and all I wanted was to escape, but didn't dare to. When, after some time, Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's wife, and her lover found out about me, they didn't even hesitate and killed me. After my murder I wasn't sent to Hades but to the Elysian Fields, because according to the Gods I dedicated my life to spiritual matters and I had a religious nature and dedication to gods.

And I wonder, why is it now that I'm dead that Gods appreciate what I did in life? Where were they when nobody believed me, when I was humiliated, when everybody recognized me as a madwoman, rebellious, insane and all the insults they used to refer to me? Now I feel that my entire life has been dedicated to people that didn't see my value and my worth and that didn't help me when I really needed it. Now I feel I wasted my life. Or maybe not.

**Elena Ocete Pozo**

DANAE



## A golden diary

This is the first day of my enclosure. The first day of my diary. The first day of my inner hell. I don't even know why I am writing this. Some people may see this as pointless since probably nobody is going to read this—I have no visitors, no family, no friends. I only have myself, and this diary. Since it is customary to introduce oneself, my name is Danae, the only daughter and descendant of Acrisius, the king of Argos. Even if I'm asked about what I'm doing here, in prison, without having done anything to deserve this, I'm unable to tell. All I get to know in my position is that my father consulted the oracles, and they told him that his grandson would kill him. Moved by this uncertain as well as archaic method, he decided to put me in jail and forbid me to be visited, and loved, being as young as I am just because of his selfish nature. So this is supposed to be my future and the only life I'm going to have. My only sin is being a woman, and having an archaic father.

So here I am, a few days have passed by and I remain here, writing and looking at the sky from my prison. By now, I have lost all hope of being free, and now my freedom seems to me as unbelievable as justice in this world. Yesterday, I saw a light of hope again. I don't want to be pretentious, but at least someone has put an eye on me, and I feel loved again. Zeus, God of Gods, Father of Fathers, came to see me last night. Due to his unlimited shape, he managed to transform himself into rain to enter my prison and we loved each other for a night. Although I'm not sure what his feelings for me are, all I needed was a moment for myself, a moment for me to feel young, worry less and feel loved. Is that a sin? I don't know if my father will notice these encounters. I hope he does somehow because maybe this is the only way for him to realise that what I deserve is not what he's giving me.

Nine months have passed since I wrote this last note, nine months of horrible happenings. Due to my encounter with Zeus, I have given birth to my son Perseus. My father noticed my pregnancy and put us immediately in a box in the river in order for us to die. Luckily, my beloved Zeus sent us a fine wind that guided us to an island nearby in which we—Perseus and myself—were helped by its king and people. Although this is not the place I was born, this is the place I consider my home now. Finally, I feel loved.

Everything has changed since I arrived here. Everything has turned from good to horrible. I'm starting to think that every time I trust a man, they disappoint me. First, my father; then, the king Dictis—our protector. He's insanely in love with me, his love has turned into an unhealthy, selfish feeling towards me, he wants to send my son Perseus away, due to the belief that he's stealing my love, and keeping my attention away from him... When will things change for me?

This is all, this is the end. I have been trying to find the strength these months to write, but I can't. Dictis sent my son away to kill my father, and has successfully completed his mission. I don't know what to feel and what to say. I just want to be alone and to be rewarded with the gift of solitude and freedom. But, since I'm growing old and things won't change for me, I will put this papers into a bottle that I'll throw in the ocean just as myself, hoping somebody ever reads this. So this ends up, with the last day of my diary, and the last day of my inner hell. Maybe this is the only freedom I can dream of.

**Lorena Castellanos Gómez**



DAPHNE



## Disclaimer: This is not a love story

The story that I am going to tell is a story about love, if you can call it that way. But let me get one thing straight: this is not a love story. It is nothing like a love story, but how love ended my life, quickly, unexpectedly.

First of all, let me introduce myself. My name is Daphne, daughter of Gea and Zeus. I'm what is known as a dryad, a wood nymph. I have loved hunting since I was a little girl, although my understanding is that it is not a very popular activity among girls—I can't understand why, if you ask me. Not that I care about those things, to be honest. That is something my mother has always hated about me: my messy hair, my 'manly' manners or my attraction for this kind of activities. She wanted me to be like the other girls, to find a good man, settle down, give her some grandsons, as if it was a woman's only purpose in life. But what about what I want? I have never imagined myself living that kind of life, the perfect, faithful wife. I'm not saying that there's something wrong in living like that, but it is not for me.

Anyway, it is time for you to know my story. The real story. I was hunting in the forest, as usual, although that day I felt something was wrong. It wasn't anything that I saw, it was just a feeling. Something in the air wasn't right. I decided to ignore it, fool of me. I noted that everything was really quiet. Where were all the animals? Suddenly I felt a chill on my neck. Someone was watching me. I took all my things and went home.

I had the same feeling during the next five days, closer and closer every day. I got tired of it. I felt his presence, right behind me, and pointed with the arrow at the figure hidden behind a tree. He was a young man, maybe in his twenties, with dark hair and even darker eyes. And he was staring at me. Something in his way of looking said to me that I was in danger—he had a penetrating, obsessive look. However, I took down my arrow, I didn't want to be rude. Now that I think about it, I should have shot him when I had the chance. I will always regret that.

'Who are you? What do you want?'

He said he was Apollo, a god. If I'm honest, I don't remember a word he said, I was too scared and confused. But the next lines, I remember them very well, as they were the beginning of my nightmare: he said he was in love with me. He had been watching me for days, but he was too shy to talk to me, he said. I couldn't understand it. Why would someone who didn't even know me say those things to me? I decided to fake my best smile and told him that I was sorry, that I wasn't interested, and I turned around and started to walk home, hoping that he wouldn't follow me.

Bad idea. He reached me in a second and grabbed my wrist, and all my arrows fell to the ground. My only weapon. My only opportunity to defend myself, I thought. I was feeling more and more scared, I couldn't think properly. The only thing I knew was that I had to get out of there. However, he was really strong, much stronger than me,

and he wouldn't let me go. I finally got to set me free and I ran, I ran as if it was the end of the world. I ran between the trees, I jumped the roots and avoided the bushes, all that nature that once was my favourite thing in the world, my home, now they were only obstacles in my way. I heard his steps behind me, he was fast. It was love and desire that motivated him to run. It was fear what moved me. I couldn't feel my feet, they were cold and wounded, but I didn't care. My breathing was getting heavy. I felt it like a stone in my throat. My legs were getting weak. My hair impeded me to see well. Why did I listen to my mother and let it grow, only because she said it would make me prettier? Finally, I rested my back on a tree, I didn't hear him.

Was he gone?

No, I didn't think so, but I couldn't run. I was too tired. In the moment I was trying to think what to do, I felt his fingers on my shoulder. His way of touching me was repulsive, as if I was something of his property, something he owned and wanted to possess. I started crying, screaming for help, but no one came. And then, overcome by panic, I did the only thing that I could think of: I prayed, prayed to my father to help me. I couldn't stand it. I didn't want to go through that. I hoped that Zeus felt sorry for me and I kept praying.

Suddenly, I felt my whole body getting rigid, like a trunk of a tree, and when I looked down, that was exactly what I saw. I was turning into a laurel. I watched how the look of Apollo changed from desire to despair and real fear. He tried to stop my transformation, in vain. He started to scream that he didn't want to lose me, that he loved me so much, that it would break his heart. I was losing my life and the only thing he could think of was himself and his feelings. Everything was getting darker, my breathing slower. I knew I was dying but, to my surprise, I didn't feel fear, only anger. Anger because someone that wasn't me had decided my fate. Anger because my life was ending because of someone else's craving. He didn't have that right, but he did it anyway. It wasn't fair.

It is never fair.

**Irene Moreno Puga**

## Who is running now?

She was running. She was running as if she was going to die if she didn't. She could feel the heartbeats up in her throat, as if her heart was going to explode any minute. Never in her life did she feel like that. Her anxiety was so powerful that for a moment the thought of her giving up and letting that man catch her and rape her crossed her mind, but then she realized how ridiculous it was to just wait to be tortured by that rapist, and through that thought she gained strength to keep on running. Even though her mind was still strong, her feet were not; and she was close to reach her physical limits. She was beginning to slow down. She could almost feel the breath of that god in her neck. She felt extreme panic. Then, what seemed an illusion became very real... She was indeed feeling Apollo's breath. She then felt his rude arms strangling her body with enormous strength. Some of her ribs had broken. But that was not what hurt her the most. The fear of thinking what was going to come next was the worst feeling she had in her life. And then... She was shocked. Apollo did not rape her. Instead, he turned into a tree. She could not believe it. The relief was unbelievable, but she was still nervous, and still felt some fear. She got away from that place in case he stopped being a tree.

She came back to the lake and told the other nymphs what had just happened. They were very shocked, and fear flooded their hearts. They had never thought of the possibility of being raped, and now that possibility seemed to the nymphs too real. After a while, one of them asked:

'How could he turn into a tree?'

Daphne was not listening to her. She was already thinking about who turned Apollo into a tree before the question was even put forward. She did not have the slightest idea of who could have done that, but she was very thankful and had an unstoppable desire to thank whoever did that. Because she knew that someone had done that.

Zeus was terribly angry. His son turned into a laurel tree? He knew exactly who did it, and went to see Ceres. She explained to Zeus that Apollo was going to rape an innocent nymph, but he did not care. He threatened her:

'I want you to dispel the curse that turned him into a laurel tree, otherwise there will be consequences!'

But she did not do what he wanted. Zeus went to earth to try to dispel Apollo's curse by himself, but he was surprised: Ceres and other goddesses were surrounding the tree to prevent anyone from getting close. Thousands of nymphs, including Daphne, were also there. Ceres knew that Zeus was going to try to help Apollo, and she decided to join all the women she could to avoid it. Zeus asked:

'What is happening here? Get out of my way right now!'

But the women did not. Ceres said, in a resolute voice:

‘We will not get out of the way. For many years, goddesses, nymphs, and other mortal women have been raped without any consequences. That ends now. Apollo deserved to be punished. From now on, rapists will not get away with their terrible crimes. If you wish to get your son back, you will have to first fight with us.’

The God of Gods laughed. Who did they believe they were? Even though there were many goddesses, he was the most powerful god, and they were just a bunch of women after all. He prepared himself to throw thunders upon them, but then he realized he was unable. He concentrated, and tried again. He couldn’t. He was extremely confused. What was happening to his powers? He realized there was an aura in the air. This aura emanated from all the women that were there. It was extremely powerful, such a dense aura that Zeus realized he could not breath.

‘You may have underestimated our power in the past, but that ends now. Tired of being abused, we, women, have united to stop it. Together, you cannot defeat us!’ exclaimed Ceres. Zeus, realizing that he still could not breathe, went away from there. The women cheered, very happy to see that they have defeated Zeus. But the aura still remained. They would never let another woman be abused. All women, regardless of their status, would fight for each other, and a new era of happiness was to come for them.

**Daniel Molero Cifuentes**

## Daphne revisited

Just like any other day at school, a teacher started her lesson. She would explain the myth of Daphne and Apollo. One of the students was terribly shocked after listening to it, so she went home really worried. Later in the afternoon, she asked her grandmother when the story of Daphne and Apollo took place.

‘A very long time ago, my dear. Don’t worry about it anymore.’

But she thought it was impossible that her grandmother was right. It was difficult to believe that such a story happened long time ago.

‘Are you still thinking about the story? It’s just that, a story. It’s not even real!’

‘You know what? I’ll change it. I’ll make the story as it should have been told.’

The girl started to figure out how to change the myth. But, it was difficult since she thought the story was *too* real for her. At the end of the day, she went to sleep and Daphne turned up in her dreams. The girl felt surprised since her image of femininity was quite different from what she saw in the nymph. She was told that beauty in women was related to a beautiful body. Well, she more than once heard that a beautiful woman was quiet, respectful, modest and, of course, some make-up on her face was necessary. However, this Daphne was... different. She was quite fat, her dry skin reminded her of the lack of softness of an olive tree trunk. She didn’t even have breasts as the girl saw in models’ magazines. And what surprised her the most was what she *had* between her legs. *Nothing*.

‘Who are you?’ Said the girl with a scared tone of voice.

‘I am myself. The one who will tell you the truth.’

‘The truth about what? I don’t understand...’ She said while she covered her face with her little hands.

Daphne laughed when she saw the little girl staring at her body.

‘Are you a woman?’ the girl inquired curiously.

‘Well, I consider myself a woman. I feel it. I choose to be one. A woman is more than an uterus and breasts, little kid.’

‘Let me tell you about my story so you, my dear, can rewrite it. Just as your teacher told you, my story is quite famous. But everything is a huge lie. In fact, Cupid was not that lovely tiny boy everybody thinks of. He was a nice companion with men indeed. But, *just* with men, my dear.’

‘I knew it! It’s like in school! All boys help each other a lot. And then, they bother us all the time!’ The girl interrupted Daphne.

‘Yeah, you are very clever, love.’

Suddenly, something appeared in the room. Red eyes full of luster lurked in the middle of the dark room.

‘Apollo, what do you think you are doing here?’ Daphne angrily complained.

‘She is clever indeed, *for a girl.*’ He said. ‘Are you gonna call your daddy, little Daphne?’ He asked ironically.

‘Oh come on! Stop deceiving people! You’ve been telling lies for so many years. So, shut up and listen to the real story, you bastard. And don’t dare to run away because I never did.’ The nymph said.

And after that, Apollo remained as quiet and static as a lonely tree.

‘So, as I was telling you... *both...*’—she said with a threatening voice—‘Cupid was quite friendly with men. However, he treated women as competitors. In fact, he was desperate for finding his soul mate. So, he made up the story that his mother, Aphrodite, was jealous of my beauty. He depicted her as a monster throughout all these years, you know.’

‘A soul mate! That’s what everyone says it is necessary to be happy, like in Valentine’s day.’ The girl said.

‘The ideal of love, I guess... It hasn’t changed so much. Well, I prefer staying in a room of my own. In fact, Aphrodite and I were friends. She and I created a nice room where we could talk and have fun because we realized that women should be together. The thing is that Cupid shot Apollo with the gold arrow because he was in love with him. So, Apollo fell in love with him too. They began a secret love affair which I supported. I was surprised when I saw them kissing inside a hidden forest—as if they need to hide! So, they thought I was gonna tell everyone.’

Apollo looked incredibly ashamed and remained quiet.

‘But what is wrong with that?’ said the girl. ‘Love is love. It is like water, it can be slippery and unpredictable, isn’t it?’

‘Yeah, but society has been always ruled by the same minds. Their minds. So, Apollo and Cupid decided that getting rid of me was the easiest solution so their reputation remained intact. My dear, imagine how worried I was, that although I am allergic to tree pollen, I came back to the same forest they were to tell them I would not tell anyone. Instead of listening to me, Apollo tried to rape me so people would think he was straight! When I told my father he said that was awful. But he thought that if I had got pregnant it would not have been such a bad thing because being a mother is the best a woman can aspire to.’

After all Daphne had said, she felt terrible. What if the girl was traumatized because of her? So she apologized.

‘Don’t say sorry. I am not surprised. I couldn’t rewrite your story because it was so real. I hear stories like yours everyday in the news, from my parents... That’s why I thought it happened recently.’

‘Men need to really change, my dear. Many women will be raped and killed unless they don’t change. So, we must teach them. But we are also still learning.’



'How does the story end?' The girl asked.

'Well, I met a literature teacher, who lived in the Oracle of Delphos, and she taught me about a potion called *feminism* and made me realize that if I wanted to keep going on with *my* life, I just needed to create my own strategy.'

'Which one?' The girl wondered out loud.

'Creeping over men and their monuments. At least with my knowledge. So, I was not scared anymore.'

And after that, the shadow of the false spirit of Apollo vanished since Daphne had defeated him forever with her words. The power of words.

**Virginia del Carmen Casares Soldado**

## The pointless arrow

The myth story says that once Apollo—the God of light and poetry, one of the Twelve Olympian Gods and son of Zeus and Leto—finished fighting a gigantic serpent, he found Eros, the Greek God of love. When he firstly met Apollo, Eros immediately fell profoundly in love with him. Apollo's reaction was insulting and telling Eros to abandon the battlefield. This behaviour outraged Eros in a way that he used his powers to hurt him. With his stated intentions, he set the goal and unleashed the arrows, one for Apollo and the other for a beautiful and innocent naiad nymph, Daphne. Apollo received the arrow containing an immense desire, passion and love while Daphne felt aversion for him so that Apollo was going to be doomed and punished for being in love with someone who hated him and did not have a mutual and corresponding love.

From that time onwards, day after day Apollo tried to seduce Daphne but there was no good response and success. She rejected him constantly and not only because the arrow from Eros enchanted her, but also because she was not attracted to men. During all her life, Daphne was hiding some internal feelings that she had to hide. If other nymphs, and more specifically her sisters Menippe and Stilbe, discovered that Daphne was attracted to women, they would immediately tell the river God, her father Peneus, and this would condemn her for life, leading her to a life of suffering linked to multiple and severe punishments that would torture her even in the afterlife.

Peneus was commonly known as a Thessalian river god, leading everything in his path because he was a hegemonic figure and felt empowered to do so. He was truly proud of his work, as not only did he care for the outside environment, but was considered a great protector of his family, loved his beloved ones, was a peaceful being until someone gave him reason to unleash his anger. He would be completely capable of hurting even his family members if they did something wrong or deserved to be punished. That is the main reason why Daphne's father could not find out about her sexual preference for women.

Finally, the day came when Apollo could not resist anymore and started abusing Daphne and taking advantage of her. In that moment when he was about to rape her, she could have asked for her father's help to be turned into a laurel tree for life. Instead, she chose a different path and called the nymphs that were living near the forest. The women managed to get rid of the rapist and Daphne felt she was finally free again.

As a way of celebration, a party was prepared in which there was a banquet with music, motivational speeches, messages of support, alcoholic beverages and delightful moments. Daphne seized the opportunity to express her actual feelings and reveal her sexual orientation. Having said that, she was afraid that this breaking news was going to cause a lot of commotion but, actually, she got the approval of everyone and she even received messages of support and joy from the whole group of women. In fact, a nymph who was walking around listened to the speech and felt very identified with her words, falling in love with her way of thinking.

**Cristina Fuentes León**

## An arrow, by the way

‘What do you think you can do with such arrows? Did you know that everyone with a bow thinks of me, Apollo?’

‘You make me laugh. I am Cupid’

The little archer wanted to see Apollo on his knees, submissive... That’s why he shot one of his fearsome arrows and it reached the heart of the God of Light. When he raised his head, the first thing he saw was the face of a beautiful nymph, who was talking to the birds while smelling the perfume of flowers. He did not hesitate to run in search of her to discover who she was.

The sun was shining as it did every morning of that glorious summer. The crystal clear water, the bright colour of the flowers and their scent, the sound of the birds and the splashing of the fish in the river were my soundtrack. Like every day, I went out to explore even though I could not forget the warnings of my father, Peneus, the river-god: ‘Beware of everyone you meet, my dearest. You are very young, Daphne. Your beauty and innocence will attract anybody’.

Thinking of my father’s warnings as I walked through such a lush forest, I wondered, will I ever find love? According to my friends the birds, my beauty was so evident that soon a human being would appear and would fill my heart with happiness. My walk continued when suddenly I felt a small prick on the left side of my chest. I stopped until I heard strong and firm footsteps coming towards me. It was a tall, strong gentleman with a slender body and blond hair. He was the most beautiful man I had ever seen, for I did not see many either.

‘Miss, what are you doing in these lonely places? It may be dangerous for you, for such beauty could enrapture any human being who wanders here,’ said the handsome gentleman. I changed my mind about him. How could he only notice my beauty? Isn’t there anything more beautiful than the inside of a person? Her feelings, her virtues and defects, insecurities and strengths... I could only think of one thing to do—run away from there, as my father ordered me to do.

The more he ran after me, spitting all kinds of flattery out of his mouth, the faster I ran to escape from such a situation. I felt a strong repulsion towards him and his attempts to conquer me. At last I reached the river bank. My father was watching me from afar.

‘Father, please help me hide, make me the most beautiful tree in this forest. I want to go unnoticed surrounded by such a nature’. So saying, my father didn’t hesitate for a second and turned me into a beautiful laurel tree. My long, straight hair turned into small leaves, my slim, slender body began to crumple into a strong, dark trunk. My delicate feet became roots. While Apollo watched this incredible metamorphosis, he surrendered to my roots and begged me to become again the beautiful nymph he had fallen in love with.

In doing this, I gave up many things. I could no longer walk with my beloved little animals, run after the flight of birds or bathe in the river in the company of my fish friends. I had sacrificed all that in order not to fall into the clutches of a gentleman, whose only desire was to show me his most virile skills and treat me as the world's most prized award.

**Paola Sánchez López**

## Flecha dorada, punta de plomo

¿Qué se le pasará por la cabeza a muchos hombres como él? Parecen haber salido todos del mismo molde de galletas, con la misma complexión física, la misma marca de ropa y el mismo mono tocando los platillos en lo que a menudo llaman cerebro.

Es alto, moreno y lleva un perfume que se huele a dos manzanas. En su mirada se mezclan la arrogancia, la ignorancia y la estupidez. No basta con decirle que cierre la puñetera boca; sigue hablando con sus ojos. Me mira como si fuera obvio que estoy tan enamorada de él como todas las demás. Incluso cuando no lo miro directamente siento esa mirada sobre mí. Da por hecho que antes o después acabaré arrastrándome detrás de él, siguiendo el rastro de ese asqueroso perfume. Lleva el tipo de andar que enloquece a las muchachas que caminan en manada sobre tacones por la noche con solo pasar a su lado. Pero él parece ignorarlas a todas. Por alguna razón ahora sólo me persigue a mí. Y que queréis que os diga, eso lo hace todavía más patético. Exactamente igual que todos los que ya he rechazado, y no quiero parecer presuntuosa, pero la lista es demasiado larga a estas alturas.

—Nena, incluso con esas botas a lo Katniss Everdeen me encantas, ¿a que es increíble?

—Lo tuyo sí que es increíble.

Y otra vez esa mirada de suficiencia.

—Ojalá tuviera el arco y las flechas de Katniss ahora mismo.

—Pero, nena, Cupido ya se ha encargado de mí.

—Las flechas de Katniss no son del mismo tipo.

Y el rey del dramatismo lanza la mano al pecho simulando que una flecha lo ha alcanzado para darme a entender que eso le ha dolido. Ojalá se largara a Broadway; a juzgar por las escenitas que me ha montado de camino al trabajo, triunfaría.

Me sigue todos los días desde el Starbucks de al lado de mi casa hasta el periódico donde he trabajado todos estos años. Aunque sería más apropiado decir que más que seguirme se pega a mí como una lapa. Los dos primeros días su excusa era que le pillaba de camino al trabajo, pero cuando le dije que sabía que eso no era verdad, me contestó que la única razón de perseguirme era el supuesto amor que siente por mí. Y así desde hace un mes. Cuando llegamos a la redacción se marcha en taxi a su oficina, situada en uno de los rascacielos de la city. No es que vaya a tener ningún problema en su trabajo por llegar dos horas tarde—es el jefazo de una empresa de refrescos que tiene varias denuncias por la cantidad de azúcar que incluyen en sus bebidas. Y todos los días me cuenta alguna historia sobre cómo esquivan esas denuncias con montañas de dinero.

—Daf, nena, quiero llevarte a París el mes que viene, ¿qué me dices?

¿Cómo puede pensar que iría con él a cualquier sitio? ¡Y menos París! Casi oigo el mono con los platillos sonar en su cabeza cuando giramos y aparece el edificio de *The Guardian* al final. No puedo evitar soltar una carcajada. Esto es de locos. No sé qué extraño rayo le habrá caído en la cabeza.

Lo conozco desde hace años. Es hijo de unos amigos de mis padres, y cuando llamé sorprendida a mi madre el primer día que lo vi esperándome con un café en la mano, ésta me dijo que hacemos una pareja ideal, que tanto los padres de Apolo como ella y mi padre llevaban años esperando a que eso ocurriera. Lo decía como si fuera la solución a lo que ella considera que son mis problemas sentimentales. Pero sólo sería la solución a sus problemas.

—Deduzco de ese ofrecimiento que acabáis de comprar otra empresa, ¿no?

Saca pecho con aires de superioridad.

—¡Bingo! La de la serpiente, ¿sabes cuál es no?

Me paro en seco y lo miro un momento. Él se para también satisfecho de haber captado mi atención aunque sólo sea por un momento.

—¿Te refieres a Pitón? Es una de las pocas bebidas que me gustan.

Hasta ahora, supongo. Lo veo asentir con los labios apretados. Luego sonrío y cambia el peso de un pie a otro mientras mete las manos en los bolsillos de su aburrido traje gris. Todo él es gris, un gris apagado, como las nubes de esta insulsa ciudad en la que he vivido tantos años. Londres tiene muchas cosas buenas, pero lo mío es la naturaleza, así que salvo sus jardines, toda esta ciudad es un gran nubarrón gris. Pero este tío se lleva la palma, es como mi nubarrón particular, incluso si sale el sol, parece que está lloviendo.

—Sí, princesa. Y me lo he currado yo solito. Llevo meses detrás de ellos, pero ya son nuestros. Ahora la empresa se está forrando gracias a mí, y, nena, aunque no te lo creas, a pesar de todo mi éxito laboral, yo sólo podré ser feliz si accedes a venir a París conmigo y a vivir conmigo el resto de...

—Lejos de extinguirse, tu empresa sigue creciendo, ¿eh?—Lo interrumpo antes de empezar a tirarme de los pelos.

—¿Por qué iba a extinguirse? En Laurel Corporation estamos ganando más dinero que nunca, baby. Mira, si no te gusta París podemos ir a cualquier sitio. ¿Te gusta Australia? ¿O Canadá? O África... ¿Te gusta África? He supuesto que te gustaría París porque a las chicas os gusta París, ¿no es verdad?—dice con un guiño que da a entender que conoce la clave de la seducción—. El dinero no es ningún problema, yo sólo quiero estar contigo.

Miro la pulsera que lleva en la muñeca cuando alza la mano para repeinarse su flequillo engominado hacia atrás. Otra hoja de laurel, igual que el logotipo de la marca

de su compañía que lleva en la carpeta de la mano izquierda. Qué irónico, una planta que representa la grandeza de su imperio y a la vez una gran contradicción: las bebidas de su compañía y sus valores son de todo menos grandiosos. Sin contar con que utilizar algo tan natural para representar la compañía con más aditivos del mercado es el peor o el mejor marketing del mundo, según como se mire. Desde luego, va a juego con nuestra sociedad, sabemos que nos mienten y nos da igual. Él sólo es un peón más en la cadena.

—Apolo, no quiero ir contigo a ninguna parte. Ya te lo he repetido miles de veces. No me interesas lo más mínimo. Lo único que quiero de ti es que me dejes en paz.

—Pero África te gusta, ¿verdad?

—Me gustan todos los sitios que has nombrado, pero no me gustas tú, ¿capisci?

—Eres dura de roer, nena, lo pillo. Pero igual que conseguí esta empresa, conseguiré tu amor, ya lo verás.

Di que sí, colega, lo que te faltaba ya era tratarme como a otra de tus conquistas empresariales. Quizá las chicas con las que has salido se sentirían así, esas rubias altísimas, naturales y de bote—supongo que te daba igual mientras parecieran modelos de revistas.

—Apolo, déjame en paz—digo acercándome a la puerta de *The Guardian*—. Que pases un buen día, espero no verte mañana.

Voy a abrir la puerta pero se coloca entre el pomo y mi mano.

—¡Nena! ¡Acabaremos juntos, ya verás! Sé que sientes algo por mí... Y no tendrás que trabajar nunca más en este periódico todo el día. Todo son ventajas, ¿eh?

Resoplo mientras asomo la cabeza para hacer contacto visual con el guardia de seguridad. Pero luego lo pienso mejor. No necesito ningún guardia. Apolo tiene la entrepierna totalmente descuidada y yo muchas ganas de poner en práctica mis clases de defensa personal y descargar de paso la ira acumulada a lo largo de este mes. Mientras sopeso mis opciones oigo unos tacones pisando con fuerza que se paran a nuestro lado.

—¡Eh! No se llama nena, capullo, se llama Dafne. Quita del medio, si no quieres que...

—Tranquila, cariño, lo tengo controlado.

—Tú eras Jane, ¿no? ¿Nadie te ha dicho que tienes muy malos modales? Las damas al menos dan los buenos días. Pero supongo que de dama tienes poco...

Vale, se acabó.

Justo cuando se agacha encogido sobre sí mismo y chillando de dolor, el guardia de seguridad abre la puerta.

—Ya estabas tardando, mi querida Dafne. Tenía una apuesta con mi compañero desde hace un par de semanas sobre cuánto ibas a tardar en hacer algo así. Él decía que

otro mes, yo decía que este octubre no acababa sin que al menos le dieras con el periódico del día en la cara. ¡Me debe veinte libras! Aunque dado que no está aquí hoy, voy a necesitar que lo confirmes, ¿vale?

No puedo evitar reírme con él aunque estemos montando un espectáculo en la puerta.

—Claro, Pete, sin problemas. Pero va a tener que ser entre hoy y mañana, porque nos marchamos el jueves.

—Oh, es verdad, os vais a Los Ángeles. Mis queridas Dafne y Jane, os voy a echar tanto de menos... Me han pedido que no os diga nada, pero os tienen preparada una pequeña fiesta sorpresa en vuestra planta. Yo no os he dicho nada, ¿vale?—dice Pete con el dedo índice sobre sus labios.

Voy a echar mucho de menos a este hombre. Y a su bigote blanco y su panzota de Papá Noel. Ha sido uno de los mejores amigos que he conseguido en Londres. En cambio miro al que está en posición fetal sobre el suelo y no siento nada igual ni por asomo. Y otra vez está sobreactuando, como un futbolista al que han golpeado y espera tirado en el césped a que el árbitro saque alguna tarjeta roja contra el equipo contrario.

—Chao, Apolo. Que te vaya bien.

Voy con Jane hacia la planta de redacción y cuando llegamos siento un pelín de culpabilidad.

—Te veo en un segundo, cielo. Tengo que ir al baño un momento.

—¿Qué pasa? ¿Estás bien?

—Sí, tranquila, es sólo un segundo.

—Vale, pues te espero aquí en la puerta, para que nos sorprendan a las dos. Ensayaré mientras mi cara de sorpresa, aunque me temo que por mucho que ensaye no voy a convencer a nadie.

—Yo tampoco—me río— optaba por dar saltitos de alegría y aplaudir efusivamente.

—Fantástico, pues ya tenemos plan. Te espero aquí, cariño.

Pero en vez de ir al baño voy a la recepción. Quiero dejarle a este capullo algún regalo de despedida, aunque sólo sea por todas las rosas que me ha enviado a la redacción este mes. No puedo evitar sentir algo de pena por él. Al fin y al cabo su manera de comportarse sólo es el resultado de lo que le han enseñado desde que era niño.



## *Epílogo*

Es como si se hubiera convertido en un laurel. Es lo único que me queda de ella. Pero sé que ella no es ese árbol, ni siquiera está ya en la misma ciudad que yo. Estará haciendo surf en California con esa Jane. Yo no volveré a verla nunca. Aquel laurel parece mirarme fijamente. Me hace sentir más pequeño, como si un adulto estuviera regañando a un niño que no ha sabido comportarse en una fiesta. Pero ahora la fiesta se ha acabado y no hay nada que pueda yo hacer para arreglarlo. Ojalá me hubiera disparado con aquellas flechas de las que hablamos aquel día, como Katniss Everdeen. Eso podría haber acabado con mi sufrimiento. Pero supongo que Cupido fue mucho más malvado que ella: me disparó una flecha que me dejaría medio muerto hasta el final de mis días, sin llegar a matarme del todo. Lo único que me queda es un laurel. Una planta que inevitablemente me recuerda más a mi empresa que a ella. Y de lo único que estoy seguro es de que de Dafne, esté donde esté y haga lo que haga, es y será el único amor de mi vida.

**Eva Ríos**



DEMETER



## Indoor plants

It was a warm summer's evening and the goddess of harvest and agriculture was having a calm chat with the kid that Persephone brought with her. Demeter looked into the little girl's eyes. She was smiling whilst hugging the goddess.

'How did everything start? Persephone says that she really loves Hades.'

'You can't trust her words on this matter. She was drugged and the God of the Underworld changed her personality and character. My sweet Kore could never do that willingly,' said Demeter, trying to calm herself in front of the child.

'That is not true,' said Persephone, entering the room. 'Do not mind what your grandma is saying. I fell in love with Hades and I decided to devote myself, my body, and my soul to him. Besides, my name is Persephone. I am no longer Kore. You should respect that at the very least,' said Persephone gazing severely at her mother before leaving the room and going out to water her garden.

Demeter looked at her daughter whilst she was leaving and then her eyes met the eyes of the little girl. She changed her face to smile at the child with awe.

'Are you sad because Persephone is happy with Hades?' asked the girl, trying to understand why Demeter hated that relationship.

'Kore will never face true happiness with the god of the dead. Do you want to know what happened?' said the goddess holding the girl's hands. 'The real story,' added Demeter.

Macaria nodded, full of guileless curiosity. 'You will see how everything comes together,' said Demeter, happy to have this opportunity, happy to maybe save this maiden life by opening her innocent eyes to the cruelty of the world.

'Many centuries ago, Kore was gifted to me as a reward for all the suffering that I went through. She warmed my soul and I promised to protect her from everything. I promised to spare her the evilness of the divine world. I promised that she was not going to suffer the abuse, slander, and humiliating treatment that I suffered every single day of my endless life. But I failed, and that is something I will never forget nor forgive myself for not being capable of doing. I lost my baby girl, my innocent maiden, full of virtue and honour, free of men, pure.'

With a gentle touch and a gaze full of determination, Demeter proceeded to tell Macaria the real story of her daughter's abduction, hoping the little goddess' future was not as dark and sad as Kore's was.

'I was thrilled, I worked the land and helped mortals to survive with it. But I was lonely. I had no one come to visit me unless it was to hurt me, to take from me what I valued the most and what made me beautiful; my virtue.'

Demeter stopped, closed her eyes for a moment, and continued her story.

‘One day Zeus came to my temple in Naxos. He raped me.’

Macaria didn’t look surprised. She already knew at her young age what rape was and how common it was everywhere.

‘But that rape gave life to my little Kore, and I am grateful now to Zeus for doing it because I was no longer by myself. I was no longer alone. I had my daughter, she was mine.’ Demeter smiled whilst saying it, remembering the good times when no man was separating them.

‘Was she pretty as a baby?’ asked the girl.

‘Oh, she was the most beautiful living being I have ever seen. When I saw her little face, I promised myself that no man was going to take that naïve and pure beauty of hers as many did to me. She was not just beautiful,’ she added. ‘She had a graceful figure. She loved to sing and dance with my nymphs. She was full of life like the flowers that you see all around my land. Life grew around her. She was the water that my plants needed. And then, one blasphemous day, the God of the Underworld saw her and got obsessed with her. He came to see me one day, saying that he wanted to marry her, that he was in love with her,’ she laughed, her eyes were dark and lifeless. ‘I didn’t believe it then, I don’t believe it now, so I said no. I warned him to stay away from my daughter’s sight. But he didn’t listen to me. Apparently, he didn’t understand what the word *no* means.’ The goddess laughed with a hint of acidity but no humour. ‘So, he took her, using force, the help of the infamous Gea, and the complicit gaze of two gods that did nothing to save my daughter, the reason of my existence.’

‘How do you know it? Were you there?’

‘That would have never happened if I was there,’ replied the goddess. ‘The nymphs that were with Kore, I know it because they told me after everything happened.’

‘And where are they now?’ asked the child again, trying to discover every single detail of the story. Demeter clenched her jaw before answering.

‘I can’t remember. I assume they are out there with the other nymphs. But anyway, I went to see Zeus, demanding my daughter’s freedom.’

‘And what did he say?’

‘He smiled and said that nothing could be done. Can you believe it? The king of gods and men, the mighty God could do nothing to save my innocent and powerless daughter. So, I settled down in a devastating state, but I looked for my child without rest. I had heartache for every step I took, but I refused to stop. One day, my dear Hecate came to see me because she was concerned about the mortals. She said that I was not doing my duties and the humans had no harvest to survive. The landscape was covered with snow and they had no fertile land to farm.’

‘Did they die?’ asked the girl.

‘Some of them did.’

‘Why? Why couldn’t you help them?’ asked Macaria again, feeling sad for those abandoned souls.

‘Because the life of my only child was at risk. I knew it then.’

‘What?’;

‘That I could use it to save Kore. I could save their lives only if my beloved daughter returned to me. I knew that I was not the useless goddess they made me think I was, ignoring me, humiliating me. But, at that moment, I had the entire humanity on my hands. I knew that then. I was the mightiest goddess and Zeus could do nothing about it but accept my only requirement. My daughter.’

‘What happened then?’ asked the girl, absorbing every single word Demeter said.

‘Zeus summoned both the King of the Underworld and my daughter. He said that Kore would go wherever she wanted to.’

‘But she chose Hades,’ anticipated the kid. Demeter shook her head.

‘When she said that she wanted to stay in that lifeless world she was no longer my Kore. She was Hades’ creation. He forced my little girl to eat a pomegranate seed to enslave her forever in eternity. That fruit corrupted my girl’s mind and the girl I knew ceased to exist.’

Demeter cried in silence.

‘But she is still your daughter. She loves you.’

‘And I will always love her too, but she is not my sweet and innocent girl anymore,’ said Demeter, smiling calmly again. ‘Don’t worry, my child, I do not resent her. The only one I resent is the monstrous being that kidnapped her.’

‘But Persephone said that he offered the fruit as a sign of his love.’

‘You can’t trust her,’ repeated the goddess. ‘Whatever she says is to favour her captor’s honour. My Kore would never choose that life.’

‘Again?’ said Persephone whilst watering the indoor plants. ‘Mother, you will never be able to admit that I make my own decisions. The only problem here is that you don’t like them. Hades loves me without qualm. He respects me and I decided to be with him willingly, no one forced me nor tricked me to corrupt my thoughts. I am not the foolish girl you always thought I was. You forced me to live isolated and powerless because you never thought I could be enough for myself. Hades believes in me the way you never could.’

Demeter remained silent for a moment as if she was absorbing the words Persephone had said as arrows shot directly to her immortal heart.

'You love that god because he tricked you to do so. He poisoned your heart and your words to hurt me. I know that.' She closed her eyes once. 'And don't make me start talking about him. He doesn't love you. He loves the creature he created for himself, for his pleasure.' She stood up, facing her daughter. 'You are letting him separate us.'

'Stop!' shouted Persephone, grabbing the kid's hands. But Demeter had not finished.

'You should stop letting him trade with this kid's life and acting like he is her father just because he is not able to give you the most precious experience of your life. You will never know what it feels like to bear a child because he is not even enough of a man to do that simple thing. He is the god of death, after all, nothing about him can grow life, not even you.'

'That's enough!' Hades was staring at the front door, coldly gazing at her mother-in-law. Persephone went straight to him. Macaria hugged her grandmother and went back to Persephone and Hades.

'It's about time,' said Hades to Demeter.

She blinked, and that movement was enough for them to be gone. When she closed her eyes again, a lonely tear rolled down her pristine cheek. The indoor plants withered as the mother without a daughter walked through them.

**Ahinoa Vílchez Bonel**



## Di-mater

Life is like an endless nightmare. One day, you open your eyes and you realise that all the good things that you remember never existed. Some people say that I have a very pessimistic point of view, but what I think is that I am realistic. Sometimes I go out, to the new world, and all I can see is grief and despair. I have been kind of dead for so many years and for that you may think that I am sad, because a dead person has no voice and because my bodily decomposition no longer exists. As only my soul can speak and no more eyes of mine will see.

My story began the same day my own father ate me. Yes, my father ate me and yet this is not the worst part of my life. Well, after my father ate me, I was rescued by my brother Zeus and in that exact moment I started to take consciousness of what I could expect from life. My name is Demeter. Some may know me because I am the goddess of agriculture. Now, as you may guess, and as I have said before, I am kind of dead, and I say 'kind of' because some say that gods and goddesses never die, but as far as I know, nobody remembers me.

Even though I fought against titans and I defeated all of them, my brothers divided the whole planet without asking me if I wanted a part. Then, I worked hard, harder than anyone else, you can trust me, and I managed to invent the harvest so that human beings could subsist... Nobody cared! They were all worried about mortal things and gods' wars. But one day, after all these years of darkness, a ray of sun appeared through the smallest window of my house in the Olympus. All of a sudden, I fell in love, and I don't regret it, because it was the first time that I really felt myself.

His name was Iasion, and he was the most beautiful creature that I have ever seen. He was my nephew, but please do not be shocked. At least I am not Oedipus. Well, as I was telling you, Iasion was so beautiful. When I looked at him, we both understood what the other was thinking. Once I helped him to create Samothrace's mysteries, and as gratitude, I had a statue built in my image and likeness, perhaps you know it, it is quite famous today, it is called *The Winged Victory of Samothrace*. Yes, you may have noticed that I don't have wings but they stylised my naked body and also enhanced my goddess figure.

My life with Iasion was perfect—we loved each other so much that words weren't needed. However, one day, my brother Zeus discovered our relationship and, as he didn't want us to be together, he killed him with a damn ray. Do you know what is the worst part of the story? It is that I didn't have time to mourn my beloved, because as a punishment, my brother raped me. He raped me and he stole my right to cry. After this incident with my brother, I was never the same again. I felt horrible with myself, because I thought that it was my fault that he raped me. Nowadays, I have realised that my brother Zeus is a god with the appearance of a man, and watching the news that you mortals have in your world, I have noticed that men will always rape, and society will always blame women. For that reason, I forgive myself, because I forgive any other woman who has suffered the same that I have suffered.

Now, I want to talk to you about Hera, who you may think is a jealous woman. Well, it is false. I am sure that a man wrote her story, because she is the kindest person I have ever met. She is my best friend, and I can tell you that she has suffered a lot

because of Zeus's aggressiveness. She helped me a lot when her husband raped me. She said that she herself was raped by him *almost every day* and I felt pity for her. Our parents didn't educate us like this! Okey, ha-ha-ha, that was a joke, I have already told you that our father ate us. But, again, focusing on what is important in the story, with Hera, I felt something similar to what I felt with Iasion when we both fell in love. However, Hera was different. I didn't know whether I liked her in a physical or in a spiritual way, but let me tell you something, I do not believe in spirits...

Thus, after this little break, I want to keep telling you the story of my rape. After the crime of my brother, I felt sick, as I had never felt before. I didn't understand what was happening with my body. I hated myself, and I just wanted to die. But then, one of my biggest nightmares came true. I was pregnant, and the father was my own brother! I didn't know what to do, so I asked Hera and she reassured me. She told me that everything was going to be fine and that, if I wanted to, she would help me to abort. But how unlucky I was that Zeus found out that I was pregnant and I had to have that baby by force! In that way, I gave birth to a girl and I named her Persephone. During the pregnancy, before she was born, I had never thought about the sex of the baby. Once she was out of my body I realised that I preferred a boy, because boys can take advantage of anyone, and women are designed by society to please others. Then, as my baby was a girl, I realised that she would love me unconditionally.

We built a very beautiful mother-daughter relationship. I taught her all I knew about agriculture. She loved nature as much as I did and I felt that Iasion was there, by my side, even if he was dead. I could feel his presence in the body of Hera. Thus, they both helped me to raise our child, because Zeus was never there, and I thank myself for it. When Persephone grew a little older, I told her about Iasion. She was proud of him and sometimes, when Aunt Hera visited us, we walked for days and days, and we hid in the grass of the deadly forest to talk about good men and how to trust them. Sometimes, when Hera was sad because of her home situation, we changed the topic to talk in a more pessimistic tone, to talk about bad men and how to try to escape their clutches. I think that men are more powerful than women, because they make people suffer, and Persephone, my own daughter, suffered because she was a woman. Sorry, I don't know why I speak in the past tense, because she is still suffering. Well, her own uncle, Hades, abducted her. I am sure that Zeus offered her as a gift, as a piece of meat...

What Persephone cried the night she was raped was not normal. I think that her tears were the cause of the universal flood. And then, I realised that Persephone was cursed. She was carrying death with her wherever she went, and as her mother, I could have protected her, even more, even knowing who her real father was! But I didn't do it, I failed her, and I will never forgive myself for it. Persephone, surely you're not reading this, because I am writing these words for mortals, because I want them to learn about our errors, and because I don't want anyone else to suffer as we did... But if for some reason, some of my words reach your ears, dear daughter, I want to tell you that I am sorry, and even if you can't forgive me, I want to let you know that I am already cursed.

And in this way, the worst day of my life was the day that I realised that Persephone was an attractive young lady, because that same day Hades came to our home and stole my girl. I went to the underworld looking for her, I barely remember how it was, because my eyes were full of tears and my ears repeated once and again: *Persephone will never COME home*, and she never did because we no longer had a home. I escaped from what we knew as our home, and suddenly, the fields became dry and the

leaves started to fall. I needed to have my child. I missed Persephone and I started to take care of other children, mortal ones. And don't judge me but I wanted them to live forever, so one day, I tried to bake one of them to see if he would become immortal like me. Her real mother caught us red-handed and I died again of shame. Meanwhile, you mortal people were dying even more often than ever and it was all my fault. Because you didn't have places to harvest or trees to recollect food.

So, Zeus, desperate, came to me, and you may think that I am hypocritical, because the moment I saw my brother kneeling before me, asking me to return to Olympus, I felt like a man and I liked it. I felt that I was the fundamental piece of the puzzle that everyone needed. I remembered Persephone and I had to do it because of her. So I asked my brother whether he would let Persephone free. And, talking long nights with Hades, we reached a conclusion: she would come back, but for three months she would return to the underworld with him. Of course, I didn't want Persephone to go back there, but what could I do? I think that I did the right thing, what would you have done in my place? And then, I am sad when she has to go, that's why you mortals experience the cold of winter.

And sometimes I wonder. Maybe winter is my fault, and maybe it is also my favourite season. Because I cannot lie to you, but when Persephone is with Hades, I feel relieved, as if I don't have to take care of anyone, just of myself. And it is because my whole existence has been based on caring for others. Am I a horrible mother? Maybe I am, but I didn't ask to be one. For that reason, let me tell you a secret, something that only immortals know, something that even your own gods will never be able to figure out. Let me tell you that I don't love Persephone. But she is so much like her father. She reminds me that Iasion is dead, and she laughs at my face when I see how Hera is a better mother than me. And I had such a good time with her, in the past. Now, I want to live my life. I want to find some hobbies, and maybe, if life stops being a nightmare, I can also find a lover. And if, for some reason, I can't find any lover or any hobby, all that I want is to die. And how could a goddess such as me die? Well, some will say that my death will come suddenly within the death of my child but, do you know something? I am already dead, because I am cursed by men that I don't love.

**Esther Fernández Arredondo**



**ELECTRA**



## Querida mamá

Querido diario:

Hoy estabas debajo de mi almohada y no sé cómo llegaste hasta allí. Estoy muy feliz porque siempre he querido un diario, pero papá nunca ha querido darme uno. Hoy es mi cumpleaños. Ya tengo diez años, soy muy mayor y por eso creo que los dioses han cumplido mi deseo. Mis padres me han regalado cinco tipos de chitones distintos, juguetes, y una tarta de chocolate. Ha sido uno de los mejores días de mi vida. Lo único malo es que mi mamá estaba muy cansada para jugar conmigo, porque ya había jugado con papá. Me he cabreado mucho porque yo quería jugar con ella también, pero supongo que la próxima vez será.

Querido diario:

Perdona por no escribir más seguido, pero estoy muy ocupada aprendiendo a tocar el piano y a tejer. Mi tía me ha regalado mi primera máquina de coser porque dice que una señorita de clase alta como yo tiene que aprender ciertas cosas para asegurarme un buen futuro. No sé exactamente qué quiere decir, pero mi mamá me dice que de mayor entenderé todo.

Hoy he conocido a Pílates. Es un chico bajito y tiene una cara muy graciosa, la verdad. Cuando lo he visto por primera vez, no pude evitar reírme. Parece ser que me reí muy fuerte porque mi tía me estaba mirando con mala cara y me dijo que tengo que ser más educada con el señorito, porque en un futuro me puede servir. Yo nunca entiendo a mi tía. Es como si viviese en un mundo distinto del mío. Yo no quiero jugar con este niño extraño. Quiero seguir jugando con mis hermanos.

Por la noche, llamé a mamá porque no podía dormir. Me cantó para relajarme y me dijo que entendía por qué me reí de aquel niño tan bajito. Ella también pensaba que tenía una cara graciosa. Cuando me lo dijo, la miré a los ojos y nos empezamos a reír otra vez. También me contó un cuento, pero no me acuerdo del final, supongo que me quedaría dormida. Solo recuerdo que mamá me acariciaba el pelo mientras me leía, y vi que su ojo estaba algo hinchado. Otra vez había estado jugando con papá a escondidas sin avisarme, pero se lo perdoné porque me estaba cantando mi nana favorita.

Querido diario:

Hoy estoy muy triste. Mi hermana Ifigenia se ha ido de viaje. Papá dice que va a ser bueno para ella, ya que va a descubrir nuevos lugares y va hacer muchos amigos, pero yo la voy a echar de menos. Espero que le vaya muy bien y que me escriba a menudo contándome sus aventuras y las cosas nuevas que vaya aprendiendo. He llorado al

despedirme de ella. Aunque nos peleemos y me robe la ropa, sigue siendo mi hermana pequeña. Mamá también está muy triste, pero yo le he dicho que mi hermana nos va a escribir pronto y que no tenemos por qué preocuparnos.

Querido diario:

Hoy he escuchado a mamá llorar por la noche. Tenía los ojos rojos. No entiendo por qué está tan triste si mi hermana volverá después de un tiempo, no lo entiendo...

Querido diario:

Papá se ha ido de viaje a Troya para recuperar a Helena, que fue secuestrada por Paris, o eso me han dicho. Mi padre quiere gobernar Troya para ser más poderoso y rico. Yo solamente quiero que vuelva pronto. Por otra parte, mamá está más animada desde que su amiga viene a verla casi todos los días. Se llama Egista. Es una mujer un tanto extraña, tiene el pelo corto y prefiere no llevar el chitón ajustado hasta el talle. No entiendo esta forma de vestir, puesto que así es como lo llevan los hombres y pensé que para las mujeres estaba prohibido llevarlo de esa manera. De todas formas, no termina de convencerme. Mi tía dice que en el futuro debo evitar ser como ella porque solo me traerá desgracias. Papá no la soporta, no puede con ella, por lo que no suele venir cuando él está en casa. Es un poco rara, pero a mí me cae bien. Cada vez que viene hablamos y me enseña los libros que está leyendo. Siempre son autores de los que yo nunca he oído hablar. Además, es una persona muy graciosa. A mi madre siempre le hace reír. La verdad es que nos lo pasamos genial. Algunas noches ellas beben demasiado y Egista acaba durmiendo en la habitación de mamá porque no puede ni mantenerse en pie.

Querido diario:

Hoy cumplo dieciséis años y, como muestra de ello, por fin tengo mi propia habitación. Ya no tengo que compartirla con el pesado de Orestes. Voy a poder decorar mi cuarto a mi manera sin escucharlo quejarse. Estoy muy ilusionada. Nunca he tenido nada que sea solo mío. Mi hermana siempre me quitaba la ropa y Orestes me sigue destrozando todo. A partir de hoy voy a tener algo que nadie va a poder quitarme o romper. Por cierto, mi hermana sigue sin responderme a las cartas. Creo que hay algo que mis padres me están ocultando...

Querido diario:

Mi padre aún no regresa de su viaje a Troya y mi madre no quiere hablar sobre mi hermana. Mi hermano y yo estamos preocupados porque no sabemos nada de ella, pero mis doncellas me dicen que mi hermana se encuentra en un lugar donde no llegan las



cartas. No me creo nada de lo que me dicen. Se creen que sigo siendo una niña pequeña y tonta, pero yo sé que algo ha pasado y nos lo están ocultando. Hoy ha venido Egista otra vez y estuve intentando sacarle información, pero solo me dijo que le preguntase a mi padre, que fue su idea. No entiendo lo que está pasando, pero lo voy a descubrir.

Querido diario:

Hoy ha venido a verme Pílates. Hacía ya años que no lo veía. Lo recordaba totalmente distinto. Ya no soy más alta que él. Al contrario, ahora me saca dos cabezas al menos. Su voz también ha cambiado. Antes le salían gallos cada dos por tres y ahora su voz es profunda. Incluso su cara ha cambiado. Ahora parece más un hombre, incluso tiene algo de barba. Ya no somos unos críos por lo que fuimos a dar un paseo en vez de jugar a héroes y princesas, como hacíamos de pequeños. Empezamos a hablar sobre el futuro y me dijo que quería casarse conmigo, pero no supe qué responder.

Querido diario:

He estado pensando sobre la propuesta de Pílates y creo que lo voy a corresponder. Es la decisión correcta. Ya tengo diecisiete años y debo encontrar un marido, como todas mis amigas han hecho. Le voy a escribir una carta diciéndole mi respuesta junto con una gota de mi perfume para que se acuerde de mí y no piense en otras chicas. Hoy he comunicado la noticia a mi familia y todos se han puesto muy felices excepto mi madre. Dice que me estoy precipitando y que todavía no sé qué quiero en mi vida, que soy muy joven para entender lo que significa estar casada. Ella no sabe nada sobre mí. Ya no soy una niña que no sabe nada sobre la vida. No me importa lo que haya dicho, voy a casarme con Pílates.

Querido diario:

Hoy vuelve mi padre de Troya, hace mucho tiempo que no lo he visto y estoy deseando contarle la noticia. He invitado a Pílates a comer con nosotros para que nos dé su aprobación. Ahora te cuento.

La comida ha sido un desastre. Al principio, todo iba bastante bien, nos lo estábamos pasando estupendamente y mi padre estaba feliz de que me fuese a casar. El problema fue cuando mi padre nos preguntó cuándo pensábamos tener hijos. No me esperaba esa pregunta para nada, pero cuando quise responderle, Pílates me quitó la palabra y dijo que nos íbamos a poner a ello en cuanto nos casáramos. Me quedé muy sorprendida porque nunca hemos hablado de ese tema y ha respondido sin siquiera preguntarme primero. Le dije que yo no quería tener hijos tan pronto, que quería pasar tiempo con él conociéndolo, y me respondió que él como marido tiene su derecho legal a tener hijos. Yo no entiendo sobre leyes, lo reconozco, pero no puede forzarme a hacer algo que no quiera. Mi padre, en vez de apoyarme, a su propia hija, dijo que Pílates

tenía razón, que yo tengo que cumplir con mi deber. Me he levantado de la mesa y ahora estoy en mi habitación. Por primera vez en mi vida me siento atrapada, asfixiada, impotente, porque no he podido decir nada para contradecirles, solo he podido levantarme y huir a mi cuarto. No he pensado en el futuro, todavía soy joven y prefiero hacer otras cosas antes. ¿Qué sinsentido es eso de ‘derecho legal’? ¿Yo no tengo ningún derecho legal por ser la esposa de alguien? Creo que voy a acostarme porque estoy muy cansada.

Querido diario:

¿Cómo ha podido pasar esto? No entiendo nada. Me estoy volviendo loca. ¿Cómo puede ser que mi padre esté muerto? No tiene sentido, no tiene sentido, mi padre es uno de los hombres mas fuertes del mundo. ¿Cómo puede estar muerto? No lo logro entender, no me encuentro bien, no puedo salir de la cama, no puedo comer, no entiendo nada...

Querido diario:

Las cosas siguen empeorando, mi madre ha sido acusada del asesinato de mi padre, ¿mi madre asesina? No puede ser, mi madre quería a mi padre. No entiendo cómo la gente puede pensar que ha sido ella. ¿Quién ha podido matarlo? ¿Quién odiaba a mi padre? Solo me viene un nombre a la cabeza... Egista. Nunca ha tolerado a mi padre, siempre se estaban peleando, sí, eso debe de ser, no puede haber otra explicación, no puede haberla. Tengo que decírselo a Orestes.

Querido diario:

Orestes y yo tenemos un plan para vengar la muerte de nuestro padre. Esta noche lo vamos a ejecutar. Egista va a venir hoy a visitar a mi madre y le vamos a tender una trampa.

Querido diario:

¿Cómo ha podido pasar esto otra vez? Cuando llegamos al cuarto de mi madre para avisarla de nuestro plan, Egista estaba allí, llorando, sosteniendo algo entre sus brazos. Mi madre. Se había suicidado.

Querido diario:

Han pasado dos años desde las muertes de mis padres. Aún sigo sin entender nada. Parece un cuento, pero no de hadas. Mañana es el día de mi boda con Pílates y hoy he decido ir por primera vez desde su muerte al cuarto que pertenecía a mi madre. Quiero

llevar en mi boda su vestido de novia. Es lo mínimo que puedo hacer en su honor. He logrado encontrarlo, pero dentro del vestido había algo escondido. Era un diario. No estoy segura de si debo leerlo o no, aún no me he atrevido.

Querido diario:

He perdido las ganas de vivir. He leído el diario de mi madre y ahora entiendo todo. Mi madre era solamente una niña cuando decidió casarse con mi padre y ni siquiera entendía lo que era. Ahora entiendo por qué siempre estaba tan cansada, como lo estoy yo ahora, ahora entiendo todo. Hoy le escribiré a mi hermana la última carta para poder despedirme. No sé si contárselo a Orestes o no. No sé si creerme todo lo que cuenta mi madre o no, no sé si casarme con Pílates o no, no sé nada, estoy perdida, necesito descansar.

**Elena Flores Soto**

## Revenge is a dish best served cold

### *PAST TIME*

‘We can assure that in this family Death has always been by our side.’

‘According to myths and legends, our ancestors were kings and queens of Mycenae. My father, whose father decided to name after King Agamemnon, also found an unfair death. That’s it. It doesn’t matter how luxurious your life is, how many parties you attend, how you dress or what you think, at the end of the day, Death will find you and take you down.’

‘Anyway, I’m going to talk about my father so you can better understand my rage and pain. He was a great, strong man who, despite all the mistakes he could have made during his lifetime, didn’t deserve that end. He always supported my decisions, whether they were good or bad: when I failed my driver’s license test twice, when I abandoned my degree to move alone to another country, when I decided to open a café even though our mother turned her back on me after this decision... Because of all of this, when I found out that my father was secretly dating one of my employees, I didn’t open my mouth and kept it to myself. However, what I didn’t really know was that, at the same time, our mother Clytemnestra was cheating on him too with our neighbour Aegisthus.’

‘I have never loved our mother. This may not sound feminist at all, but it is the hard and cold truth. The women of this family are cursed to be wicked and selfish. In fact, this *curse* is said to have been set since our grandmother’s rape that led to the birth of our mother and our aunt. This is just a legend but I decided to believe it, just in case. Our mother is Death herself, but alive. She has never taken care of both of us as she is only capable of taking care of herself. Thus, when I found out about her affair and her intentions of breaking up with my father, it did not surprise me at all. You may say, “if you don’t care about it, why are you hurt?” Well, here comes the cruel and impressive part—I think she did it but I just can’t prove it. I think that our mother killed my father. I’d rather think it was Aegisthus who made it with her ominous help,’

‘I think I know my father too well to be aware that he wouldn’t leave home without a farewell. It is very curious that the only thing he left behind was a letter saying he loved me so much and that he was moving to happily live with Cassandra. It’s highly suspicious that he left all his stuff behind too, isn’t it? He didn’t even take his favourite jacket or his leather shoes. I know that sadly, he’s dead. I don’t know whether Cassandra is too. Therefore, I need your help, Orestes.’

These are the messages that Electra sent to her half-brother that winter evening of December. Orestes accepted the challenge.

### *PRESENT TIME*

The night was incredibly quiet and calm—only the looks full of anger that Electra devoted to her mother and her new stepfather. ‘I am deeply sorry about your father leaving you, Electra,’ Aegisthus said, faking a smile. The siblings did not believe him and, smiling, Electra answered that she was truly thankful for his support so much. When they were eating a fabulous piece of chocolate cake as dessert, the topic of Agamemnon’s inheritance had already been raised a few times. The point was that his properties and money could not be in use until ten years had passed of his disappearance. In fact, this really got Clytemnestra mad because her missing husband had left nothing for her. There was nothing for the new widow and her hateful lover.

‘Well, dear mother,’ Electra started talking while she was cleaning up her dessert knife with a napkin. ‘It is time to say goodbye.’ Clytemnestra tried to interrupt her but Electra continued, ‘I don’t love you, you have been the worst mother a daughter could have ever had and I will forget you. You will die and your memories will die with you too.’ Everything happened really fast and all hell broke loose. In just three or four minutes, the lifeless bodies of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus laid hieratically down, covered with blood and several stab wounds on their chests. It was a grotesque scene, with Orestes and Electra in full red death, maniacally smiling.

After some minutes of tense silence, Orestes muttered. ‘How are we supposed to clean this mess up?’ And his half-sister, pronouncing each word calmly answered. ‘Don’t worry, I’ve cleaned enough houses to know how to cover up a scene, did you buy the bleach?’ ‘Yes, but... what are we going to do with the bodies?’

‘Good thing my daddy made me get a boating license when I was fifteen,’ was her answer.

### *FUTURE TIME*

The café was full of people shouting and gesturing to their friends and their relatives, celebrating that the new year had arrived. The racket covered the sound that the television was producing. The screen was broadcasting an indeterminate news channel but, despite all the noise, Electra noticed the news that was being told. As she was filling some cups up with coffee, she stopped just to check that what she was reading on that screen was real. The news was not about the happy celebrations of the new year nor about who won the lottery. The sentence that could be read was: *Two bodies were found in the lake last night by the authorities*. She knew it and her blame made her run outside the café, fleeing from the happiness and enjoyment that was inside her business. She breathed deeply while inanimately observing the eccentric clothes that were exhibited in the shop window. Suddenly, a voice resounded and echoed amid the noise: ‘Sorry lady, but there’s a hair on my cake, and...I think that this is blood??’

Inmaculada Alonso Olivar



EUROPA





## A pitiful white bull

I want to tell my own story. People have always paid attention to *his* version of the events, even though *I* was the protagonist. It was about time the narrator of this story was me and only me. No one is going to put words in my mouth for me. Not anymore.

My name is Europa. I am sure it rings a bell. My name is always associated, in Greek mythology, with a bull. Why? Just because one day, while I was picking flowers in a beautiful valley, a God—if he can be considered to be 'above human level'—thought he had the right to kidnap me, disguised as a white bull. Isn't that tacky? Some people may have thought that I am a dimwit trusting a bull. Everyone thinks I chose freely to go away with a bull. Well, sorry to break expectations, I didn't.

I was enjoying a beautiful sunny day with my friends. We were talking about trivia, nothing too serious. We also talked about some Gods, their affairs and all the gossip around them. Suddenly, a white bull approached us. He seemed to be in pain, he was limping. The animal lied next to me, on my feet, and looked at me, begging for help. Firstly, I went away from him. But he kept looking into my eyes in a way I thought it was sincere. I love animals, and I couldn't deny my help to him. Slowly, I stroked his head, and looked for some wound in his leg. This is not told in the 'official version.' He was presented as a noble bull that seduced an innocent girl. His acting was not showed to the world. His lies were not shown to the world either.

After I approached him, the colour of his eyes turned darker, showing something that definitely was not sincerity and purity. He got up and revealed his human form; he was Zeus, God of Gods. Wait. None of you know this detail. Yes, he showed himself as a human before kidnapping me. Once again, this was erased from the story. This would have proved that he forced me to go with him. I did not follow an innocent bull, I was taken away by force.

I was confused for a moment, but I remembered the stories my mum had always told me about the power of gods. She taught me to respect them, to honour them; this way, they would protect us. I had always done that, so I expected Zeus to just thank me for something. Suddenly, he talked to me in a way that did not suit a God. He asked me to bend down, to knee on his feet, he was a God and he deserved some kind of respect. I did so; I didn't want to upset him.

In less than a second he grabbed me by both arms, holding me tightly, I couldn't move. I was afraid. I wanted to punch him, but the fear stopped me. I was frozen. He then laughed at me and called me 'little girl.' He was amused by the way I was trying to hold my tears. I felt so bad. I remained silent, just waiting for him to stop and go away.

Before I realised, Zeus walked towards the sea, dragging me with him. I didn't know what he was doing, but I was too afraid to ask. He turned into the white bull again, put me on his back, and swam offshore. I screamed, I was afraid, I didn't know what to do, so I just screamed. No one heard me. Except for the other gods. Obviously, they didn't do anything. They could not contradict Zeus, specially goddesses. They just passively saw how he kidnapped me. I screamed once more and everything went black.

A cold wind woke me up. I was lying on the sand again. I looked around me discovering that this shore was not the one at home. As it was said in the 'official' version, I was on the island of Crete. Zeus, in his human shape again, explained to me that I was going to be the queen of that land. 'You have no choice, my little child,' he said.

I didn't have any option but to yield to his desire. I was afraid. I was alone. I couldn't do anything to avoid what happened next to me. It was the worst feeling I had ever felt. He took something away from me. I never got it back, something changed in me for good.

Nine months later, I had a baby. I didn't want to have a baby, but I had no other option. Many years later he became the king. After that, the bond mother-son disappeared. He put me into the background. I was alone again; and, after my death, I have always been remembered related to a white bull, which turned black in my mind and keeps haunting my dreams. A total blackout.

**Carmen Hidalgo Varo**

**GALATEA**



## Si nace niña

Por aquella isla llamada Creta, caminaba una bella y dulce joven. Su nombre era Galatea y era conocida y querida por todo aquel que la trataba. Desde que era pequeña soñaba con poder casarse algún día con un hombre al que amara y la amara y así poder tener la oportunidad de concebir un ser nacido del amor. Conoció a varios jóvenes pero ninguno le agradaba tanto como para convertirse en su esposa.

Un día cualquiera decidió acompañar a su madre al mercado. Allí, visitaron varios puestos de fruta, especias, verdura y carne. Mientras hablaba con su madre notó cómo alguien la estaba mirando fijamente, un joven que siempre acompañaba a su padre al mercado, como supo después. Lampro. Su familia era pobre. El poco dinero que tenían era para comer y poder tener algo de vestimenta. Ella y su madre se dirigieron a su puesto y compraron fruta fresca. Sin más dilación, volvieron a casa. Durante esa semana Galatea no paró de pensar en Lampro. Algo la había hechizado y supo desde el primer momento que ése sería el hombre adecuado para poder formar su deseada familia.

Pasaban los días y sentía la necesidad de verlo. Ahora acompañaba todos los días a su madre al mercado y visitaban el puesto de Lampro. Él siempre intentaba ser amable y simpático en el trato con sus clientes pero la relación de confianza que se fue forjando entre ellos era diferente. Siempre le hacía un pequeño regalo a pesar de sus carencias económicas. Un día el joven le regaló una cajita de música. Al llegar a casa, Galatea descubrió que le había dejado una nota en su interior.

*Estaré a las ocho en el bosque, bajo ese gran ciclamor.*

Se sintió eufórica pero, cuando lo meditó un poco, dudó de si ir o no. No se podía confiar o entregar al primer gesto de amor que Lampro le mostrara. No a estas alturas de llevar tantas desilusiones. Después de haberlo meditado tanto, decidió no ir. Pensó que sería lo mejor para ella, porque podría evitar llevarse otra decepción, y para él, ya que ella pensó que así le demostraría que era una muchacha con valores. Pensaba que, si de verdad quería verla y estar con ella, la esperaría el tiempo que necesitara. Así que ahora sería ella la que daría el paso, cuando a ella le apeteciera.

Galatea pasó unas semanas sin ir con su madre al mercado, simplemente porque no le quería dar explicaciones a Lampro de por qué no había ido a su encuentro. Lo decidió así y no había nada más que decir. Una mañana pensó en ir al mercado sola y con un atuendo diferente para que nadie la reconociera. Solo quería ver a Lampro sin que él se diera cuenta. Y eso hizo, se cambió la ropa, se puso unas gafas de sol y se fue sola al mercado. Allí estaba Lampro, como cada día, en el puesto de su padre. Él no la reconoció pero ella no pudo evitar que él notara su presencia. Sentía que había una conexión especial entre ellos, algo que nunca antes había sentido. Ya estaba preparada y fue ella quien decidió dar el paso para verse y pasar una tarde juntos. Como él le ofreció la primera vez, decidieron quedar a las ocho en el bosque, bajo el ciclamor.

Con las ocho de la tarde, empezó a caer el día. Galatea y Lampro se encontraron en el sitio donde habían acordado y estuvieron hablando durante un buen rato sobre sus vidas, sus temores, sus alegrías. Pasadas unas dos horas, los dos fueron conscientes de lo cómodos que se sentían cuando estaban juntos y de la cantidad de cosas que tenían en común. Además, sus planes de futuro eran similares; encontrar a la persona indicada y formar una familia. Era tal el deseo que sentían el uno por el otro que Galatea quedó encinta esa misma noche. Los dos estaban felices, habían cumplido su sueño.

Todo era felicidad hasta que, pasados los tres primeros meses de embarazo, Lampro le hizo una sugerencia a Galatea que la dejó hundida. Su esposo le dijo que esperaba que fuera un hijo varón lo que le iba a dar, porque si era niña tendría que abandonarla a su suerte. Desde ese momento, todo lo bonito y deseado que habían construido juntos se le vino encima. Aunque ella tenía muy claro que tanto si fuera niño como niña iba a luchar por ese ser.

Una vez más, el destino le había fallado.

Tras nueve meses de gestación, nació Dalia. Galatea dio a luz a una preciosa niña. No tuvo corazón para abandonarla. Su madre ya sabía lo que le había sugerido Lampro, así que le aconsejó que vistiera a la niña como un varón y le diera por nombre Leucipo, para que así su esposo no se diera cuenta de la verdad. Galatea se opuso a esa idea porque ella estaba muy orgullosa de haber sido madre de una niña y nada le dolería más que la arrancaran de su lado. No tenía por qué ocultar su delicadeza y feminidad.

Cuando Lampro supo que había nacido una niña, no dudó un solo instante en decirle a Galatea que la abandonara en el bosque donde mismo fue concebida. No podía aceptar el hecho de haber engendrado a una niña porque eso significaba deshonor como hombre y motivo de burla. Estando en desacuerdo con su marido, Galatea decidió abandonarlo e irse con su hija y ser feliz con ella. Dalia era lo más grande que tenía en la vida, era una parte de ella de la que no podía deshacerse. No le importaba ser madre y padre porque para ella era un regalo haber vivido esa experiencia.

Fueron pasando los años y Dalia se convirtió en una hermosa doncella. Un día quiso acompañar a su madre el mercado, como Galatea hacía cuando era joven. Su madre la complació aunque no sabía la sorpresa que les esperaba. No era el mismo mercado donde Galatea solía ir con su madre, pero allí estaba Lampro. Cuando vio a su hija se quedó impactado de lo bella que era. Le dijo que él era su padre pero a Dalia poco le importó. Con su madre tenía suficiente en la vida, no necesitaban ningún hombre para ser felices.

Lampro, arrepentido, les pidió perdón, pero no sirvió de nada. Él seguía en su misma vida de siempre, pasando necesidades y de mercado en mercado. Justo en ese momento se dio cuenta de lo que había dejado ir de su lado: su mujer amada y su hermosa hija, dos tesoros abandonados por irracional y necio.

**María Teresa Morales Morales**

# GANYMEDE





## The waste land

Once upon a time there was love, there was perfection, there were values. But now, in this waste land, love is not possible. Fear is as common as the full moon every twenty-nine days. Hatred wins.

The time: 2021. The most advanced century since the beginning of the world! The place: Italy. The most beautiful country in the world. Cradle of art, perfection, affection.

But this place feels like an unreal country. I never thought hatred had undone so many people. In this country there is a couple living together since the beginning of time. It is said that the world does not have any gods, any values, but apparently, somewhere in this desolate land, there is a glimmer of resistance.

The couple is lying in bed, naked, their bodies resting like a river that has flown as far as the ocean. Outside the window there is a boulevard of trees with orange leaves, framing the outstanding monument called *the Colosseum*. Allegedly, it is considered a symbol of power, strength. Even if the Italians have lost all sense of value, they venerate it. But they were not able to protect it from the bombs during the Second World War. They showed the world is not as everlasting as we think. They let the armour fall into pieces. For one of them, the most powerful god, the Colosseum was a symbol of power and eternity, the strength of the empire and military force. For the other, one of the most fascinating gods, it was a symbol of decadence, of illusion, and abjection.

It is quite common that when you have everything, you get tired. That is what happened to those two, living in an accommodating situation. After millennia they got tired, and they decided to live like normal human beings. But the true reason was another one, something darker, a secret. But of all the places they could have chosen, why Italy? Let us suppose that Italy has the potential to be one of the best countries in the world, with its cultural heritage, its art. It is about time it rises from the ashes of Fascism. Sooner or later it will become a civilised country. Or let us suppose that the two lovers did not choose the place, and Italy happened to be the best country to live a life-long punishment.

Ganymede, young, beautiful, feminine and smooth-skinned, is staring at his lover: powerful, savage, masculine and primitive. He is thinking of the first time they met—so romantically—more than two thousand years ago. Ganymede was tending sheep on Mount Ida, near Troy, in Phrygia, when a giant eagle approached him. It was actually Zeus disguised as an eagle, and he ripped Ganymede's clothes off, violently. Claws running down the gentle back like a plough in a spring day. Blood running warm like that of a sheep sacrificed on the altar. Zeus was standing behind him, wrapping him up. Flushed and decided, he assaulted at once, its exploring claws encountering no defence, using Cupid's arrow like a conquering sceptre. Ganymede remained still, speechless, hurt, tears running down his eyes, the awareness that a piece of him was taken forcefully. Zeus greedily lifted him and took him to the Mount Olympus to be his wine pourer. He made him abandon everything to stay with him. He took away a piece

of him, controlled him, abused him and played with him like a child's toy. But Zeus felt a sense of guilt inside, and, as in exchange for the offense, he offered Ganymede's father two of the finest horses, the same that carry the immortals, delivered by Hermes, his messenger. Tros, Ganymede's father, was consoled that his son was now immortal and would *only* be the cupbearer for the gods, a position of very high distinction.

That is how everything started, but fairy tales do not tell this, we are not taught about this at school. We are not educated to defend ourselves from abuse.

With the passing of time, Ganymede fell in love with Zeus, and surprisingly, Zeus did too. Ganymede was Zeus' Achilles' heel: he was completely free of any role and imposition, he regarded his sexuality as something to be proud of, and he sometimes dressed up as a woman and had sex with the most fascinating goddesses. After some time, Ganymede became the destabilising element in Mount Olympus, for obvious reasons, of course. There was someone who was surprisingly threatened by him: Hera, Zeus' wife, the goddess of marriage and family. Literally the most cuckolded person in Mount Olympus. Her favourite hobby was to find out about her husband's illegitimate affairs and numerous offspring.

Instead of pitying the young boy who was abused and then taken away from his home, all she could feel was envy, competition, hatred, but she felt she lacked something in comparison to him. She knew she could not give Zeus what Ganymede was giving him. She envied his freedom. She pointed a finger at the *little faggot*, as she liked to call him, to show the other gods how such an effeminate cowboy walked among the gods to pour out their wine. She was angry at her husband for making him immortal. Not surprisingly, Ganymede was the only one of Zeus' lovers to be ever granted immortality.

The climax came when Ganymede strongly opposed the judgment of Paris, which implied choosing who was the most beautiful goddess—Hera, Athena or Aphrodite. Ganymede spoke to Hera, he pointed out to her that there was no point in competing against each other. He was sincere when he said to her that women were much more than beauty. He even asked her why she needed a man's validation. He concluded by saying that this trial could have caused a war.

This was too much for Hera. Tired of all the destabilisation Ganymede created, Hera threatened Zeus to banish his lover and him from Mount Olympus. She required more love and attention from him; she wanted him to be even more masculine, more powerful, rougher, darker. She did not want to see in his face any sort of compassion or emotion. She required him to wear more masculine clothes, those usually worn by Mars. But all the warnings faded away as soon as he saw Ganymede dressed up as a woman, or spreading love and peace across the Mount, or walking naked, with his body less sculpted than that of Greek athletes.

Zeus progressively became a bad copy of himself. His mighty thunderbolts looked like fireworks. His long beard was more withered than ever. It was clear that his masculinity was starting to sway like the city of Pompeii during the earthquake years before the famous eruption. One day Hera tried to get him back and required the ultimate love quest: create the most stunning monument. So, one night, he appeared in emperor Vespasian's dream disguised as an eagle. He urged him to build a symbol of power, of masculinity and military force to consolidate both his power and the Roman

one. He desperately needed to win his wife over. He wanted to prove to himself that he was more powerful than ever. He was eager to show that the only way for a man to leave a mark was by strength and violence, not delicateness or peace. Of course Ganymede did not know any of this. Neither he knew about the deal the two monarchs made: Zeus would have been exiled for his bad behaviour and could have been completely free, but just for a short period of time. After that, he would have to leave Ganymede forever. The deal was strongly desired by Hera. She also chose the time and the destination: Italy, Rome, 2021. Not for its flourishing art, nor for its culture, but because, as she said to him: «it is impossible to be queer and live in a country like that».

When in Rome, the two gods were looking at each other intensively, like it was the first time they made love.

Ganymede was looking at Zeus as if he was the most precious thing in the universe, with the eyes of love. Love! Love! Happy love! Free as the mountain wind. *Without* doubt. Ganymede started to speak.

‘Do you remember the first time we met? At first, I was traumatised, but later on, I started to consider it as one of the best days in my life. I still remember when I left everything behind for your love: my friends, my family, my values, myself. I remember when I did things I did not consider right just for the sake of your love. When at some point I did not recognise myself in the mirror. Your love compensated everything.’

‘Of course I remember, my love. Even if you felt like having a choice, you did not. That is the way things work. Some of us are hunters, some of us are preys. Some of us are abusers, some of us are abused. This is life.’

Zus kissed Ganymede softly.

‘I know, I am your prey, you were so powerful when you showed up as an eagle, so strong! A true animal. No flaws, no weaknesses! You did everything you wanted with me. I would have gone to war for you.’

‘And you were so gentle, feminine, delicate, so insecure... I was attracted by your being free. I was attracted by your insecurity because I knew you would always need validation from me.’

‘Yeah... But maybe it is about time we change our roles, what do you think, eagle? I am not that kind of god anymore. I have evolved. I am like flowing water: fluid, free. I can be whatever I want to be. Whoever I want to be. I do not have limits. I am able to take the form of everything,’ replied Ganymede, proudly.

‘Roles? What roles? We do not play roles. It is just the way we are. We are completely free. I wish I were like you, but unfortunately superior forces prevent me from being like that.’

‘Yeah, superior forces... Like you were not the most powerful god. And if we are free then, why cannot we hold hands in public, upload our photos on Instagram, and most of all, why are we still in the closet? After all this time? Is my love not enough? Are you ashamed of us? Of being who you truly are?’

'We do not need to share our love. That is what faggots and straight couples do. We do not need to be like them. Even if our love is secret, it is still valid. And you matter, of course.' Zeus was annoyed.

'Or maybe that is the exact thing we need to do. We should be out, loud and proud. We should be displaying our love to this world, not stay in the closet. We should proudly hold hands, kiss, make love. We should spread love. And please do not use that terrible insulting word.'

'We have already talked about this, you know the answer is no. I am not ready. I am scared. Being out for me is not as important as it is for you. And to me, that word is not an insult.'

'Yeah, I know. Anyway, we should go to bed. Tomorrow is an important day for this country and for us. Hopefully they will pass a law which will protect us from all kinds of discrimination.'

'Yeah, interesting.'

'Okay then, goodnight.'

Reading fairy tales we get to know that when you are in love, you have butterflies in your stomach, and the common feeling you feel is happiness. It is also written that before going to sleep, people who are in love will automatically think of something good, positive. In this case, the last thought Ganymede had before going to sleep was: 'I wish I were straight.'

*Rome, Unreal city*

*27th of October*

October is the cruellest month. Spring had kept us warm, feeding a little life with dried tubers. The Senate is supposed to pass the law against homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and to protect disabled people. It is the most awaited day in years. It is the right occasion for Italy to prove to the world it is as advanced as other countries. To prove it is not stuck in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the huge wooden courtroom there is a sense of tension, darkness. The country is reaching a turning point. Everyone hopes the right decision is made, even though in the last months there was an intense discussion about some articles in the law, particularly one regarding gender identity. The most conservative parties wanted to delete it, as it was considered *too dangerous* and *vague*, as if people's identity was not valid.

The propaganda against the law was incredible: you could see fake news spreading all over the newspapers. You could hear politicians twisting entire pieces of the articles. There was a lot of misinformation about the topic. As soon as the law Zan was approved in the Chamber of Deputies, it was clear that it was much more than a law. It was a powerful tool against violence. Against hatred. Against toxic masculinity. Against Patriarchy. No wonder they wanted to stop it at all costs.

One hour after the discussion, the most conservative parties ask to vote using a secret form. They do not have the courage to publicly show their faces. They are as cowards as a flock of rabbits. The count begins: one in favour...one against... But it is a lost battle, just like this State is. The counting ends with 154 votes against, and 131 votes in favour. The law is officially buried, dead, and with it, all the hope queer and disabled people had in their country.

The speaker renders the verdict, and a crowd of senators, which is supposed to be one of the highest political position, starts to scream and yell like a herd of pigs in the mud. They are celebrating. They look as if they have won the Olympic games. They look like savage hunters left alone in a natural reserve. They are hunters. From now on, all civil rights will be endangered species. In the same way, all minorities are about to be hunted. The world is made of abusers and abused. Lots of people are clearly going to be abused.

You can imagine the disappointment in people's eyes while watching that video going viral. The hopelessness, the anger, the hatred, the awareness that the State does not care about them. The feeling of constantly being inferior, in danger, at war with something or someone bigger than them. You could see teenagers crying like the day they were born, because when we are born, we know we will only suffer. You could see people shouting, wanting to manifest. And you could see people sitting in their houses speechless, disappointed. Common thoughts were *I want to die, I do not want to stay here anymore, I wish I was straight*. Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled.

When we read fables and fairy tales, the moral is that evil loses, and good will always prevails. The weakest are always protected. Discriminations are not admitted. Love is tolerated, and usually wins. But we are in Italy, 2021, a country where fairy tales do not exist.

The next morning, the cupbearer woke up in turmoil. He feared for himself and for the country, but in any case, he would be ready to take to the streets and demonstrate, like so many others did, in that famous summer of 1969, when the Stonewall riots began. After all, life is a battle, or at least it is for the people like him. He thought he heard a feminine voice in the other room, but it was just hallucination. He did not want to stay with his companion, so he went for a walk around the city. The enchanted atmosphere of the Pantheon, of the ancient Roman forum, the colourful palette of the little streets, the façades, the doorways, the greeneries... He waited until the results were made public: the Zan law was not passed. He was not surprised. Like Tiresias, he foresaw it. It was time to go home and talk to Zeus. He did not have expectations, for Zeus seemed unable to understand his battles. He came home like a beaten dog. And he was ready to take even more blows.

'Have you heard about the results? The law is officially buried. All the Italian queer community is about to manifest. We have to go, come on, love. This is our occasion to show our love to the world.'

'I do not want to go. Oh, I forgot to tell you, Hera is here. She is testing me, again. Plus, for me it does not make sense. I do not believe in those things.'

'Why is she here? She is obsessed with me. With this triangle I feel like re-experiencing the 776 BCE Olympics all over again. Why do we need to make it a competition? I do not see any point in competing. Anyway, if she is here, it means you can show her how much you love me. Will you? Come with me, love. It is our moment to shine.'

'I am sorry, I cannot do this.'

'Please, now you really have to choose between me and Hera. True love or imposition. Freedom or fear. Make the right choice.'

'I cannot go with you.'

'Whatever, I am sick and tired of you and your games. I will go alone. Queers do not need any company to go and demonstrate for their rights.'

Ganymede went out and shutt the door behind him.

A beautiful woman was standing right outside the door, she was wearing a crown on her long light-brown hair. She was ironically smiling at him, like those who know they have won something important.

'Hi *little faggot*, bad day? So my husband has chosen me and not you, like always. Like when he created the Colosseum just for my love, or when he decided to come to Earth with you, so he could have his sop.'

'I am sorry, he did what? What do you mean he created the colosseum? I thought it was Mars who built it. And why are you talking about the sop? It was a common decision, we were tired of all the commodities.'

'Oh, so you do not know about our deal! Do you want to know about the deal we made, baby?'

'What deal?'

'Well, we decided that Zeus could stay with you for a limited period of time and that afterwards he would come home and reign like he used to do before you messed up and destabilised everything.'

'You did what?? I am so speechless. Both of you are terrible.'

'And you are so naïve. You do not notice what is happening around you. You trust people too much. You are passive, and you are not able to make your own decisions.'

'I am not that god anymore. I have changed. Luckily. I am tired of listening to you. We could have created an alliance, but you were too busy waging war with the other two perfect goddesses. You were cruel with me, but even more with his other female lovers. Your soul is filled with hatred because you cannot stand Zeus being someone else other than your husband. Now I am going to demonstrate proudly. Bye, loser. Oh, and cuckold. And by the way, no one fucks your husband like I do.'

That being said, he walked to the meeting point. Turning behind for a second, he saw Hera in a full state of rage, big tears running down her eyes.

The colourful crowd started to pour around street San Giovanni in Laterano, Roma's queer street, right next to the Colosseum. You could see people of every skin colour, of every sexual identity and orientation. It was an open hymn to love. To freedom. To communion. Every single one of them had a sign with them. You could read any kind of sentence: *Love is love, you have stopped the law, not the fight*. Every single sign was an ode to love. Insults were not admitted. Hatred was not even contemplated. They were superior. They were standing there, singing, shining, just like a rainbow after the rain. After the thunderstorm. Progressively, the whole city became colourful. For a moment, the rainbow outshined the lies. The fear. The hatred. It even outshined the Colosseum, which started to lose its marmoreal tone. A crowd full of colour, of love. Them. Not only the queer people, but also the Black and the Latin American community. They were all united together to fight for civil rights. That is exactly what happened during Stonewall riots. They were all part of that history. Of our history. Ganymede felt like being in 1969, again. They were the children and nephews of the Stonewall generation. Of those who did not stop fighting. They all had a huge debt to pay to Sylvia Rivera and the others, to those who sang: 'We are the Stonewall girls, we wear our hair in curls, we don't wear underwear, we show our pubic hair, we pick up lots of tricks, that's how we get our kicks, we wear our dungarees above our nelly knees!' To those who fought for freedom. To those who did not stop believing.

Ganymede returned home from the manifestation. He was full of love. He knew he was not alone, that his community would always be with him. He was ready to confront his lover.

'So... I talked to your wife. Is it true?'

'Yes, it is. I am sorry.'

'No, you are not. I am just tired of you,' replied Ganymede, calmly.

'You are tired of me? After everything I have given you? This is all your fault. You are not enough. The mistakes are all yours. My only mistake was to use violence against you. I gave the world to you. I even talked to the astronomer Simon Marius to name Jupiter's largest moon after you.'

'Yes, it was all my fault. I let you use me and hurt me. I was so weak then, but I am so strong now. You gave the world to me because you are not capable of giving me the only thing I need: love. You feel inferior to me. You did all of this just because you cannot accept your bisexuality, you cannot conceive loving a bisexual man. You look pitiful.'

'It is not like that, I can explain.'

'I do not need your explanations. I am tired. I am tired of your compensations for the lack of love, I am tired of your close-mindedness, I am tired of all your stereotypes. The precautions. The lies. The secrets. I am tired of your fear and your hysteria. We look like prisoners. Love is not supposed to be like that. Welcome to the Universe. You once told me the world is made of hunters and preys, abusers and abused. Well, I believe we get to choose who we want to be. You were allowed to do whatever you wanted, and this is my fault. But now, I do not want to be like you, nor follow your

stupid mechanisms. I do not need your validation. I do not want to be your prey anymore. I do not want to be abused. Nor I want to be the abuser. I want to be free to love and to express myself. Free from all impositions. Labels. Stereotypes. Criticism. I want to be loved for the person I am, not for an image of myself. I want to be loved freely. Fearlessly. Unconditionally. Love is not fear, love is not hatred, love is not hiding.'

Having said that, he left all his things behind. He only needed one: Cupid's quiver, the one Zeus used to abuse him. He stole it and went straight to the Colosseum. This time, he did not look behind him. It was a starry night, the cypresses were curling around the illuminated monument as if it was a Van Gogh's painting. Ganymede took one of the arrows, he flexed the ash arch, and with all his anger he threw one of them towards the Colosseum, which was destroyed, and with it, all the things it represented. Many little flames sparkled. The ashes descended like snow. The Colosseum turned to soil, to smoke, to dust, to shadow, to nothing.

He turned and looked a moment at the destroyed monument, hardly aware of his departed lover; his brain allowed one half-formed thought to pass: 'Well now that is done, I am glad it is over.'

Once upon a time there was love. Lots of love. There was communication. There was freedom. But once upon a time is for fairy tales. In the waste land, fairy tales do not exist.

**Martina Gori**



**HYACINTH**



## How I became a flower

The day, the moment, the argument, and the excuse arrived. I was an eighteen-year-old boy with features elevated by the handsome features of youth. I was prepared for my first day at the University of Massachusetts. English Studies. I was in love with the poetry of Thomas Hardy.

I decided that I would wear my favourite black jacket, as I was very superstitious and believed that it would bring me good luck in the beginning. In addition, I ate two pieces of toast with two glasses of milk because I did not like odd numbers, and I thought they would bring me good luck too. After that, I went to college. Once there, I noticed all the people. There, hundreds of young people were able to express themselves in many different styles. It was very overwhelming. Among all of them, I noticed the look of a boy amid all the noise. It was a haunting, mysterious, constant gaze.

I decided to go out for some fresh air. While my fingers pressed the lighter to light a cigarette, a tall boy, with a strong complexion and very well combed hair startled me. It was the boy with the look.

‘Do you have another?’

‘Yes, of course’. I answered as I took the lighter and the cigarette out of the box.

We smoke in silence. Neither of us knew what to say. We exchanged a few sideways glances from time to time. It was clear that there was tension. We went back inside the building. We looked for our respective classes. It was by chance that we were in the same one.

The first semester passed, and Thamyris and I became great friends. There was always flirting between us, as it was inevitable because we spent a lot of time together, in addition to the physical or sexual attraction that there was. One thing was clear: we liked each other. The day we finished the exams, some classmates—Zephyrus, Apollo, Thamyris and I—got together to go out to clear ourselves. Thamyris did not like the idea very much, since Apollo was coming. Zephyrus was a basic straight boy who always played slightly homophobic jokes. We went to McDonalds and, after that, we decided to go to a bar to have a few shots to celebrate. Between shots, Thamyris and I got closer and closer. The rhythm of techno music, the alcohol, the neon lights that blinded us, left us closer and closer to the game of looking for each other. We met first with our eyes, then with the touch, finally with the connection of our lips. Zephyrus and Apollo were stunned; they did not know how to react to this situation, so they decided to leave.

The next day, I do not know how, Thamyris and I woke up together in his flat. Everything was strange to me but at the same time, I loved it. I do not know when, where, or how we decided to go further, but what I was sure of was that it happened. We started a relationship. Everything was great. We were great together. We were inseparable, but there is always something behind. I would tell you that everything was very nice but no. We began to distance ourselves from our group of friends, since we preferred to make plans that were more intimate. During one of the literature classes,

Professor Clío—my mother, but nobody knows—ordered us to write an epic poem in groups with its respective explanatory story. I chose Thamyris, because he had an ability to sing epics accompanied by the zither. Its melody even made the Greek gods fall in love.

Apollo, who secretly loved me, spoke with the group of the Muses, a group of very beautiful girls. They were of great help at the time of writing, as they were very inspiring due to their knowledge in various artistic branches. Apollo and the Muses were close friends. Aware of his feelings for me, the Muses devised a plan to get between me and Thamyris' group work. For this reason, the Muses spoke with the teacher, and they told her that Apollo was going to attend class singing the poem with the zither. It seemed much exaggerated, so she exempted Thamyris from doing the work. In this way, I had to do the job with Apollo. Apollo was also helpful, having knowledge of the arts.

Zephyrus had recently left his five-year relationship with the girl from his hometown. He had had a bad time. However, thanks to Apollo, Thamyris and me, he had managed to feel good, especially with me. It felt good, at ease... He thought he had just found someone to trust, like a best friend. However, on the night of the shots, when he saw me making out with another boy, he felt frustrated, disappointed, and sad. He did not understand what was happening to him, or rather ignored it. He understood that he was in a new stage, surrounded by new people, growing as a person...

In his mind, three concepts floated. Straight? Bisexual? Gay?

When Clío joined Thamyris and Apollo, Zephyrus began to feel angry, furious. Why did Thamyris choose Apollo and not him? Why was he always the last option? Then, Zephyrus just accepted it and did the poem with Ovid, who also wrote poetry.

About 4 o'clock, Apollo sent me his location, as I did not know where his house was. I arrived around five thirty or so. I was speechless! It was spectacular; it had the shape of a Greek temple since it consisted of a rectangular-plan enclosure, surrounded by columns in a modern marbled colour, which revealed cracks that showed the passage of time, covered by a triangular-shaped roof, very pretty. The façade had shapes; they were like characters trying to tell some distant story. The only bad thing was that his house was built on a hill, at a certain distance from the city. As a consequence, my electric scooter did not have enough strength to climb it, so I had to walk up it.

5:35. I knocked on the door.

'Hey! How are you? Was it too difficult for you to climb the hill?'

'Not at all, I am in good shape, I go to the gym on weekends'. I joked out of breath.

'Come on, give you some water, you look a bit tired'.

'Yes, thank you'.

He led me to his room, where a luxurious and abundant snack awaited me, with many fruits and the occasional tasty sweet. He put some music on his iPad, while we enjoyed our food. We talked about many things, such as the new television shows that were very obscene, defaming and humiliating their participants.

'Do you like Thamyris?' He asked with an expression that mixed concern and sadness.

'Yes'. I answered confused.

'Have you missed me?'

(Long silence)

'I did for a while'.

Suddenly, he grabbed my face with his hands, leaving me unable to make any movement. He kissed me. It was a very confusing moment, perhaps strange or uncomfortable for both of us. After that, we did not bring it up again. We worked non-stop from six to eight or so doing the poem. After that, I grabbed my skateboard and rushed down the hill to my house.

Apollo, concerned about what had happened, told what happened to Zephyrus. Zephyrus burned with anger. He considered me a traitor, since I had not told him anything.

The second semester of the year ended, and before returning home, they decided to go to the nearest beach to spend the day. Thamyris felt tension. Ignorant of the situation, he did not understand why everyone was so strange. He decided that it would be a good idea to play a game called quoit. While Apollo and I were throwing it at him, Zephyrus, very angry and blinded by jealousy, seized the disc and threw it against my skull. I collapsed and began to bleed. Apollo held me, his dying lover, in his arms. He used all his medicinal skills and even tried giving ambrosia to heal my wound. Nevertheless, his effort was in vain because he could not cure the wound inflicted by fate.

In a matter of a second, a great commotion had formed on the beach. Everyone was watching what was happening. The ambulance came and everything looked very bad. By this time, the sand was covered in a red sheet. They mounted me on a stretcher to take me to the hospital. My friends followed the ambulance in dismay, with lost eyes, immersed in drowning thoughts.

Once at the hospital, my closest relatives and colleagues arrived. They waited for three hours but there was no news. Two more hours, no one gave new notice. After seven hours of waiting, they confirmed the worst news of all: I had died. The impact of the disc had led to a head injury together with a subarachnoid haemorrhage that led to my death. Yes. My death. Our doctors could do nothing to save me.

My relatives entered in order, first my parents, then my friends, and finally Apollo. Apollo burst into tears instantly when he saw me so cold, so serious. Afterwards, the doctors took my body, leaving a pool of blood on the blanket that covered the litter from which sprouted as if by magic, a flower, the Hyacinth. Apollo clung to the blanket with all the pain and sorrow in the world and wept inconsolably. He picked up the hyacinth and shed his tears on the petals, leaving an imprint in Greek letters 'AI' as a symbol of his lament.

A few days after death, the world around Apollo was not summer, not friends, not fun. Everything that surrounded Apollo was sadness, bitterness, nostalgia, and

loneliness. Suddenly, Apollo's messenger provided him with a letter from my parents. It was time to say goodbye to my body, but he was not ready to say goodbye to me, his lover.

He travelled to the nucleus of the town where the funeral was to be held and after that, a series of rituals. My body was transferred with lyre music to the place where the last step of the ritual was carried out, the sacrifice of a lamb. The lamb was chosen because it represented my purity and innocence.

After all the prayers, the praises and the last goodbyes at my grave, Apollo approached and kissed for the last time a bouquet of flowers of blood, red hyacinths.

**Lidia Ocaña Santiago**

**HYDRA**





## The hollow

They killed my sisters one by one. They dug up a hole and threw my head. ‘Monster’, they called us. But they didn’t know that we were all alive, no matter how deep or cavernous the hollow was, no matter how far my head was from my land and my swamp, no matter how rotten and perished our body was, we were still breathing. We breathed the odour of our burnt flesh, the metal sound of Heracles’ sword against our body. I breathed all my sisters’ screams of pain and grief. I breathed the howl the water made while our beheaded body was falling slowly.

But why is he in the Olympus as the gatekeeper? Wasn’t he the one who killed his wife and his four children? No.

No, no, no, it was Hera’s fault. She induced Heracles to kill them and when he realised he regretted everything. So he had to rectify.

Rectify with our deaths.

Heracles perpetuated our existence as a mere quest to be accomplished, as an unfeeling creature to be slaughtered, as the poison that can kill any living being. As an obstacle to take back his prestige.

We were in our nest when the attack took place. Hera told us that Heracles was not only going to try to kill my sisters and me, but also that he had already killed our brother Nemea and that Heracles strangled him with his bare hands and used his fur and head as protection. We were enraged. He didn’t have any right to kill our family one by one. Now it was our opportunity to take revenge and to provide peace to our family. We could have killed him slowly and easily.

But we didn’t.

He was not alone. A man helped him but we didn’t know his name. They appeared in a chariot pulled by two horses and, as they were nearer and nearer of our nest, Heracles got off and confidently, with firm step, walked steadily to the nest wearing Nemea’s head as a helmet and a sword proclaiming how powerful, mighty and manly he was. I was able to see that Nemea was reduced to a thin sheet of golden skin that was from time to time interrupted by crimson and dried stains that smelled like sour steel. We could have attacked him suddenly as the nest was a dark and shadowy cave, brought him inside the cave and killed him in our territory, but we chose to remain quiet so we could see his first moves.

The cave was lighted by several thin burning arrows that produced fast and windy sounds that triggered our eighteen ears. We suddenly felt how Heracles was in one of my sisters’ neck. Just before he could slice his sword into her neck, we coiled in his body. All of our necks were intertwined as a perfect interlaced knot trying to asphyxiate him. His screams began to be lower as his throat could not articulate any word while his face was turning from a reddish colour into an azure and purple one. Why did this man believe that he had the right to kill whoever he wanted to? Why did

this man feel superior to anyone? Why did he have to kill my sisters and me? Why? He was dying.

A steel sound was heard followed by the sound of something falling in the ground. Heracles? I have heard each of my sisters' laments and cries of woe for our loss. It was the sound of one of my sister's heads. The miserable man sliced my sister like a thread. All our minds were together, in sisterhood, to kill this murderer. From our scar two new sisters were born but they already knew in their first seconds of life that they have lost a sister and that Heracles was guilty. Heracles' and his companion's faces turned pale. You should have seen the horror, the disgust in their faces. It seemed that they were going to vomit at any moment. I wish they had. I liked it. I enjoyed how terrified they felt in our presence and how little and vulnerable they looked in comparison with our immensity.

Now is too late. I am already buried in this hole. But I can still breathe.

Over and over again, my sisters have died and are born again from our scars. I don't know how many of them died and how many hours the battle lasted, but both felt endless. Our mental energy and our body were starting to be drained, as we have lost a lot of blood, energy, and family. But this dot on the ground appeared tireless.

Among the bloodshed, I could see that both men were watching each other, they interchanged glances and then watched me. I felt something was about to happen. One, two, three times and all of a sudden I felt our body burning, one of our scars had been wrapped with a flamed piece of cloth. Seconds of silence perpetuated the scene. My sisters and I were waiting for our two new sisters and Heracles and his companion as well while holding their breaths. No one came from our scar. My mind, our minds could not bear it anymore. We tried to kill these two bastards desperately. We were so angered that we had no time to mourn. We fought without thinking. They killed off my sisters one after another. A neck sliced, eyes removed, a howl, a leg cut off, screams, a head torn up, another neck sliced, scars in flames, cries. And then, silence again.

I was all alone now. They had murdered all my sisters, my family. No 'we' anymore. I was just a woeful 'I'. Heracles watched me as a trophy, as a mission almost fulfilled. But what was that sparkle in his eyes? Could that be pity? Regret? Weariness? It was arrogance, domination, and a primitive desire to finish his job.

A last steel sound. He completed the quest.

The sound of shovels against the dirt woke me up. Everything felt dizzy and confusing. Am I dead? It felt like I was, or rather, it didn't felt like it. There was a terrible emptiness that seemed to fill up all the space. White, empty nothingness. I felt alive, but I was unable to do anything but think, hear and smell. But the whiteness turned gradually into darkness as I heard the wind my head made while falling into the endless vertical black tunnel. As soon as I reached the wet bottom I fell in a state of lethargy that was frightfully calm.

A drop.

Two drops.

And another.

My conscious arouse from that emptiness. My rotten eyes, ears and nose were useless now, but I could perceive that something was alive in the hollow. The narrow hole felt wider and the atmosphere was damp. How many years or ages had passed? I had no sense of time, but I could feel that the hollow evolved into a sort of well. My sisters crossed through my mind as a vague memory that was beginning to feel gradually real, even tangible despite my lack of body.

Heracles.

He killed my sisters one by one. He threw my head into and endless hollow. He reduced our existence as quest to be accomplished.

I will never forget the screams of my sisters and the pain and grief that you caused us. You dared call us 'Monster', but who is the real monster? Who killed his wife and children? Heracles. You. And you had to keep murdering us to amend your errors.

But I am still breathing. I am breathing now the steel sound of your sword and I am breathing the smell of my and our burnt flesh. You didn't know. No matter how far my head is buried, no matter how rotten and perished my body is. My consciousness is still breathing.

You didn't know that if one is conscious we are all alive. And I am here. You haven't completed the quest. You haven't either amended your murders, for I am alive. I am everlasting.

We are endless, as the hollow where you buried us.

**Malena Padovan Sánchez**



ICARUS



## Wax and fire

I met him at a strange moment in my life. I just spent my days thinking about each one of the events that led me to that situation. All I did was exploring and discovering new places—hidden in a forest, most of them. One day I saw a new secret place, but this one seemed different. There was a special energy coming from it. And then I saw him. A gray man made of wax with two big wings and a pretty face. It didn't take us a lot of time to start a conversation and know each other. It was evident that neither of us had anyone else in our lives, and we were desperate to find someone to talk with. He did not take long to ask me the reason of my visit.

'So, why do you come here?'

'To think, just like you.'

We fell in love with each other really fast.

The days went by without even noticing it. Every day was like a new beginning. I felt different emotions by the hour. I was so trapped by him that he became my own labyrinth. I thought I could not be happier. Icarus was really care-loving. He took me to pick sunflowers because he knew they were my favorite ones, he watched me while I was painting galaxies, he even took me to see the stars every night because he knew how much I used to love it. But oh! That day...

'Look dear, a shooting star! Make a wish'

Then I saw a crow falling from the sky, with an arrow piercing one of its wings.

'That is not a shooting star.'

'What is it, then?'

'Bad news, I guess.'

He took me to his house. We laid in his sofa together to cuddle all night long. But soon we discovered something that had gone unnoticed. A drop of wax. That day was the beginning of the ending. Icarus started to lose wax every time we were together.

'My love, you have to control your heat'

'But, I...'

'You have to, don't you want us to be together?'

'Of course I do!'

Controlling my heat meant trying to stop shining and producing it. But what is the Sun without its heat? It was not easy, but of course I could do it for him. He loved me, he was literally melting for me. I had to make the effort.

*(A few months later)*

We have continued with our lives. But can this even be considered a life? I mean, a proper life. At first it was a big deal, having to control my heat, but I got used to it somehow. Icarus kept doing his daily life things, like painting. Oh, I did not mention anything about it. He is always painting plants and giving them names. I am always observing him, I have nothing better to do.

Monogamy is starting to affect me. Also, I am starting to feel weird about not having my natural heat. Existential and general questions are starting to come to my mind. What does my heat have to do with me? Obviously it is a part of me. Is it really important? Who am I? No, I know perfectly who I am. I am Icarus' lover. Isn't the heat supposed to be an essential part of me? I cannot even feel it anymore, everything around me is a bit dizzy. But it is okay. I love him despite the warning signs.

I am laying on the sofa with Icarus. He is asleep. I keep watching him and observing everything around us. I can see one of his newest paintings. Is that me? I can see a woman who looks like me. But she's palid, as if she was dead inside. I touch my skin. Cold. I haven't felt my heat for days. Where is it? I'm trying to bring it back, I need to feel it in order to realise that I am still alive. Why isn't it working? Please come back. I am still alive. Where are you? I am tearing my wrist, noticing that my blood is getting cold as well. I know you are somewhere inside of me.

'Come out!'

'What is the matter, dear? Are you okay? Why are you bleeding?'

'I am not the woman in that painting! I am the Sun!'

And then, fire.

Icarus is melting. He acts as if he doesn't care. He is holding me, trying to make me control my heat. He is worried about me. Fire. My heat is here again. I am here again.

'This is me.'

I turn around and I start walking. I guess that, at the end, Icarus really flew too close to the Sun.

*(One week later)*

Now I am sitting in a forest. I guess things do not always go the way we want to. I have been running from him all this time. Hidding. Trying to establish some order in my



mind. I cannot run forever. I stand up and go to one of the hidden places we used to go together.

‘Dear!’

He is standing in front of me.

‘Look... I did not want anything of this to happen, really. You deserve to be happy. But I have sacrificed so much for this relationship. Could we just forget about it and start over?’

‘Sacrifice, huh?’

I turn around and I start walking away. I am sorry, Icarus. I do not think there will be enough time in this world to discover if we could be together.

There are two scars where his wings used to be. He must have lost them in the fire. I touch my wrist as I see him. I definitely do not know what I am going to do now. What should I do with my life? Where should I go? It is all up to me now, but it is so difficult...

Oh! A white daffodil.

**Alba Delgado Almenara**

## Icaria

Como hija de Dédalo, era razonable pensar que sería una inventora estupenda. Sin embargo, no lo fue, o al menos no está registrado. Icaria fue criada con Ícaro. Ambos crecieron en una isla alejados de la sociedad y mantenidos por el rey Minos. Al igual que su hija Ariadna, poseían todo lo que necesitaban y nunca tenían faltas materiales. Tenían todas las comodidades al alcance de su mano. Icaria, al ser más mayor cuidaba del pequeño como si se tratase de su propio hijo. Tenían una complicidad asombrosa y desde que nació Ícaro, Icaria sabía que este no era un niño corriente: había heredado de su padre una inteligencia asombrosa y una creatividad inigualable. Sin embargo, Ícaro poseía algo que su padre había perdido con el paso de los años, un ansia de vivir que difícilmente era satisfecha viviendo alejados en aquella isla.

Un día, cuando Ícaro lloraba amargamente por una disputa con su padre, Icaria se dio cuenta de que aquella vida quizá era soportable para ella pero no para su hermano. Aunque es cierto que su hermano había disfrutado de unos privilegios educativos que ella no, nunca le tuvo envidia. Nunca fue inferior en conocimientos tampoco. Fue entonces cuando Icaria empezó a recolectar unas plumas de unos pajarillos a los que alimentaba y comenzó a pegarlas con cera. En su mente podía verse volando, volando hacia un lugar mejor, con estas alas, que aunque no le fuesen dadas biológicamente, ella había creado y había hecho suyas.

Al terminar el par de alas, y tras mucha práctica, pudo empezar a movilizarlas. Icaria hubiese sido la primera ingeniera si su padre, al ver que planeaba una fuga, probablemente con su hermano, no hubiera escondido las alas en una cueva paralela a la que vivían. Con el paso del tiempo Icaria empezó a enfermar. La casa cueva en la que vivía empezó a criar moho, las paredes le parecían cada vez más estrechas, más cerradas, como si la misma Tierra la estuviese tragando lentamente. Hubo un tiempo en el que Icaria soñó con volar, pero ahora lo único que fluía de su mente era la misma bilis negra que intentaba contener, pero que corría sin límites por su circuito sanguíneo.

Un día que Ícaro ayudaba a su padre, encontró por casualidad las alas en la cueva y, sin dudar, se las puso. Su padre, que castigó a su hermana por crearlas, no pudo negarse a que el joven volara. Era el momento de que Ícaro se fuese y formase su propio nido. Con esto y con todo, Dédalo, le advirtió no volar demasiado bajo, por si era tragado por las olas, ni demasiado alto, por si se quemaba la cara con el sol. Ícaro con las alas puestas y con la impulsividad propia de los adolescentes aceptó, y voló sin saber que esas alas habían sido diseñadas por su hermana, para volar juntos. Ícaro voló solo, dejando a Icaria en la cueva, envejecida, enferma por el moho y por la falta de luz.

En pleno vuelo, Ícaro no pudo resistirse: voló, voló muy alto y quiso tocar el sol, desoyendo las instrucciones del padre. Fue entonces cuando la cera comenzó a derretirse y las alas se despegaron de la espalda de Ícaro. Sin darse apenas cuenta, pasó de lo normal a otra realidad que no podía explicar y, como si fuera un fatal destino vaticinado por su padre, cayó al mar.

Icaria, que había salido de la cueva a ver el suceso, sentía dolor y pena, a la par

que satisfacción de probar que su invento hubiese funcionado mejor con ella. Cuando fueron a rescatar al hermano, se dieron cuenta de que no era más que un cadáver. El padre, enojado, angustioso, culpó a Icaria del nefasto desenlace y quiso que muriera de la misma manera que su hermano. Tomó a Icaria, enferma de dolor y pena, por su vida y por la de su hermano y la lanzó por un precipicio.

El cuerpo de Icaria fue tomado por las olas. Cierto es que sin vida, su cuerpo era más libre que nunca.

Ícaro fue cremado y enterrado. Nadie sabe donde está Icaria.

Nadie sabe nada sobre ella. Puede que ahora tú. Celebremos su triste victoria, tú y yo y todas.

**Andrea Nieves Jiménez**



**LEDA**



## Nasty, naughty bird

My husband had not touched me for as long as I can remember. Surely, he had been very busy putting his ass on his throne. He had always believed in money and power rather than in powerful love. When a relevant event was about to happen, my husband always asked me not to be very grumpy in public.

‘Smile, my queen,’ he grinned.

I wished he were eating ground with worms. But my image was very important to keep on being a queen, so I had to obey him. When I celebrated the usual snack in the evening, my friends talked about marital life and how proud they were of their children. Our masters used to discuss the last horses race that had taken place last night.

When night came, my husband wanted me more than ever. But not the way you think. My husband wanted me asleep. Sometimes, I thought he was with another woman or other women, but most of the time, I thought he was simply an asshole. The majority of our citizens wanted me nude in their beds. Even Zeus thought I was pretty. But one night, when my husband was sleeping, my desire of being alone and not listening to him when he was snoring was so high that I went out from our palace. Oh my god! I only walked for five minutes and I was still hearing the snores coming from my husband’s mouth. What a shame! So, I kept walking through the middle of the road because there were no horses at that late hour. I remember that the moon was pleasantly bright and my eyes were full of light and passion. Street lamps were the only witnesses to testify against my mad footsteps. Suddenly, the moon had her eyes set on the river Eurotas, the most popular brook in our town. My husband had in his mind to transform this river into a private swimming pool for us, but this fact would have bored me actually. Hot athletic guys used to wash their bodies in here and it could have been a pity not to watch them anymore.

My feet were feeling the warm wet water of the river. I lighted a joint and my eyes were getting closer and closer but there was a reflection in the river that made them brusquely open again. A sexy sophisticated swan appeared before me as if he was the sky god with his brilliant beard. I thought he had the biggest bill I’d ever seen in my life. His white wings stopped beating when he treated me gallantly.

‘What are you doing here, babe?’

I didn’t answer. I was looking at his surprising bill with my eyes wide open. Suddenly, he began to touch my delicate neck. His fingers were doing a race with spider footsteps throughout my sensitive parts until he was about to reach my cave. I hadn’t been rubbed that way ever. My thighs started to shake and a pleasant panic went over my mind and my nipples. And then, he used his powerful powder by moving his tongue that was discovering the cannibal side of my irresponsible inhibitions. A strange shudder took over me and at that moment, there were three rivers and two of them were more natural than the Eurotas.

I never saw the bird again.

When I was coming back covered with a soft shock, my husband was at the palace gate, waiting for me. I cleaned my mouth with my hand as much as I could. With a furious face, he hit me and sent me to our bed. We were silent. I felt he was worried about my outing and a sad look took over his face. Suddenly, he hugged me and kissed me and, after approximately ten years, we made love.

Nine months after that nasty naughty night, I gave birth to four children. Two of them had the appearance of my spontaneous raptor. The third of them had the same femme fatale beauty as me, my dear Helen. The last one snored the same way as my husband did. When my friends asked me why the other two had this kind of physical appearance I answered that that night I ate a great quantity of chicken with eggs and then, that was the reason why they acquired those bills and wings. I think they swallowed that lie because they stopped eating it when they had sex with their masters. One day, someone told me that they had Zeus' nose and how proud I had to be for that.

Nobody knew the truth. Now that I'm dead, I don't care anymore.

**Beatriz Romero Velasco**



## Domino effect

They say a butterfly effect is what happens when an apparently simple act causes a great impact on the world. That is what my daughter is considered to be: the trigger, the beginning of the end, the cause of a bigger domino effect. The love of Helen of Troy was offered to Paris in exchange of a golden apple. My beautiful and poor Helen, doomed for eternity for the choice of a man.

But now is not the time to mourn the fate of my daughter, known to many, one way or another. I should be considered the true trigger of the Trojan war. It was me, Leda, the woman who gave birth to Helen of Troy, and thus the true beginning of this domino effect of unfortunate events that led to Troy being burnt to the ground and the ending of the Trojan civilization.

My story begins with light and calmness. I became queen of Sparta after marrying king Tyndareus. It was a sunny day, and I wanted to go for a walk near the lake. I wished to wander and contemplate the landscape, and feel a little calmness for once. It was as if nature itself was calling me to go to the lake that day. As I was approaching it, I was getting more and more attracted and thrilled by it. The water was transparent, the plants were leaving a pleasant scent, and the animals around also contributed to this marvelous harmony. Suddenly, something appeared that caught all my attention. I had seen swans before, but none of them resembled this one. The way he was swimming around, his penetrating yet attracting look, everything about him made me feel so paralyzed and, at the same time, I just wanted to be closer to him. But I actually did not know what to do, for the first time ever I had no guidance or instructions.

I finally decided to take a closer look at him. I felt a few steps closer would help me stand my ground and feel more confident. It looked like it was my time to prove something. Yes, definitely he was no ordinary bird. There was something about him. I tried taking more steps forward, but then, all of a sudden, he ambushed me and held me down. I was so terrified. It was such an overwhelming feeling, he wanted me not to move. I tried to push him away, but he was stronger and kept his feathered breast upon mine. I wanted to escape, but all I was able to do was wait until the end and think about the beauty of the day and the landscape around me. But, oh dear, that was not the end at all.

When I came home, my husband took me to the bedroom and told me to lie with him. He did not notice the exhaustion in my face, in my body, in my limbs, in my whole self actually. He did not care, just like all men, just like that savage and arrogant swan. Anyway, I was used to that behaviour. The thing is that from then on, I was never the same. But I repeat, nobody cared. They were all full of joy to find out I was bearing children for the king. Four children, exactly. Nobody would stop talking about them, the blessing they were to us. Yes, I agree, especially Helen, who really blessed the city of Troy and its citizens. She blessed every inch of its surroundings, its walls, and of course I cannot forget about its stunning tower.

The thing is that I could not stop overthinking these moments ever since. They just kept repeating in my head, like a progression of vague images on a loop, going on and on for all eternity. Yes, I really mean it, for all eternity. Even in the afterlife I could not get rid of them. History and the arts made sure that moment had to transcend. It started with the oral tradition, which kept my story alive. Then, men who listened and learned about those tales captured this

moment of my life in their paintings. They put really good detail in my physical appearance, making an effort to capture my beauty and my purity, and how I was willing to follow the swan in his seduction. Right, a sweet and tender seduction for a sweet and pure woman. I would not have described it any better. It makes me sick to only think about it. All these misconceptions, and I still wonder why it keeps surprising me that they come up because of men. And not only that, they questioned me too. 'How could she not defend herself from that "feathered glory"?', they said. I am the one not caring now. In fact, I have to be grateful and thankful. My daughter sent humanity and the gods a message. No disgracing act will go unpunished.

Even though people will still consider me a simple motif, I know who I am. I am not part of a domino effect. I am the domino effect itself. I was the one setting up the pieces and getting ready to start it at the right moment. I was the one who came out of the chrysalis, powerful enough to cause the greatest hurricane classic history has ever seen with the delicate flapping of my wings.

**Ruth Salvatierra Gascón**

**LYSISTRATA**



## To women!

My name is Lysistrata, and yes, I am a real woman. I am not a fairy tale even when all of you think so. I was a woman who was able to fight for our freedom and our peace. You might know me from the famous comedy written by Aristophanes—what a funny play right? The first thing I can tell you is that it was based on true events, and it was not a happy and funny thing at all.

I will start from the beginning. As you know, I was born in Athens, and I was raised by a very lovely couple. My mother was called Anthea, and my father was called Andreus. My father was a strong and wealthy man, as well as intelligent, who married my mother when she was only fourteen. Andreus was a powerful merchant chief in the city of Athens, and he made sure that everything was in order with the products, and how much gold other merchants owed him. He was known for his strong will and no one dared to trick him. He was feared, even from my mother.

You see, my mother was a beautiful woman, yet so innocent and insecure. She only served my father and my father only. She was an orphan, and she was raised in an orphanage house of the city. She was taught how to be a good and submissive wife, and she mastered the skills of cleaning and doing chores, taking care of me, cooking, sewing... I always remember how she used to tell me how fortunate we were to have a house and food in our plates and a roof, and how we were lucky not to be slaves, but I always used to think how she was a slave without even noticing. The beatings that my poor mother received everyday from my father were out of this world, the abuse, the yellings, everything.

I did not want to live like my mother, tied up to a man and being locked up in a house forever, only being able to get out at daytime to do what the man thought was necessary. My father Andreus, when I was ten, got sick from a rare disease that at that time we did not know. My father had to stay in bed forever, and had to leave his job. He was unable to do anything, and my mother took care of him. My mother told me that I must get married, and the thought of it horrified me. I was just a little girl! How could I get married at that age? I didn't want to become my mother.

My father finally died, and my mother could not stop crying. His death destroyed poor Anthea's heart. I remember how I cried with my mother, but being honest, these were tears of happiness, although I never told her so. Wherever you are mommy, I hope that you are happy and in peace. To my father, I really wish that you are rotting in the fire of Hades.

When I was fifteen, I started the biggest women's revolution ever to have existed. This time is what happens in Aristophane's play. What a fool! The only thing he did was to invisibilize such a wonderful and revolutionary event, and portray it as a funny comedy. Don't worry, dear readers, I will tell you the truth of what happened.

First of all, I was obviously not married. After my childhood, I promised myself that I would never be married. I would rather die. It is true that the war was happening

at that time, but what I planned with all women was not to stop this men's war. The war I was against was the silent war between men and women. The normalized abuse that we women suffered from antiquity, but no one wanted to fight against. I understand the fear of not confronting it, but luckily, I was not afraid. Only one brave spirit—and a pair of ovaries—was needed to fight against this injustice, and it was mine.

I had planned this great event since my father's death—may he not rest in peace. The day had come. I knew that women at my time would not understand the reason of our fight, even if deep in them it was something that they wanted to finish. That is why I used the pretext of the war and missing husbands in order to stop it and for them to come back. I convinced them with this. Two days before the well known day—which I call the Great Day—I met my lovely neighbour Calonice, and I explained to her how we would meet all women of Athens and make a sexual strike in order to make men go crazy and stop the war. Such a brilliant plan mine was. I told her how we would take over the Acropolis of Athens while men were at war and abstain them from entering and having sex with us. Calonice spread this to every women of Athens and to other nearby places.

In the beginning of the Great Day, very early in the morning, I was happy to find how Calonice, Myrrhine, Lampito and a lot of other women were outside at my door. Not only did wives appear, but also very old women and the children of these women. Contrary to popular belief, no woman had the slightest desire to be again with their husbands, even if a few of them were good men—very few indeed. They still wanted justice to stop the war.

We celebrated the very well known oath, with a cup and and a amphora of wine, to not be back with any man, and to keep fighting for our mission of peace. Every woman touched the amphora and swore on it. Then we went ahead to the Acropolis and, once all women were inside, we shut the gates and made a barricade to prevent men from entering. We were all in, and old women as well as children were left to rest, but the rest of us had the mission to guard the acropolis.

While all of these women were defending the gates, Calonice, Myrrhine, Lampito and I went to the Aglaureion, a cave that was inside the Acropolis, but a place that only a few knew. Its existence is doubted nowadays, but I can tell you that at that time it did exist. It had a very discreet opening, but it was so big inside, full of chambers and corridors. When we entered the cave, we cleaned the floors with crystalline water. We were purifying the shrine for the big event.

When we finished doing this, one of the women, responsible for guarding the gates of the polis, called me. The men were outside, extremely angry, and ready to kill us all. They were calling Zeus and every manly god that there is in the Olympus for such crazy thing we were doing. Some women were afraid, but they swore an oath. I was not afraid at all, and confronted these men. I watered them, and told them to go clean the house and go to the market with their shields and swords. They insulted me with all of the bad words you can imagine, it was so funny! While every woman was in fear, I was laughing like I never laughed before, and all of the women started laughing at them as well. They knew that without us they couldn't do anything! My friend Lampito started screaming 'Go away to your stupid wars, playing with your little xifo',

and all other women started screaming ‘Go away! Go away! Go away!’ repeatedly. They felt so humiliated, and left us alone.

After the encounter with those useless men, I gathered all of the women again inside the acropolis. I explained to them how we should take shelter in the Aglaureion that night, and celebrate our victory. We went on our way again with all of the women to the cave. While we were walking, a man appeared in the distance, along with a teenager and a little boy. This man was the husband of Myrrhine, Cinesias. He was drunk, and he was asking Myrrhine to go back to him, and telling her that he loved her, and that their little child needed her. Myrrhine didn’t want to go at all with him, because she swore an oath that couldn’t break. At this moment, in the play of Aristophanes, a very funny scene is described where Myrrhine tells her husband that she is going to have sex with him, but goes out and into the scene repeatedly for a mattress, a cushion, perfume, etc. While making him extremely aroused and crazy. But what happened in reality was tragic. Cinesias forced and abused Myrrhine in front of their child and the teenage slave, and I hurried to help my dear Myrrhine. After so many insults and death threats from Cinesias to Myrrhine and me, I killed him by throwing him off the walls of the Acropolis. He deserved it. The poor child and young boy came with us. He was the only man that took part in our ceremony.

Once we were all in the Aglaureion, we started celebrating our victory. You might think that we would sacrifice some animals, but we thought that was a very primitive thing to do, so we adorned the animals with flowers and perfumes, as well as all of the women that took part in the ceremony. I told everyone that they were free to dress as they wanted: some women were fully naked, others were just wearing a cloth, some others were wearing their husband’s clothes, others decided to wear a lot of jewels. They were all free. I made a giant fire in the center. The main hall of the cave was giant, and we had plenty of space. We all held hands and formed a circle around. We breathed a sigh of relief, and raised our hands.

I chanted:

‘Oh women, we gather here all,  
to fight for our rights,  
we are free and self-reliant,  
we are powerful and shiny.  
I invoke all women,  
I call upon every child, wife and elderly,  
I praise all slave, middle-aged and royalty women,  
all united for a single purpose,  
to make peace, and fight against the violence of the xiphos,  
all united. All free’.

We closed our eyes and started chanting. There was a beautiful energy around every one of us women. They finally realised how our purpose was bigger than the peace of a single war—it was the peace between all the wars that no woman talks about. We were empowered, and we felt united. After this, all of the women started singing traditional songs, along with the sounds of drums, claps, and harps. We were dancing as we wanted, and no one told us how to act. We felt free and out of judgment and humiliation. I noticed the dance of Lampito, and I was mesmerized. She was in the centre, and she was wearing a very beautiful dress, that showed her beautiful erotic side. She was barefoot, yet she was hitting her feet to the ground with the rhythm of the music, while she was turning and playing with her long loose black hair, as well as moving her fingers and arms in such a grandiloquent and amazing way. She was so beautiful, like a phoenix.

This ceremony and celebration kept going until the next morning. We didn't need any sleep, since we felt fully energized and courageous, and we went to talk with the men to the gates.

'You are such a slut, how you dare do this thing to us? You killed Myrrhine's husband!' shouted the chief.

'You call me a slut? you know what a slut can do right? A slut doesn't fuck you, she kills you! Son of a bitch,' I howled with a big smile.

They could see the rage of every woman that had ever been abused in my eyes, and they were scared.

Finally, the time for reconciliation came. I told the chief that all women were free to go with their husbands or not, that we were as powerful as men, and that laws would be put against any type of violence and injustice towards women, and that if they did not accept, all of us women would go away. They accepted. 'What should we do with the war?' The chief asked me. 'Men started it, men should fix it. Don't make us responsible for your childish and stupid mistake', I replied calmly.

This movement inspired other women of other cities, and subsequently, of other countries, but unfortunately, it was soon destroyed again. I hope that this message makes all of you brave to fight for our rights as we did. Again.

**Aitor Morientes Simal**



MEDEA



## A woman's burden

Who does he think he is? No, really, does he think he can keep getting away with this? So typical of him. He has always been arrogant, but this is really pushing it. He never would have done it without me, you know. I was the one who helped him get that stupid fleece of his. As a matter of fact, he would not have come close to it without me. And now he thinks he can just hang me up to dry? Oh, boy, he has another thing coming...

It all started a long time ago, when I was still a little girl. You see, my grandfather was Helios and you all know how annoying it is to have a really famous relative, because you can never really live up to them. You know how you always feel like that really popular relative is hanging above you and during family gatherings aunts smile at you and say 'I'm sure your father or brother or grandfather or cousin or uncle would be so proud to see you right now.' Well, mine is always watching me. Because he is the damn god of the sun. Do you have any idea how annoying that is? Good thing I learned to ignore that pressure when I was still a little girl, or I would have gone crazy. I'm also a goddess, see? They denied me my status, though, so I am still a mortal. And I know exactly who it was. That damn Hera, always so jealous of everybody, as if it makes any difference. Zeus is still gonna turn into a ram or a peacock or whatever and bang some maiden he spotted from above. She's trying to act nice with me now, but I know she can turn on you in a split second.

Then he showed up. Jason. I was so stupid, looking back now. How could I have ever fallen for his lies? It was so clear that he was only thinking about that stupid fleece. Of course, he couldn't get it on his own. He was far too weak, so he needed the help of somebody stronger than him. Which is why he turned to me and, of course, I fell for it. How typical of him to use me for his own benefit. I told him I would help him, it was all a walk in the park to me all the same, on the condition that he would marry me once he got the fleece. I can't even remember what it was I did for him. It was so insignificant. He would come up to me, crying and powerless, asking me how he would ever deal with the tasks my father gave him. I gave him what he needed, but I did it more out of spite towards my father than anything else. He deserved it for being such an ass towards me.

Anyways, Jason did what I told him and managed to get his little greedy hands on the damn fleece. Then we fled my old home, killing my brother, Absyrtus, in the process. I've heard some say that I had him chopped to pieces since I was sure my father would stop to bury the parts. That's not really true. I just did it because he treated me so poorly, but then again, of course my dad would care for him more than he did for me. He was his little boy after all.

Once Jason and I got to Iolcus we found out that old Pelias did not want to give up his throne. Jason was the one who cared about that, really. I actually wanted to set his daughters free. Which was why I had them kill him. I could have done it myself, of course, but they needed to go through this catharsis in order to clean themselves from his filth.

Then Jason and I went to Corinth and have been living here ever since. We had two boys, but I could see it in his eyes. He did not care about me anymore. He had done what he had to do in order to keep me in the house, so he could go out to his regular adventures, or however he liked to call it. The boys were also starting to get really annoying as well. They constantly talked back and could see that they took after their father.

Then I heard the news. Funniest thing was, I didn't hear it from Jason. Such a coward. He was leaving me for Glauce. Good riddance to him. Always chasing some skirt, just because she is not as worn out as the woman who gave him children. What a fool. But I won't just let him get away with it. Those days are gone. I am not as naïve as I used to be. He will have to pay. With the blood of his two boys. I don't feel for them either. They are set to become just like their father anyways. It is best to save two women like me from this suffering than to continue with this vicious cycle.

The dagger weighs heavy in my hand.

But I know what must be done.

I must go now.

**Kiril Shishkov**

## Medea's last words

A light blinds me. I sense the ground I am stepping on and, while the persistent dizziness and my ears throb, I manage to touch wood with my fingertips. It is my turn to speak, I know. But I do not know how to begin. The consequences of my actions are weighty, and they make me feel weary. No. It is my time. I must speak now. I cannot allow others to tell my story. I take a deep breath.

‘Speak! Shout! Howl!’

In the agony of my endless torture, I live in torment, not only for what I regret, but for what I will never be able to change. Or, at least, that is what I think. I am living in eternity, in the minds of those who, every time they hear my name, question my actions. I am the main character in the nightmares of children and men, an atrocious anomaly without emotions. Medea, man-killer, sorceress. This is how I was baptized. Nothing could be farther from reality, as I never wanted to do anything of all that I am known for. But I had no choice.

I still remember the fear in Aeetes' eyes. However, I do not feel any remorse. I was never his favourite daughter, much less a paragon. Despite this, there is something that still hurts and burns inside of me because I will never be able to know what paternal love is. Aeetes was not an exemplar figure to me since he was absent for a large part of my life. The path of knowledge to witchcraft and mystical arts turned out to be an escape route for all that I longed for. Hecate became my role model, my muse. She filled my emptiness with her wisdom, and, like my Aunt Circe, I grew into an exceptional and powerful woman. However, my father was never intimidated by it. Absyrtus was not only the legitimate heir to the throne but also the pridefulness of the king of Colchis.

I still remember the tears of my sister Chalciope. Perhaps Absyrtus' sacrifice would have made our father deliberate, but Chalciope was not only his youngest daughter; she did not stand out in any way. The gentleness and elegance of Chalciope became her biggest disadvantage. She was easy prey for famished lions. She was not fierce, much less skilled; she was not smart either, but she was very temperate and bright. However, reality cannot simply be filled with illusions, and even hope has a limit. Aeetes offered my sister's hand in exchange for the Golden Fleece. Today I still believe that Phrixus accepted his proposal with the guarantee of living in comfort, regardless of whether my sister was part of the deal or not. From that moment, men became my enemy. My mother, Idya, was their ally, because while she cried with my sister, she never trembled after her husband's dictum. Although I hated my mother then, I now pity her. Not all of us are capable of acting in the same way when faced with fear. Each and every one of us has a shady side that we hardly ever display. My mother was finally able to get to know that side of him. Her husband was a ruthless cruel being with great power. No one had the right to question the words of the crown.

It is said that by the grace of Eros, the daughter of terror was born, an impulsive monster without mercy. Due to my weak soul and my dazed mind, I fled with him and his companions, sowing fear wherever I walked through. Conveniently, I did everything

in the name of love. However, tales tend to be somewhat of uncertain belief and, unfortunately, a little questionable if the main character of a certain story is a woman. I indeed fell in love, that is something I cannot deny. But I did not flee for love but rather in search of shelter. When Jason and the Argonauts reached Colchis, they claimed the Golden Fleece. Aetes, in return, asked them to carry out a series of tasks. That same night, my sister and I chatted about everything and nothing at the same time. Everyone knew Jason's accomplishments or, at least, the most famous ones. He had indeed saved my nephews in the past, and it is something that I appreciate. I cannot hide that curiosity grew in me when my sister started talking about him. I was jealous, and that made me feel vulnerable. Chalciopé's words were a turning point in my life that very night. She asked me for a favour, and I was willing to conceive her desire, not only because she was my sister, but because it symbolised an alternative path in the linear journey of my destiny.

The moonlight became my witness, or even my enemy if I had not been cautious. With fearful but determined steps, I set out to visit Jason. It was undeniable that he was a man with a certain charm and manly appeal, but that was not a distraction for me. After all, he was a man just like my father and my brother and, therefore, he had the ability to persuade and trick the most foolish of beings. Yes, the beauty of him could be the perfect spell to seduce any weak-hearted woman. Fortunately, the veil of ignorance fell the day Aetes manifested his true physique. Jason and I talked that night. He spoke to me not as if I were a woman but as one of his fellows. He trusted me. Maybe he saw the potential that I was hiding...

ENOUGH! It is not true! Jason never thought of me as a partner! He never did. He is guilty of everything. Perhaps Chalciopé was part of his plan; ergo, she was also her ally! No, wait, it is not true, it cannot be. Everything is Aetes' fault. Yes, that is it! It is your fault! Guilty man! Monster!

The piercing sound comes back, deafening me. I cannot feel anything. I do not know where I am. A metallic smell saturates my nostrils. I try to adapt my eyes to the light in the room. I feel disoriented and dizzy. I try to scream out loud, but I cannot utter anything, my mouth keeps shut. Something caresses my fingers. It is a face. Yes, I notice a nose and soft round cheeks. I also notice long, wet lashes. Wait. I can feel something wet underneath my feet. A cry breaks into my ears, creating a painful rumbling in my head.

'Mommy?'

It cannot be. No. I have not done this! I did not do anything wrong! Mermerus? Pheres? Jason! It is true. I helped Jason to fulfil Aetes' promise. I deserved the Golden Fleece, not him. Without my help, Jason would not have become who he was. No. It is not my fault. I am not that naive! It is not true! Jason promised me the freedom I much desired! That is it! I still enjoy the feeling Aetes gave me after learning that not only had Jason breached part of the deal, but his daughter was also involved. The enraged King of Colchis had been made a fool that day. Not only had he lost an object of great value, but also his dignity spilt onto his marble floor, flooding the streets of the kingdom. The river of shame of the royal family was born. That day, I shed my title as a princess. I am Medea, daughter of Hecate.

I made the first mistake in trusting Jason the day Absyrtus tried to convince me to come back. I could not trust him, not after being under Aeetes' protection. Besides, the Golden Fleece was in our hands, it belonged to us! No. It belonged to Jason. That is why Jason murdered him. Absyrtus... I never developed any kind of affection towards him, but his death indeed lit the fuse of uncertainty in me. Jason was not a hero, but a murderer. Nevertheless, he did it for all of us. After all, Aeetes had sent his son to inevitable death, a fact that astonishes me. Was I important to him? He sent his legitimate heir in search of me. Was he finally able to recognize my worth? I would love to find that out. However, his son's death was attributed to my name. Jason took it upon himself to grant me the victory. And no, it is not something I wanted. I did not want to murder my brother. I did not do it, I swear! It was him! Jason is the killer! Is my father also a murderer? Yes, it is true, they both are, their stubbornness takes control of even their own mind, paralysing their ability to think properly in important moments. But women are hysterics, and whilst we become monsters, they are the heroes of every story told for centuries.

I know why I am here, telling my story. Yes, I am telling it to you, reader. It seems that everyone has forgotten my true nature. Jason dumped me for another woman in exchange for power. Why am I the evil character in this story? Is it because I murdered my children in cold blood? No! I did not do it! And yet you believe the words of a merciless murderer. Jason incited me to commit murder. Sorry. I am not being entirely honest with you. Yes, I murdered Creusa, my husband's fiancée. It was not out of jealousy, but out of revenge. The life he promised me was dishonest, and each step we took gave birth to a crimson river that we left behind. Yes, my name is stained with blood, just like Jason's. And yet everyone remembers me as a murderer. What about him? I want to stop getting involved with his name. I want the whole world to remember me for my deeds. Jason owes me every one of his triumphs. Without me he would not have been able to do anything. When did I decide to associate with such a useless being?

I am Medea, an intelligent and powerful woman! I am not the wife of, nor the daughter of! Call me by my name and remember me for my deeds.

*Medea's laughter fills the room and, consequently, blends with her shouts and groans. The room begins to darken, and a heavy voice establishes a verdict. Medea is sentenced to fall into the void for all eternity. All this time, her trace has demonstrated the truth of such atrocity: the murder of Mermerus and Pheres. According to experts, Medea, in a fit of anger, tried to get rid of everything related to Jason and, immediately afterwards, she took her children to her room. There, she told them that her father had abandoned them; she would be in charge of healing the pain that her father had left them. Children's souls look down on her mother. After hearing Medea's sentence, they exchange complicity glances and run into the arms of their father, who is looking at his wife for the last time.*

**María José Carmona Quero**





MEDUSA



## A statue in the house

It was the first time I found myself alone in the house, and even though I was raised here, it felt like I was in a completely different place. When my mother was alive, this place used to be so full of joy and warming smiles and now it was so cold and dark. I remember I was always playing outside in the garden with the dog, pretending he was a villain and I was the hero who wanted to defeat him. My mother once said she found my stories very entertaining and, sometimes, she would even encourage me to imagine different stories. But that was when she was alive and healthy; she never showed any sign of weakness when I was around. As a matter of fact, probably no one really knew she was ill.

My mother was always smiling.

The first years after my mother's heart failed were the hardest. I was alone with my father, who was always inside the house doing paperwork or anything related to his important, time-consuming job. He was never outside with me, and probably he didn't find enjoyable to spend time playing fantasies with his daughter. This situation continued until my teenage years when games were not so interesting and other things were catching my attention. I didn't know his name, but there was this one boy I was infatuated with at high-school. I once saw him looking at a magazine during lunch. The girl on the cover was wearing makeup and it seemed he was attracted to her. Therefore, it seemed like a good idea to put on my mother's makeup as a strategy to make him like me. I still had one of my mother's lipsticks, the one with the red shade; I never saw her wearing it, probably she regretted buying it or just didn't find the occasion to wear it.

I wore her lipstick the next day. Everybody was looking at me, but I didn't care, I wanted him to look at me. And he did. It was the first time a boy laid his eyes on me. It was exciting but weird at the same time. We spent the break time together and I couldn't help but blush like a little girl when he kissed me at the end of the day, just a peck because he didn't want any lipstick on his lips. However, the happiness didn't last long, for when I came back home, my father was waiting for me. The boy's girlfriend found a way to contact my father and told him what happened; she told him I was an attention-seeking little whore who wanted to steal her man. Absurd. Why did he never tell me he had a girlfriend?

That day changed my life completely. My father made me look at myself in the mirror and said I was a bad girl as he wiped out my lipstick with a dry towel. I knew he did it like that to hurt me. I never dared to wear makeup in public again. I never dared to go out without my father's permission, which was unusual, he would only let me leave the house when it was totally necessary, like going to school. And, of course, I wouldn't even put a step on the garden where I used to play as a child. I behaved and I did exactly what my father expected of me. Probably, the worst part was when he hid my mother's belongings from me so I wouldn't use them improperly.

But one day my father was gone too, and all I had was this house full of memories but it felt so empty. I walked around the house for a while, still feeling my

father's presence in certain rooms, especially in his office. I stood there, looking outside the window; you could see the garden from there, so beautiful and full of flowers, my mother's favourite flowers. After a couple of minutes, I turned around and I saw it. There was this statue in the corridor connecting my father's office with the living room. It had always been there but I never paid it too much attention when I was a child. It was as I grew older when the presence of the statue started to disturb me. It was the statue of a young man, naked, with defined muscles and perfect facial features. I never understood why its cold gaze made me feel so uncomfortable. It was as if the statue was alive, as if it could follow me but it was always there, frozen in the same place every time I would turn around. Probably it was the eyes, cold, so white and always staring.

I shivered and I decided I would get rid of that statue the next morning. I went back to my bedroom and proceeded to open a couple of boxes I found in the basement. My mother's belongings! I finally found them all. I spent the whole morning looking for them, I knew my father kept them somewhere in the basement because he forbid me to go down there. The first thing I saw was an old picture of my mother, she looked so young...

Suddenly, I turned around. Footsteps. I could hear steps outside the bedroom. Impossible. I was alone. I went back to look at my mother's things and I found the damn red lipstick. How a simple lipstick got me into so much trouble? I thought it would be funny to put it on; my father wasn't there to tell me what to do anymore and I was an adult now. I could wear makeup if I wanted to. I was about to do it when I heard steps again. What could it be? A stray cat that got into the house? A thief? Or just my imagination? It would be advisable to check it out just in case. I walked around the house, slowly, trying not to make much noise just in case. But I saw nothing. For a moment I thought someone was behind me, but when I turned around my eyes only met the statue and its petrified eyes. I sighed. I was acting like a child, it was normal to feel uneasy in this situation, I was alone, the house was big and it was getting darker, but this was pathetic. Taking a deep breath, I went back to my bedroom, but I heard the same noise when I was about to open the door. Ignore it. Ignore it. It is just your imagination. Just your imagination. I remembered my father didn't want my mother to feed my imaginative mind. He feared that I would grow up thinking life was full of fantasies. Probably he was right. I turned around just to make sure as I was about to walk into the room. I felt movement behind me. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw something, a formless thing with arms, it was a person, I was sure about it.

But again, when I turned to look, there was nothing there. However, this time I saw something; it couldn't be just my imagination. Could it be? I did a little test, I stood there giving my back to the emptiness of the house and started to walk towards the garden doors. I took a couple of steps, stopped, I looked behind me and I repeated. The fear was invading my body. I could only hear the steps and feel movement when I was walking and not looking directly to the source of the noise. It was as if someone or something was trying to hunt me.

How crazy is that?

I needed to call the police but the phone was in the office, the opposite direction. That would mean walking into the darkness and probably be face to face with the intruder. I had to take a chance. I took a deep breath and when my lungs were filled

with oxygen, I turned around and ran as fast as I could. The steps could be heard everywhere around me but I didn't stop, I didn't look around me, I would not even look at the mirrors I found on my way.

I just ran.

And then...

I ran into something tall and heavy. It felt like a wall blocking my way. My instincts took control over me and my reaction was to shove whatever was in front of me and I started running again. I heard a tremendous noise behind me, like something heavy crashing onto the floor and then something rolling over it.

I ran, but when my bare feet touched the grass of the garden I started to laugh.

How stupid.

The statue.

Did I really think an insignificant statue was a thief?

**Andrea Escudero Miranda**

## Medusa y la égida

Una luz salía por debajo de las cortinas. Sabía que no la dejaban entrar, que madre la encontraría y la sacaría de allí. Pero siempre había tenido mucha curiosidad por ver lo que guardaban allí. Se coló por detrás de las pesadas telas y se maravilló con las cosas que encontró. Fue paseando por entre los pasillos de vasijas y figuras, pero ella tenía una idea fija, lo quería encontrar. Sabía con seguridad que estaba allí, debía estar, su padre se lo había descrito un millón de veces. La armadura, la lanza, su figura perfecta, el escudo. Soñaba cada noche con verlo y le pedía a su padre que se lo contara una y otra vez. Se paró en seco. La había encontrado. Paseó la mirada por el casco que guardaba su larga y rizada melena; la parte superior de su armadura, aquí incompleta, dorada y escamada, protegiendo el pecho; la afilada lanza de la que sabía que brotaba gran parte de su poder; y el escudo, ese enorme escudo, la hermosa cara femenina y su pelo serpentino, al fin delante de sus ojos. Extendió los dedos acariciando el relieve de las serpientes, observando cada detalle, casi hipnotizada. Estaba tan absorta que ni siquiera escuchó los pasos.

—¡Procris! Hace rato te ando buscando... ¿qué te tengo dicho de venir a esta sala? Sabes que se enfadarán si te encuentran aquí—dijo la mujer preocupada.

—Pero madre... Sólo quería verlo, prometo no romper nada, de verdad—masculló la chiquilla con tono lastimero esperando que, de un momento a otro, la cogiera por el brazo y la acompañara fuera.

—¿Qué tiene ese escudo que te gusta tanto? ¿Por qué éste, habiendo tantos otros? —preguntó mirando a su hija con curiosidad.

La niña llevaba meses buscando la manera de entrar a verlo. No había día que no lo intentara. Más de una vez la habían pillado escondida cerca, esperando el momento exacto en el que nadie mirara para poder entrar a hurtadillas. Viendo la oportunidad de poder quedarse, escogió cuidadosamente sus palabras y puso la cara más inocente que encontró, rogando que fuera suficiente para conseguir su propósito.

—Madre, llevo desde que tengo uso de razón viendo serpientes por todos lados. Están por todas partes. Casi siempre en su forma original, como animal, otras bajo la forma de piernas o brazos, como cuenta padre sobre el rey Erictonio. Pero esto es... ¡es una mujer! Es su pelo, es hermosa. Padre siempre me habla de este escudo, del rostro y el cabello, pero nunca me contó quién es. ¿De quién es la cara que con tanto honor luce nuestra diosa Atenea en su escudo en todas partes? ¿Por qué ella?

Praxitea miró a su hija con asombro pues sabía que, de una manera u otra, se las iba a terminar ingeniando para volver a entrar sin que nadie la viera y conseguir que cualquier desconocedor de la historia le contara lo que fuera. Así pues, se rindió a la curiosidad de la niña y decidió sentarla para contárselo.

—No rompas ni toques nada, siéntate tranquila, pero la próxima vez no entres sin nuestro permiso—le advirtió. Y empezó a hacer memoria.

Cuenta la leyenda que, tras disputarse Atenas con el dios Poseidón, nuestra diosa Atenea erigió su templo en el corazón de la ciudad. Había en aquel entonces varias doncellas en el templo, sacerdotisas encargadas de desempeñar tareas bajo las órdenes de la diosa. Entre ellas se encontraba la hermosa Medusa. Era una joven muy especial, cercana y querida por la diosa. Se cuenta que era hija de dos criaturas divinas, Forcis y Ceto, de cuyo enlace surgieron dos hijas más aparte de Medusa. Se esperaba que las tres hermanas tuvieran la misma apariencia: un monstruo divino y poderoso dotado de alas doradas, increíbles garras, colmillos de jabalí y piel de serpiente y tenían el poder de petrificar con la mirada. Gorgonas las llamaban. Esteno y Euriale nacieron de dicha manera. No obstante, la tercera hija, Medusa, distaba mucho de parecerse a sus hermanas. Tenía apariencia humana, era una joven muchacha, de increíble belleza y actitud buena y noble. Era conocida en todo el templo por ayudar a todo el que lo precisara y la diosa le tenía gran estima por ello. No había persona que visitara el templo y no se maravillara con su belleza, cosa que a veces le jugaba malas pasadas. Algunas de las doncellas que allí trabajaban con ella la envidiaban, pues no se acercaban ni por asomo a la perfección de la joven. Sus grandes ojos esmeralda contrastaban con el blanco terso de su piel. La hermosa y redonda cara quedaba enmarcada por una preciosa melena rizada y su perfecta figura parecía como esculpida en mármol por los propios dioses. Deslumbraba allá por donde pisaba.

Así pasó un día que el dios Poseidón, dolido aún por haber perdido la disputa y el patronaje de la ciudad de Atenas, seguía buscando la manera de devolverle el golpe a Atenea. Había jurado encontrar el modo de hacerle perder los estribos y vengarse por haberse ganado el favor de los atenienses. Y pensó que una buena forma de hacerlo sería asestar un fuerte golpe donde más le doliera. El elemento esencial era la joven a la que tanto cariño tenía: Medusa. Así pues, Poseidón visitó una mañana el templo y dio con el momento perfecto para llevarse a la muchacha a una de las salas pidiéndole ayuda. La joven, inocente ella, pensó que la necesitaba de verdad. El dios, zalamero, comenzó a ensalzar la belleza de la muchacha, recitando versos improvisados, rodeándola, acercándose a ella con la intención de seducirla, observándola con perversión y acabando los poemas acariciando cada palabra final de manera sibilina cerca de la oreja de la joven. Lejos de ganarse sus favores, lo que consiguió fue alejarla de él. Cuando descubrió que era una encerrona para acercarse a ella, Medusa trató de disculparse prontamente con la excusa de que la diosa requería su presencia. El dios, viendo que no había logrado convencerla, la retuvo por la fuerza y le tapó la boca, llevándola contra la pared más alejada de donde se encontraban.

El hecho de tenerla tan cerca apesada entre su cuerpo y la pared no hizo más que encender las ganas del dios de poseer a la joven que, viendo el destello de él en sus ojos, intentó con más fuerzas zafarse de sus brazos. Poseidón, haciendo acopio de su gran fuerza de dios, sujetó a la joven por la cintura contra el muro, impidiendo que pudiera soltarse o huir. Mientras, con la otra se empeñó en soltar el cinto que sujetaba la túnica de la joven en los hombros. Ella intentó gritar, pero una mirada le fue suficiente para saber que eso solo empeoraría las cosas. Una voz grave y poderosa salida de los labios del dios la terminó de convencer:

—Esto es lo que he decidido. Nunca es bueno contradecir la palabra de un dios. Por tu bien colaborarás, joven, o las consecuencias serán perores.

La túnica corrió hacia el suelo, deslizándose por el perfil de la muchacha, dejando al desnudo su perfecta y marmórea figura. Intentó cubrirse el cuerpo con los brazos, pero el dios la apartó, observándola de arriba abajo con una oscura sonrisa torcida mientras se remangaba la túnica. La muchacha suplicaba en silencio con la mirada y el rostro compungido y lleno de lágrimas. En vano, intentó apartarse cuando vio que se echaba encima de ella, acariciándole desde el pecho hasta la cintura. Cuando sintió la mano sujetándola con fuerza contra la pared de nuevo, un grito desgarrador le salió del pecho, que fue callado de un guantazo por parte del dios. Dolorida, aterrada y casi sin tenerse en pie, se rindió a lo evidente: el dios había ganado a la humana. Poseidón la forzó cuanto quiso, disfrutando de su gran momento y de aquella bella joven a su antojo. Pero el grito de Medusa había alarmado a la gente del templo, que empezó a buscar el lugar de donde venía. Atenea, no viendo por los alrededores a Medusa, mandó a buscarla. Recorriendo los pasillos del templo, dio con ella en una de las salas más apartadas. Vio al gran dios correr hacia ella, agarrándose la túnica con aire indignado.

—¡Esa muchacha ha intentado seducirme, a mí, un dios! ¡Deberías tener cuidado con quien metes en tu templo a tu cargo, Atenea! ¡Mírala, si hasta se ha desnudado!— gritó con irritación.

Atenea, que conocía las intenciones del dios, hizo gala de la inteligencia que le caracterizaba y urdió un plan sobre la marcha. La imagen que allí vio y el conocimiento que tenía sobre la joven le llevaban a pensar que, claramente, Medusa no tenía la culpa de lo que allí había sucedido. Poseidón estaba en su templo con la intención de molestar de alguna manera. Luchar contra él no llevaría a nada bueno—ambos sabían que los estragos que pudieran causar serían peores que los resultados que pudiera obtener la diosa. Así que le siguió el juego.

—Saca a Medusa de aquí ahora mismo—azuzó a la primera doncella que cruzó su paso con ella—. Poseidón, te ruego que perdones lo sucedido. Tomaré represalias con quien estime conveniente. Ahora, si no te importa, tengo que solucionar unos asuntos—. Y lo instó a salir del templo.

La doncella salía con Medusa casi a rastras. Medusa, con la cara desencajada, se agarraba la túnica contra el cuerpo, tapándose todo cuanto podía, suplicando entre sollozos que la diosa tuviera compasión de ella. Cuando Atenea entró en la sala, la joven se tiró al suelo, temiendo que la furia de la diosa se volcara sobre ella. Pero todo cuanto sintió fue un calor reconfortante. Atenea la cubrió con su túnica y la arropó con un abrazo. La joven se derrumbó y se hundió entre sus ropas, llorando y temblando de enfado e impotencia.

—No fui yo, se lo juro, mi señora. ¡No fui yo! Me acorraló, me desnudó, me golpeó, me...

Un torrente de imágenes con lo que vino después recorrió su memoria. Atenea apretó fuerte a la joven contra su pecho e intentó tranquilizarla, pero la muchacha no atendía a razones.

—¡Esto no habría sucedido si fuera como mis hermanas! ¡Ellas son fuertes y poderosas y temibles! Habrían podido hacer algo contra él...

La diosa intentó callarla.



—Nadie puede parar a un dios, mi joven muchacha, nadie. Habrían podido evitar que sucediera inmediatamente. Pero, finalmente, Poseidón habría hecho de ellas lo que su voluntad hubiese querido. No es culpa tuya. Cálmate, tengo que hablar contigo.

Atenea se apartó y le dejó un poco de espacio. Tras un rato, la joven consiguió recomponerse. Atenea se acercó de nuevo a ella, le quitó la túnica manchada y raída y pidió que le trajeran una limpia. La joven se cubrió con vergüenza, la diosa la observó con cariño.

—No te cubras avergonzada. Enorgullécete y sé fuerte. Eres bella, no te tienes que esconder ni sentir culpable. Muéstrate segura de ti misma y no te dejes vencer por nadie. Ningún hombre debería poder hacerte sentir como te has sentido. Nadie tiene el derecho de atemorizarte, someterte o forzarte—la vistió con la túnica nueva y la cogió por los hombros—. No voy a permitir que ninguna otra persona sea capaz de hacerte lo que Poseidón te ha hecho. Dices que tus hermanas son más fuertes que tú. Eso no lo discuto. Pero tú también te harás respetar. Conservarás tu belleza, pero será una belleza mortífera y todo funcionará a tu antojo.

La diosa cerró los ojos y Medusa sintió que una sensación cálida recorría todo su cuerpo, que algo había cambiado. Pensaba que entraba aire por entre las columnas y que éste rozaba y movía su cabello. Pero un siseo la hizo salir de esa idea. Alzó la mano y sintió un roce frío y cariñoso.

—¡Serpientes! —gritó para sí misma y miró a la diosa desconcertada.

—No, no has errado al pensar. Es lo que crees que es. Sé que las escamas te son familiares. Tendrás un recuerdo de tu familia siempre junto a ti y te dará la fortaleza que tú quieras, cuando quieras y como quieras—dijo Atenea divertida.

—Pero, no entiendo... ¿no me castiga entonces?

—Ya te he dicho que nada de esto ha sido culpa tuya. No te voy a castigar, Medusa, te doy la oportunidad de defenderte por tu propia mano cuando vuelvas a pasar por la misma situación. Cuando elijas defenderte, solo tendrás que mirar a los ojos de quien te moleste y desear convertirlo en piedra. Tu cabello ahora será igual de hermoso, pero además te concederá el poder que te digo. Sin embargo, no te puedo ayudar más que con esto. Ahora, mi joven niña, me temo que te tendré que llevar a otro de mis templos. Si Poseidón sabe que no te castigué, seguramente vaya en tu busca y tratará de hacerte algo peor.

Y así fue como Medusa, con su nuevo poder, recogió lo poco que tenía y se encaminó al nuevo templo que Atenea le ofrecía. Pero la envidia siempre corrompe las conciencias más puras. Una de las jóvenes doncellas del templo de Atenea se enteró de lo sucedido e intentó dar con la manera de hacer al dios partícipe de las noticias que conocía. No tardó mucho la historia en llegar a oídos de Poseidón quien, como bien intuyó Atenea, planeó la manera de volver a arremeter contra Medusa para acabar con ella. Calibró la situación por un momento y llegó a la conclusión de que no le merecía la pena mancharse las manos de manera directa y, mucho menos, malgastar su tiempo en esa inmundicia humana. Decidió dejar el asunto en manos de otros.

Se enteró de que había un joven, Perseo, en busca de un reto que llevar a cabo para ganarse la mano de la que quería que fuera su futura esposa, la princesa Hipodamía. Aprovechando la situación, se le presentó al joven y le propuso la idea de llevarle como presente a dicha princesa la cabeza de un ser divino y temible, una Gorgona. Perseo, interesado en lo que el dios le contaba, escuchó con atención y accedió a llevar a cabo la misión, sin pensar que Poseidón tenía otras intenciones muy diferentes a las suyas. Apoyado por el dios, se decidió a conseguir la cabeza de Medusa para demostrar que era merecedor de la mano de la princesa y le pidió al dios toda la ayuda que estuviera en su mano para conseguir su propósito.

—Se cree esa sucia humana transformada que es la única que goza de la ayuda de los dioses—pensó para sí mismo Poseidón—. No será la única favorecida.

Y mandó a Perseo a presentarse antes otras divinidades. Perseo acudió a los dioses pidiendo ayuda para su misión. De Hermes consiguió un par de zapatillas aladas que le permitirían moverse con ligereza y sin ser oído; del mismísimo dios del inframundo, Hades, consiguió un casco que le haría invisible en cuanto lo vistiera; y el mismo Poseidón forjó para Perseo una espada y un escudo perfecto y brillante, tan brillante que parecía un espejo donde se podía ver uno perfectamente reflejado. Poseidón advirtió al joven Perseo de la dificultad añadida de su tarea: tendría que ser sigiloso, pues Medusa podría rápidamente zafarse de él y tenía el poder de convertirlo a uno en piedra con tan solo una mirada. Debía evitar a toda costa mirarla a los ojos directamente, de esa manera salvaría su vida. De lo contrario, solo lograría dejar en bandeja la mano de la princesa y morir en vano. Avisado, Perseo partió deseando probar su valía y volver con la cabeza de la Gorgona. Pero Poseidón le dio un último consejo.

—Cuando acabes con la Gorgona, lleva su cabeza a Atenas, al templo de Atenea y dile que has dado muerte a la criatura que tanto le molestaba. Ella, a cambio, te colmará de regalos y los podrás llevar también a tu adorada princesa.

Con esa última sugerencia, Perseo partió en busca de la Gorgona. Y no tardó mucho en dar con ella siguiendo las instrucciones de Poseidón. Caída ya la noche, Perseo encontró el templo que el dios le había dicho. Sopesó todas las posibilidades antes de entrar y decidió esperar a que la oscuridad total le sirviera de aliada, mientras buscaba las zapatillas que Hermes le regaló. Toda precaución era poca y tenía que intentar evitar que cualquier ruido, por pequeño que fuese, lo descubriera en pleno ataque. Con las zapatillas en los pies, sin rozar el suelo y con sumo cuidado, fue recorriendo los pasillos del templo. Todo estaba en silencio. Perseo avanzaba con cautela. Apenas veía, el oído le servía de guía y una fuerza que no conocía lo invitaba a seguir un rumbo fijo con determinación. En uno de los muchos giros que tomó, paró en seco. Seguía sin ver mucho, pero un siseo leve se escuchaba de fondo. Iba advertido de la presencia de pequeñas serpientes por toda la cabeza de la Gorgona. El nervio de haber dado con la criatura se fue apoderando de su cuerpo y, antes de seguir adelante, cubrió sus ojos con un trozo que arrancó de su túnica para evitar mirar a Medusa a los ojos por error.

El crujir de la tela alertó a las serpientes de la presencia de alguien. El movimiento en sus cabellos despertó a la joven que se puso en tensión buscando a alguien ajeno al templo. No veía nada, pero el estado de alerta agudizó sus sentidos. Se movió en silencio, buscando un rincón por el que se colara, aunque fuera, un minúsculo

rayo de luna que le permitiera ver algo y así dirigir la mirada petrificante directa a quien amenazara con atacar. Pero el sigilo le servía de bien poco; las serpientes siseaban buscando al intruso y el sonido guiaba a Perseo. Este seguía con lentos movimientos el suave susurro de los reptiles y, en un momento en el que sintió que una leve luz le rozaba, temió quedar al descubierto y alzó el escudo para defenderse. Medusa, que iba directa a encarar su rostro, se encontró con la superficie perfecta del escudo y por un momento se desconcertó. Los ojos que vio no fueron los que esperaba. El color verde siempre le había gustado, la colmaba de calma. Sin embargo, aquel verde causó en ella una sensación diferente. Un hormigueo le subió desde la punta de los dedos de los pies, recorriendo las piernas hacia arriba. Conforme se extendía, sintió que un frío terrible se apoderaba de ella. Por vez primera vio a las pequeñas serpientes que adornaban su cabeza, que se retorcían entre quejidos. Lo último que vio fue la luz de la luna reflejándose en las brillantes escamas y luego... Luego nada.

Un crujido seco alertó a Perseo. Siguió parado en actitud de defensa detrás del escudo cuando de repente se percató de que el siseo había cesado. Temeroso por haber quedado expuesto ante la criatura, bajó el escudo y extendió la espada para atacar. Pero dio con algo duro y el filo de la espada chirrió. Desesperado por no ver y sentirse vulnerable, se arrancó la tela que tapaba sus ojos y se quedó petrificado con lo que vio. Una perfecta estatua de piedra justo delante de él lo miraba con rostro amenazante. Comprendió entonces que el plan de Poseidón había funcionado y se maravilló por un momento con la belleza de la joven de piedra, sintiendo no haber podido disfrutar de ella cuando aún no lucía de piedra. Volvió en sí y cayó en la cuenta de que la Gorgona era suya. Un escalofrío le recordó que el dios le había avisado.

—No la mires aunque parezca muerta. Sus ojos podrían matarte aún.

Aestó pues un golpe con todas sus fuerzas por encima de los hombros de la joven y la piedra se quebró, cayendo la perfecta cabeza a sus pies. Con cuidado la metió entre los pliegues de su túnica y emprendió el viaje de vuelta a Atenas. No fue hasta que salió del templo cuando entendió aquella misión. La princesa lo esperaba. Atenea le daría los últimos obsequios y, después de eso, la mano de Hipodamía le esperaba. Pero no todo sucedió como esperaba. A las puertas del templo de Atenea, pidió a una de las doncellas que lo guiara hasta la diosa. Después de un tiempo de espera, la diosa entró por el arco de la sala en la que Perseo se encontraba. Atenea lo miraba con curiosidad:

—Soy Perseo y traigo algo que enseñarle, mi señora. La criatura que tanto le molestaba, ya no lo seguirá haciendo. Anoche le di muerte con mi espada—dijo buscando la cabeza de Medusa en su túnica.

La diosa se horrorizó. Reconoció esos ojos al momento, pero los mismos que brillaban hermosos días antes, parecían ahora vacíos. Acarició las serpientes con cariño y una lágrima cayó por su mejilla. De inmediato, una punzada de ira recorrió su espalda y tuvo que reprimir el impulso de golpear con toda la fuerza de su brazo al joven que sostenía la cabeza de su adorada Medusa. Perseo, no viendo la respuesta que esperaba, se encogió sobre sí mismo y cayó de rodillas, implorando perdón sin entender por qué. Atenea reprimió toda su ira y la canalizó en un grito desgarrador que resonó en todo el templo y gran parte de Atenas. Pidió explicaciones al joven Perseo, que se deshizo en mil disculpas rogando el perdón de la diosa. Juró mil veces no saber nada de lo que hacía, solo lo que Poseidón le contó. Perdonó la vida al muchacho y lo hizo salir cuanto

antes de su templo. Perseo le pidió la cabeza para llevarla como trofeo y la sola idea de que otras manos que no fueran las suyas tocaran a Medusa asqueó a la diosa.

—No será con este acto tan ruin con el que te ganarás la mano de ninguna princesa, muchacho. Esta joven era inocente, no hizo nada para merecer el trato que se le dio y mucho menos la muerte que acabó con su vida. Si esa princesa te elige, será porque su voluntad se lo dicte, no porque le hayas llevado ningún trofeo. Si no te lo ganas, es porque nunca lo mereciste. Ahora vete.

Y así fue como el joven Perseo abandonó el templo de Atenea para nunca volver. Lo que fue de él después, nunca lo averigüé, pero creo que no consiguió la mano de la princesa. Atenea lloró la muerte de la criatura Gorgona por un tiempo. Su cabeza de piedra nunca más se separó de ella. Decidió ponerla en su escudo desde entonces y defender Atenas con la ayuda de aquella gran mujer que tanta valía tuvo para ella. Fue valiente, fuerte y noble hasta el final de sus días. Y así lo siguió siendo todas las veces que Atenea emprendió guerras con ella de la mano. La acompañaba a todos lados, formando parte de su querido escudo, la Égida, para siempre.

La niña miraba a su madre con los ojos como platos, dirigiendo a cada rato miradas furtivas de admiración al escudo de aquella figura de Atenea con su Égida y Medusa. Ese mismo día habló con sus padres y prometió haber madurado y ser más responsable.

Caminaré siempre con cuidado, lo prometo. ¿Puedo, por favor entrar a la sala de los objetos cuando quiera? Seré buena, he pensado mucho y aprendido de la historia de madre. Algún día seré merecedora de grandes cosas como Medusa, me lo ganaré. Por hoy, solo quiero poder entrar a ver la figura, la Égida con su hermosa cara.

**Luna Saavedra Cortés**

## We are all Medusa

In those times when mythology reached its height, a little girl called Medusa was born. Her parents were known as Forcis and Ceto. Many ended up addressing Medusa as a ruthless female monster. However, what they did not know was that even her name referred to marvelous concepts such as *protector* and *guardian*. In fact, she was just mortal.

Medusa's beauty was so exceptional that she ended up attracting the attention of Poseidon, who was considered the Great God of the Seas, also known as the older brother of Zeus, son of Cronos and Rhea. Nevertheless, her beauty not only attracted the attention of Zeus but also of Athena, regarded as the Goddess of War, Justice, Knowledge and Science. Unfortunately, Athena saw Medusa differently from Poseidon since her jealousy corrupted her. Not only was she envious of the way that Medusa was shining, but also of her gorgeous hair.

One day like any other, Medusa was quietly in the Temple of Athena—she was known as the priestess of that temple. Suddenly, Poseidon, a very strong and robust man, appeared in search of Medusa to finally conquer her. He proclaimed his love for her, but Medusa did not reciprocate. Was this real love, or just pure sexual desire? If only at that moment she could turn that man who dared touch her without her own consent into pure stone with just a look... Using his strength and cruelty with no empathy and his blinding anxiety, Poseidon forced Medusa until she had no strength left to resist. Medusa, who was terrified and in pain, stayed on the cold ground. Her light inside had gone, and the pain that she felt would remain permanent for the rest of her days.

Finding out what happened to Medusa, Athena ended up seeing Medusa as a threat and not as a victim. She found the girl guilty of provoking Poseidon and it was Medusa who would be punished at the end of the day. The punishment that Athena imposed on Medusa was that she would resemble her two sisters, Esteno and Euriale, since both were portrayed as monsters. They had fangs and metallic hands. Were they real monsters? Or was the image affected by the eyes that saw them as beastlike creatures like they did with Medusa? Another important feature to consider about Medusa's sisters is that they had the power to turn into stone anyone who dared look them directly into their eyes. Anyone in such case would then be petrified. Athena, affected by her anger and jealousy, also turned Medusa's stunning hair into serpents, and banished Medusa from her lands forever. Medusa could not suffer any further rejection as she was already empty and broken since that day in the Temple of Athena.

But an unexpected event was about to happen. Medusa started to feel a shiver. The nausea that she was feeling was not only from the disgust that she felt as a result of the tragedy in the temple and her anxiety caused by everyone's rejection, but because of an unwanted pregnancy. She could not stop thinking that what she had inside was not her son, it was not and it could not be her son. What was growing inside of her? What could she do now?

Eventually, Athena found out again and she decided to order Perseus to kill Medusa. Athena would not stain her hand with Medusa's blood, but her soul and her conscience would since it is not only the one who kills, but the one who does nothing to prevent it and remains silent. And in effect, no one did anything for Medusa.

Perseus proceeded to carry out his mission and Medusa was unable to resist because she was asleep in that moment. When Perseus managed to cut her head off, two children emerged from Medusa's womb, of course, two children born of tragedy. It is said that from the spilled blood of Medusa, snakes and scorpions that currently inhabit in the desert were made, but these insects could be the result of that sexual abuse because since then she felt rotten inside. She was not mourned. No one cried for her loss or her catastrophe. She never had support or help, even her head was seen as a trophy at the hand of Athena. It is said that Medusa's blood was saved by the gods since the one that flowed from the left side of her neck was deadly poison and the one on the right side had the power to raise dead people.

How many women today are Medusas and had a similar ending? It is definitely the time to change the myth for the true reality that it hides, because after all, her story is the reality of many women nowadays, which must not fall into oblivion. Think of the case of Marta del Castillo, who was raped and murdered, whose body was never found even today, or the crime of Alcasser, three teenage girls kidnapped, raped and then, murdered as well, and so many more horrible cases that happen daily and have no voice at all. We must fight for a voice and for better place.

*....I do believe in Medusa.*

*...And I do believe in you.*

**Margarita Oliver Correa**

## An exemplary party

Legend says that originally Medusa was a young mortal, tempting but above all, beautiful. Her own name meant *queen* or *guardian*, according to some sources. Medusa's beauty was so prominent that even Poseidon himself, known as the God of the Sea, fell madly in love with her.

Poseidon was known for always getting everything he wanted, and that included women. No one resisted the charms and power of Poseidon. He tried by all means to conquer the young Medusa—celebrations, numerous gifts and speeches in her honour. However, Medusa was not impressed at all. She was looking for pure love, based on mutual respect.

One night, Medusa received an invitation to a glamorous private party held by the magnificent Poseidon at the temple of the Goddess of Purity, Athena. She, tired of so many insinuations, decided to go to end Poseidon's terrible attempts and make it clear that she was not interested, and, additionally, why not, to have a good time at a good party.

Medusa did not mean to impress anyone but herself. She wore a dress of the most expensive silk that she could afford that highlighted her eyes and made her look more beautiful than she already was.

Everyone was fascinated by such beauty, and mainly, the insistent Poseidon, since he could not take his gaze from her. Poseidon approached her and made advances to her on several occasions, but she kept rejecting him. And the God of the Sea went to her to finally declare his love and convince her to marry him. Nevertheless, Medusa was tired of so much impudence and insolence, so she made it clear to him.

The party guests looked at her expectantly. However, she showed no other sign than gratitude for his invitation, and that angered Poseidon. For that reason, the angry god did not think twice, and when the guests were dancing and celebrating and were oblivious to what was happening around her, Poseidon dragged Medusa to a more private place.

'Beautiful Medusa, have all my attempts to conquer you been in vain? I must tell you that I am madly in love with you.'

'I am truly flattered, but I cannot accept your gifts or your proposals. That is the reason why I came. I appreciate all your effort, but I would not like it to continue much longer. I hope you understand.'

The God of the Sea could not speak a word. He was consumed with anger. Poseidon had never been rejected, least of all by a woman. He intended to satisfy his own desires, but he found a strong and self-confident woman fending for herself.

Medusa, at that moment, began to scream for the guests to come and find her, to help her. Then all the people went in search of the deafening screams and found Medusa grappling with Poseidon. All those visitors realized who the God of the Sea

truly was— someone arrogant, evil, selfish, who blatantly abused women and someone who did not care about the welfare of those around him.

Medusa then gracefully emerged from the dark room she was in to continue enjoying the party. Inwardly, she was proud of her actions and that someone like her, humble and modest, would have made someone as powerful and vindictive as Poseidon understand that a *no* must always be respected.

At the call of the cries of Medusa came the Goddess of Chastity and Purity, known as the Goddess Athena. She wanted to punish Poseidon in an exemplary way so that he would always remember the heinous act he had committed and that would serve as an example to all the Gods and Demigods of Olympus and men, so that they would know that women cannot be abused, that one must abide by their will.

The Goddess Athena, before imposing her final punishment, took into account several options, but finally opted for the punishment by which the God of the Sea, Poseidon, would put himself in the place that he himself had given women along the way. Thus, every time Poseidon saw or felt desires for any woman who did not correspond him, he would become a woman.

A woman.

**Silvia Moreno Urbano**



# MNEMOSYNE



## Heart of gold

I saw them. Their classical beauty was unmistakable.

Her pumpkin hair flew even without wind. Her naked figure seemed to float, a figure that could have been regarded from every angle and the eye wouldn't be displeased. She was tall, of course, and her skin revealed the youth inherent in her.

~~I couldn't smell her aroma from this hidden position. If it was sweet as the sweetest thing in the world I wouldn't know.~~

She seemed to gather the beauty from a nymph, a Pleiad and a fairy. I wouldn't be mistaken if I said that she was beautiful nature personified. Her flesh and iron were perfectly clean. Her metallic legs showed an incredible precision of craft. Hamstring and the beginning of the thighs glinted to the eye due to its unpolluted nature. It was then when the flash was born again. The waist and back presented themselves bravely until her hair covered the rest.

And she wasn't alone.

The figure next to her smoked their cigarette, calmly. The grey smoke spread into the air, vanishing quickly. Their short, black hair presented a curve that caught the attention almost instantly. The more I looked, the more I realized that it wasn't just black. Pink and light blue shadows illuminated their scene, portraying a more vivid image.

That was just the beginning.

Contrary to the divine figure, this one wasn't naked. A beautiful black short dress patterned with clockwork motifs ramped from their tanned chest to the beginning of the thighs and these weren't to be missed. Their legs were garnished in a transparent fashion. Above the knee, there was a separation between almost naked transparency and a blatant black pattern. The beautiful thing about this was the little hearts weaved in black in the transparent pattern. That pleasant sight sure made hearts smile.

I tried to look more, to get more about this strange couple. But I couldn't see anything but their backs. Comparing both of them I realized the down-to-earthiness of the right cute figure and the non-human non-average aspect of the left one. Almost alienated.

I closed the eye, setting the ear system open. I then understood more what their gathering was about.

[Hot steam can be heard as some kind of source in the scene. The noise isn't loud enough as it is far enough, so it is possible to hear the conversation]

THEY

Fancy meeting you here.

SHE

[Her voice is soft, sweet and tender]

*αγαπητέ, είναι χαρά να σε δω.*

THEY

...

SHE

*συγχωρέστε με.*

*I can be understandable now.*

*And you came here... how?*

THEY

Before I were a monster. Now—thanks to the wisdom of you, Oh, gods and goddesses—I are perfect. And I come here to claim what it's mine.

SHE

*True it is that beautiful you are now.*

*To your intentions who must bow?*

THEY

All creation will be the ones who will bow. Thou will become my sister and Zeus himself will be the one who will stretch our hand in the Olympus. 'Cause eternity is at glance, I will become the perfect being that I always wanted to be.

SHE

[Her voice trembles a bit]

*Are these words things that I must allow?*

*Aren't you thinking of becoming eternal... now!*

THEY

[Firmly]

I already made our mind. But fear not, I're not defying thee, future sibling. I're going to embrace thee and enjoy ragweed with thee, with Athene, with Posidon, with everyone. I will love you.

SHE

[In a comprehensive tone]

*Ανδρος...*

*Immortal so you want to be*

*Laudable is you being part of we*

*Is this your final decree?*

THEY

That's our duty, dear. That's why I travelled far and wide. That's why I'm here, one step behind entering this Fountain. Notwithstanding, there's something wrong. Are thou the guardian of this forbidden place? Are you going to prevent me from doing it?

[Gives a drag to their stylized cigarette, then expels the smoke]

SHE

...

*Guardian am I not.*

*Nor my purpose*

*I have forgotten.*

[She is going to adventure into saying something more but refrains]

THEY

Then? Why would such a cutie wander here aimlessly? Thou artn't a wanderer, nor lost. Beauty itself is never lost, are I wrong?

[Takes a step]

What have thou come for?

SHE

*To you my thoughts I must confess*

*That anymore my life I see a bless*

*All these lust, mankind and excess*

*I don't see the point to progress*

*Is lost the life that I possess?*

*I think the answer is yes.*

*This all is such a mess...*

THEY

Are my ears betraying me? Have I heard wrong? Thou used to represent the joy that lives within all of us. Thou art beauty. I can't understand still what is thy duty here.

SHE

*Can't you see the damage that has been done?*

*Can't you see the happiness that is now gone?*

*I lived so long, there are no things undone.*

*And I hate everything for what I have gone.*

*What's left? Hope? Love? None.*

*Let's enter the Fountain,*

*Come by and let me die.*

THEY

[Unsure]

I will take you by the hand, but give us a chance to persuade thee.

Resetting the sight system and hearing nothing again, I glanced upon them. *Ανδρος* was holding her crafted right hand. For obvious reasons I couldn't understand the fashion in which they were talking about anymore, but I quite trained my eye to read lips moving.

They walked slowly as if they were scared of facing what would become next.

~~If only I could hold their hands too.~~

Right in front of the main entrance, they stopped. A huge copper arch rose upon us. Purple energy emanated from metallic orbs that were hanging from the arch. They sighted. I noticed by their chests moving up and down calmly at the same time.

A place like never seen showed itself. Like descending into madness, the floor was engraved by a labyrinthic pattern. Blue crystals were inlaid the soil, impossible not to see and everywhere but following a determined organization. The circular structure of this rounded-like place reminded me of a theatre.

In walking fifty steps behind them, I noticed that the pattern on the floor wasn't just a simple pattern. It had something in it that I couldn't decipher, for now.

In the centre of this theatrical scenario, a huge rose stone rose. Strings and wires were attached to it, giving a feeling of being dangerous to touch. Smaller stones populated the centre in a seemingly random order. The place was apparently inhabited. But they weren't afraid of a possible ambush either.

As they approached the stone, the electric sensation that emanated from it was more and more visible. I couldn't feel the electric and magnetic intensity, but my eyes could catch the subtle electric pulses that emanated from it. It was full of energy.

Both exchanged words, as if they were deciding to agree on touching the stone together at the same time. But something stopped them. Or someone.

And, then, an Art Angel. Back from the stone but still one with nature, beautiful as a mother, her face was full of poetry. I never saw a woman like that, so tall and magnificent, but still, her face did ring a bell to me. Just a green translucent robe covered her titanic body. No hair, just wires. Wires so long that touched the floor and vanished behind rocks and spaces, wires so long that felt like she herself was connected to this

scenario, wires that made her more unhuman than the red haired beauty. Admiring her figure, her name slipped through my tongue, too late to realise.

‘Mnemosyne...’

And I hoped nobody heard me out.

She aimed her staff at the goddess, and spoke.

MNEMOSYNE

..., η κόρη μου,

*what is the reason for σύ to come here?*

*Is the end of Eras coming near?*

SHE

*Mother Memory,*

*Maybe my coming does so*

*Am I pestering thee?*

MNEMOSYNE

*How would you pester me*

*Being as μείς are here three?*

SHE

*Truth is, I'm tired of immortality.*

*Life has stopped of having morality.*

*Now, men are filled with depravity.*

*God-like life nonsense now is.*

*Please,*

*Do you have a remedy for this?*

MNEMOSYNE

*A remedy for thee there is.*

*Tell me, mortal,*

*What is your role in this?*

THEY

I're tired of being someone more. I want to surpass life and become a god. The same as her, but totally the opposite. Give us nectar, oh Mother of Memory and I will be satisfied.

MNEMOSYNE

*The answer you both seek in your heart there is.*

*Open it and you will receive the longed for wish.*

[Mechanical sounds]

Just when I opened my eyes, the Goddess, right in front of us, opened her chest. A white, gleaming wired heart pulsed. Its 1980sefish veins caught the attention of the eye. It was undoubtedly the heart of a goddess. She took some steps and touched the stone, receiving the electricity that overflowed from it. Pain was on her face.

Just at the same time, beautifully, they opened their chest too, Mnemosyne watching. Avδpoς's heart was completely different. Black red, barely wired, pulsing fast. The size difference was huge, being this incredibly smaller, something that would be expected from a simple mortal. Pain was in their eyes, but no expression, no sounds, no gestures.

Mother Memory said something. Without further ado, blood spilled everywhere. Facing each other, hearts in hand, both smiled. Getting closer, She put her heart in the chest's place of theirs, and they did the same, interchanging them. One closed the thoracic compartment of another and living without a heart seemed something plausible just for a few seconds.

A shock hit both of them. She was on her knees. They was standing with their hand on their chest, incapable of believing the humungous power that was now flowing inside them.

SHE

[Gasping and breathing heavily]

So this is what it feels like...

THEY

I feel it, inside of us, I feel it...

MNEMOSYNE

*Now you both have what you wanted.*

*My daughter, feel what is to be daunted.*

*Beautiful being, should you come with me?*

THEY

Is she going to stay here? Suffering and groaning?

MNEMOSYNE

*She now has something to accept,*

*Something that she wouldn't neglect.*

*Anonymous she will become now*



*And before you she will now bow.*

THEY

Is this alright?

MNEMOSYNE

She will be alright, let her time to comprehend.

THEY

But I see pain in her eyes and sadness in her body.

MNEMOSYNE

*Can't you remember?*

*She lives, whatsoever.*

*You felt pain and sickness as she will feel,*

*Going through same things you did deal.*

*Dying is her gift and suffering her path.*

*Hers is the power of human wrath.*

THEY

(This does not really convince me...)

Where are you taking us now, then?

MNEMOSYNE

[The voice becomes more and more distant]

*Should you come with me, will you receive the sight.*

*The fair, the immortal, the true, the one, the right.*

(Sight? What sight?)

THEY

Do you really think that she will escape the normative world? Will she be able to surpass rules and kill the ego? After all, this new mortality is her way to kill her past, her mistakes.

MNEMOSYNE

*As true as looking oneself in the mirror and breaking the glass...*

When I opened my eyes again, there she was, still bleeding, alone and quiet. I tried to venture myself in touching her, saying something nice, checking the stone, doing something after all this continuous stalking. But I wasn't able. My physical

envelope didn't let me. I wasn't prepared for something like this. I can't handle what I have seen and heard. I can't.

Tears, torn and worn.

Blood, spilled and stuck.

Sweet, bittersweet, bitter.

Happy, sappy, sad.

Joy, regret, blame.

Negation,

Negotiation,

Acceptance.

'I can't go on'

'I can't go on'

Repentance.

Footsteps.

Water, hot water.

Cold air, cold.

Words gleam:

'The End'

**Alexiel Reyes Martín**

MYRRHA



## Mirage

I am a woman who no longer understands anything. This doesn't matter, nothing matters to me any more. I am wrapped in silence, as a wave on non-reason, quiet and opaque, flows over me, leaving a trail of memories in sepia, photographs of my grandmother, my grandfather, photographs displayed on the chest of drawers here, in my bedroom. Like beer spilt on hot asphalt, words dissolve even as they emerge from my lips, from my mind. I am no longer the real protagonist of my own story, the story you are reading, for I have become a mask, a discoloured puppet, articulated by worn-out strings, moved by a superior and anonymous force. Introvert woman, femme fatale, chaste girl, witch. Masked? None of these. I *am* the mask.

I love the mask game, for life is a Greek tragi-comedy on Mount Olympus, a luxurious Venetian ball on the Grand Canal. I see in the bedroom mirror that my true face is a new mask. Am I nothing but the golden nightingale? Artificial? Am I a radiant being? Inside, I am infested with starving moths. I say I do not understand, and yet I do remember. What is the present if not an archeological dig? Stones of the past. But of what is the future made? An inkling of life – or a rotten seed, unfertilised?

I remember the fool I made of myself at Mass. I ran to the haven of Christ's tabernacle to try to escape from the black hole of my regret and remorse, but it only served me to contemplate my own loss of faith, the death of my last hope. 'My friends, we must submit to the will of our Father in Heaven. As Mary our mother submitted when she said: be it unto me according to Thy word.' Those words of the priest, incandescent swords, stabbed my soul. Did I wish to be the sacrificial lamb? In one single moment I forsook the heavenly Father, and, astounded, I gazed into the void that had been my faith. I abandoned Christ and became myself the Messiah of a new brown age of half-truth as I walk over the winged waves of a mirage. Across the dream of a whole life, my life. While time and reality drifted from me I stood up, and the eyes of the faithful flew open wide at the sight of my madwoman disguise. Tears, screams, vertigo, convulsion. I crashed to the cold chessboard of the tiles, crumpling, a pawn in a game I was never meant to win. I sobbed, I stamped, and I heard the guffaws of the sceptics, saw the contorted faces of the faithful congregation wrapped by a belief in the truths of appearances and deceit.

In the silence of my bedroom, a cell now, I smashed one by one the CDs that my father had given me. Leonard Cohen, Keith Jarrett, Marisa Monte, Maria Bethânia. And Kylie, when I trod the world with Titan feet. Part of the past. And then an icy, soaking sweat flooded every pore of my skin. Suddenly.

All life is a dream to all, and dreams themselves are but a dream.

On blurry summer nights my mother used to tell me: 'Sleep, my darling, sleep. I will be here to watch your dream.' And I thought I heard her speak as a rusty bell was tolling nine o'clock. Which day was this? It seems that it was yesterday, or even a few seconds ago. Time is as slippery as an oily fish. Then I heard the threatening creak as he unlocked the door, familiar, too familiar. His rough creased hands slid lasciviously over

my skin, white, I know, as ermine. A sudden shock. A stifled shout. A marshy anguish cloistered among the pink flannel sheets of a child's bed always glowing with soft coral dreams. This nightmare came even as I heard my mother's voice: 'Sleep, my darling, sleep. I will be here to watch your dream.' I longed to tell my mother, to break forever the balance that existed —mother, father. I could not break that balance, could not disturb my mother's innocence. His blunt firm steps always gradually coming closer, chasing me around the house, his hoarse voice that could paralyse me from head to toe. The gin on the breath of the night vampire. I offered him my rosy neck in a double act of sacrilege. I have been desecrated and destroyed. Naked I came into the world and naked will I leave it.

I greet my audience. And you, my reader, will invade my mind. The dream is real. Tick tock. I open my eyes. What time is it? Have I been dreaming? There are traces of violence on my skin, and I smell the mingled perfumes of gin and lust and desire. I am lonely, like a star rising without direction in the immensity of space. But I am not alone, not alone in my pink flannel sheets. At my bedside I find my father and he will care for me. 'Sleep, my darling, sleep. I will be here to watch your dream.'<sup>2</sup>

**Gerardo Rodríguez Salas**

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<sup>2</sup> This story was originally published in *Meanjin* 65.4 (2006): 63-65. ISSN: 0025-6293.

**NARCISSUS**





## A yellow narcissus

Aida woke up to the sounds of raindrops gently making contact with the windows of her bedroom. She sighed. It apparently hadn't been a great night's sleep, because she felt exhausted and willing to just keep her eyes shut and sleep for eternity. She started stretching her body, but noticed aching in her wrists. Aida slowly squinted her eyes at the piercing daylight from outside to find herself in her bedroom. As she drowsily made her way to the window rubbing her eyes, she noticed a peculiar scent of perfume that had seemingly permeated the entire walls of the room. Aida didn't recognise the scent. It was dense, like what an old lady would wear, unfamiliar. As she reached the window pane and her eyes finally came into focus, she suddenly sensed a surge of adrenaline hit her whole being, as what was on the other side of the stained glass seemed nothing like her home.

'Wait, where is our garden? And why aren't the dogs barking?' Aida stuttered as panic set in.

She turned around to find herself not in her bedroom, but *a* bedroom. There were no family photos of her and her mum in the garden, the walls were missing Aida's favourite flower-pattern wallpaper, there was just a bed and a desk. Next to the bed was a wall-mounted mirror, reflecting Aida's incoherent self, and she couldn't recognise it. Instead of a bubbly, pink-cheeked, curly haired girl of 14, whose petite physique didn't allow her to reach into the cupboard where her mum would hide the pastries, stood a lanky, pale, middle-aged woman with a slouched, bruised body, whose facial features faintly resembled those of Aida, despite the deep shade of purple under her eyes and her lifeless expression. Aida started breathing heavily as she rushed to the mirror, trying to make sense of the situation.

'Where am I? Why am I like this? WHY AM I SO OLD?? WHY CAN'T I REMEMBER ANYTHING?' Aida yelled, as she was gripping the mirror with tears swelling, blurring her vision.

As her words faded into the suffocating scent of the walls, all of a sudden, she heard steps. Rushing steps. Coming closer towards the source of verbal confusion. Aida felt panic and hope.

'MUMMY!' she exclaimed, while hurtling recklessly towards the bedroom door.

'Aida?' someone on the other side worryingly said.

Aida dropped on her knees and froze.

That voice. It was not her mother's, but a man's voice, yet not the mellow deep voice of her father, or the cracking voices of her two pubescent brothers. It didn't sound familiar at all. The door opened.

'Aida, what's wrong, honey?' the man asked.

Aida looked up at the large hairy foul-smelling towering man. He looked older than she remembered, but she recognised him. It was one of her father's friends, who

used to come to visit their home, whose name she never cared to learn. The only thing Aida could recount from his last visit was the sound of yelling.

As Aida was gathering her thoughts, she saw him approach her cautiously.

'My sweet wife, are you okay?' he gently whispered with a smile.

'W-w-wife?' Aida stuttered.

'Why, yes sweetheart, what's the matter with you, should I call the house doctor?' the man said, burrowing his thick eyebrows into a face of genuine worry.

Aida stood up slowly and gently, dusted off her bony knees, and in her most convincing voice said: 'T-that's okay...honey... I j-just woke up from a bad dream, g-go back downstairs and I'll b-be there in a m-minute.'

The man stared at her intently for a bit, closing in on her face, staring, directly into Aida's sunken eyes for what felt like an eternity. He then smirked.

'I'll go and phone the doctor just in case, you seem a bit delirious,' he said, as he firmly held Aida by her wrists, and pressed his soggy lips on her forehead.

With that, Aida's husband turned around and closed the door behind him.

Aida stood still in a complete and utter state of shock for some time, feeling her wrists pulsating, as the saliva slowly evaporated from her temple. She slowly made her way towards the mirror once more, and stared.

'That man is my husband? But how? Why can't I remember the last years of my life? What am I going to do?' she pondered, as she suddenly heard the man call her name.

'Aida, I'm starving now.'

A new surge of adrenaline.

'No. This is not my husband. This is *your* husband. *You*. The one looking back. You're not me. My name is Aida, I'm 14, I have two brothers, a dog, a loving mother, and a strict father. Y-you, you're older, you look like me, but you're different, sadder. What happened to you? How did you get here? And... where was I?'

'Aidaaaa, don't make me come up again!' the man, now blatantly irritated, proclaimed.

Aida glanced down at her bare feet, sighed heavily, then looked up again, now staring at the reflection's eyes with piercing determination.

'I can fix this. For the both of us.'

With that, Aida took the mirror from the wall, and crept her way towards the window. She opened it up and quietly made her way outside on the small rooftop. Aida looked down to find some shrubbery standing between what she could only guess was the living room, and the outside world. Aida crept again to the edge of the rooftop, and with one final glimpse at the reflection in the mirror, she jumped.

There was a loud THUD.

‘Wha-?’ the sound of confusion filled the house.

Aida stood up, sharp pain electrifying her whole body, she scurried hastily around the back side of the house, as she heard the front door open.

‘What in the-?’ the man's muffled voice was heard, but Aida wasn't interested.

She ran. She ran as fast as her body would let her. Her countless times playing Hide-and-Seek with her brothers seemed to pay off, as she strategically hid and took short pauses to recuperate. Despite the rain, the blood was boiling in her ears, and she heard the man yelling her name in a state of pure rage a couple of times. But Aida hid well, until she heard him no more.

As she made her way through the city, avoiding people's stares, Aida didn't stop for fear of being caught by someone, until she was eventually able to navigate what the right way towards her home was. Aida walked for hours, clutching the mirror into her arms. By sundown she saw an outline of the house she once called home. And not just that. As she came closer, she could see someone, a person, sitting next to the garden, hunched over, weeping softly.

‘M-MUMMY?’ Aida yelled with the force of her whole life essence.

The aged woman looked up and stared in disbelief.

‘A-A-AIDAAAA?’ she stood up, visibly shaking and desperately trying to make her way to her daughter.

Aida felt a second wind coming. She sprinted, as if there was no tomorrow, until finally dropping the mirror and embracing her mother.

The mirror laid slightly sideways on the staircase. There was a crack. In the corner you could spot the reflection of a yellow narcissus blooming.

**Aleksandar Krasimirov Ganchev**

## My secret regret

Looking back at my life, I only regret one thing. Not having looked at myself earlier.

I am Narcissus, a semi-god, born to Cephissus and Liriope. My mother was told that I would be practically immortal if I never recognized myself, I was not to look at my reflection anywhere in order to live a very long life. That Tiresias... I always thought he was just jealous, but now I know better. Depriving me of the most gorgeous image on the face of the Earth.

I am the one man that successfully turned around the roles of the beautiful woman and the powerful man. My beauty was my power, thus combining both features into one incredible creature. Me. I was always aware that I needed no supernatural strength. Neither did I have to impress people with my lineage. I didn't even have to go out of my way slaying dragons or animals to get some woman to fall in love with me. Why would I need that?

Why were women the ones everyone would fight for? I was so much more beautiful and still they expected me to just fall in love with them with a glance. I never quite understood why I was then the arrogant one. Was that just for being a man and expecting the same as a woman?

I loved strolling through the woods. It was generally very peaceful and I could be with just myself. I did not really need much more. One day I heard a female voice constantly calling out to me, a bit intrusive to just interrupt me like that. Suddenly a Nymph appeared out of nowhere and tried to embrace me. Just like that. No words, no heroic action, not even a proper presentation. I guess for them it was natural that any man to ever see them would automatically fall in love, but I wasn't going to settle with just anyone. Probably I wouldn't settle at all. I never would've found anyone to reach my standard.

However, Echo, the Nymph from the woods, was apparently heartbroken just because I did not imprint on her the way she did on me. Women are not supposed to suffer because men do not desire them, but I am a different man. She should have noticed. Apparently my rejection was my weapon because she pined for the rest of her life. Because of the Nymph's disappointment, or rather because of her arrogance, I was the one to be punished. Nemesis decided that she would cut my life at short by forcing me to look at myself in the pond. My destruction and salvation all in one. I could understand Echo's despair but she should've fought or done something spectacular like she probably would have hoped for herself. Looking at my own reflection... Oh my!

Now, I am in the Hades. Everyone seems to suffer, but I just think they are being dramatic. There are mirrors here and no one expects anything from me just for being a man. Nor are there women who expect love at first sight just for being women. It is a dark place but I'd rather be down here than have a long life up on the Earth where I cannot be myself.

Christina Miranda Porras

PANDORA



## Fingerprints

The sound of birds wakes me up. The red walls embrace me with warmth, giving me shelter from the suffocating heat of the day and the frost of the night. I can see the marks of my husband's fingers in the clay that envelops the house. Tiny oval lines encircle smaller ones to enclose them in a small, isolated circle. All the walls are shaped by those footprints, creating rounded reliefs that I like to pass my hands through. I look at my fingers and I see that the marks in them are the same: infinite circles, each inside the previous one.

I sit up, my husband is not beside me. Instead, he is collecting sowing. The back pain makes me sit for a few moments before getting up. As I stand, a calf cramp makes me have to sit back down. I look down, my belly is very swollen. Suddenly, something moves in it. A foot, an arm, an elbow, maybe the head. My little one has woken up. I reach out to him, saying good morning, and it shakes inside me.

My husband walks through the door. His face is wrinkled by the desert sun and the passing years. His dark complexion contrasts with the red of the walls. He is slim but robust, his hands are tanned from work, and his arms and legs are too long. My husband looks at me with indifference as he takes water from the jar. Not a word. I remember our wedding day, nine months ago. We did not meet each other before the celebration. He did not talk back then. My husband just slept with me that night and I got pregnant. The circles of the footprints and the baby I carry inside me are the only company in this desert of isolated sand.

I manage to stand and step next to my husband, who still does not speak. I drink water from the jar and feel something warm in my crotch. I look down and my legs glow with the amniotic fluid. I drop the jar, and its water and the water that comes out of me mix in the dry land. My husband looks at me alarmed and runs out of the house to ask for help. I lie in bed while I feel something breaking inside me. A contraction. I scream. My little one wants to go out and I think about the life he will have in this place. How will his father treat him if he does not even speak to me? What if it is a girl? She will have to marry, like me, with a husband who doubles her age and does not speak to her. Silence. For the first time since I got married, I burst into tears. For me, for the baby, for the agony of not being able to talk to anyone.

But now I can speak with someone, with my son. I look out the window and I only see the intense blue sky. A small whirlwind of sand passes by. The dry wind of the desert, bold, free, moves everything in its path. I should be like the wind, stronger, braver, freer. Another contraction. The chalice overflows life and I feel it pushing through me. Pain scream. I touch myself and I feel its rounded head breaking through. Another contraction.

My husband and the matron come through the door, agitated. They stand before me at once, while I fulfil my only purpose as a woman in this house. But the chalice has overflowed and the wind is blowing strong out there. One more contraction.

Life is already out of me. The matron cleans the baby from my blood, from our blood. My husband is standing at the door, watching, not saying a word. The matron brings the baby to my arms. It is a girl. I burst into tears. Its smell is primitive, warm, familiar. I can see the disappointed face of the father, who wanted a boy.

They leave me alone with my little girl, who has fallen asleep in my arms. Little by little my breath and its breath are coupled to be one, and I fall asleep deeply. In my dreams, I find myself in a room full of light. In the centre of that room there is a sturdy wooden box with soft corners. Something inside it tells me to open the box. I need to know what is inside the box. When I open it, my baby is inside, naked and crying.

I wake up, wrapped in sweat, the little one is not with me. I get out of bed with pains in my belly, looking for her, fearing the worst. But my baby is in a crib, in the next room, sleeping peacefully. My husband is sitting in a chair, his hands crossed in front of his face, thoughtful. He does not even look at me when I enter the room. I take my little girl and put her on my chest, protecting her with my arms.

A few days pass and the wind pushes my daughter and I through the desert, fleeing from that isolated place, from that isolated husband, from his footprints enveloping us. The box is open, and with it, our freedom.

**Sandra López González**



## Don't

Epimetheus is not home already when I wake up. You see, he is a really busy man, always travelling with his brother. They are very lucky, if I can say so myself. They have duties to carry out and places to explore, things to learn... I have nothing. I'm tired of seeing myself in that damn mirror in the dressing table, tired of seeing how perfect I look, tired of appreciating my beauty. Oh my god, I hate Aphrodite so much for gifting me this! I'm just tired. I'm more than a beautiful face, and a perfect shaped body. I have ambitions and desires and I want to learn things about the world and everything that surrounds me.

But I can't.

I'm not allowed to.

I'm so tired of this life!

I hate being by myself all the time!

Thinking about my existence makes me mad. Thinking about why I was created makes me mad. Thinking about men makes me completely furious. They only appreciate me for my beauty, for what I represent. I'm tired of being watched as a mere object that needs to be admired. Epimetheus, my husband, just simply can't ask me how my day was! He simply doesn't care! He feels so triumphant about having me by his side, so proud but he can't even care one bit about how I feel. I'm just there, next to him, unable to speak, to move freely, to share my passions. I'm not even allowed to have those anyways. I'm just in this damn room all the time by myself! If it wasn't for that stupid box in my nightstand constantly calling me I would think I'm deaf.

I'm not allowed to touch the box. The Gods say it holds very dangerous things inside that could end with the world as we know it. But it's so pretty! It calls me so many times throughout the day that sometimes I think I'm gonna give up and finally open it.

But I can't.

I shouldn't.

I'm so curious!

What can it possibly be holding inside that is forbidden? Sometimes it keeps me up all night thinking about it. Sometimes I feel like giving up and crossing the few meters that separate me from the box and open it to see what is actually inside of it.

But I must resist.

I shouldn't do it.

It keeps calling my name! I need to open it! I need to discover what's inside.

I've been thinking about that box for so many years now. I've done everything that they have told me. I've always obeyed their orders so well, I've been so good. How wrong would it be to do something for myself for once? I'm just so tired of this void, this silence. I'm tired of not being able to do anything for myself, of being a simple trophy and that box just can't be quiet! It keeps calling my name over and over again and I'm so curious about it! I want to know.

I'm not supposed to open it because very dangerous things are hidden inside and men have warned me about it so many times! I'm tired of hearing their prohibitions and their warnings. I don't want to be blamed for something bad happening in the world but I'm so curious! I'm going to open the box. I want to do it. I think I should be scared but the adrenaline of finally knowing what's inside is bigger than anything else.

I'm gonna do it!

I'm gonna discover what's inside!

And I'm doing so because I've decided to do it!

I've made my decision.

I run to the box and I decide to appreciate it for a while one last time. It is so pretty that I can't possibly think of a bad thing lying inside. It keeps calling my name, more desperately now so it must be the right decision.

This is the moment.

I'm gonna open the box.

I open the box.

Nothing happens.

**María Luisa Aparicio Olivares**

# New Eden

*Year 2530*

All around the globe scientists researched the field of genetic mutation to create the perfect woman. Led by Dr Zeus, an unscrupulous and sadistic man, this elite team aimed to implement a secret project called *New Eden*. The Earth, in a catastrophic state of close destruction due to climate change, forced the population to live in submarines under the sea, since the melting of the poles had eventually caused the cities to be submerged under water. This secret project was the last chance for humankind after the failure to colonize the Moon and Mars.

Dr Zeus, the most prestigious scientist on the planet, was in charge of planning the mission in order to create the perfect woman who would be used as a reproductive recipient to populate the first base, recently sent to the planet Alpha Centauri A. Dr Hephaestus designed the female cyborg endowing her with the perfect body according to beauty standards. Dr Athena, on the other hand, was in charge of infusing wisdom into her brain. Little by little, the group of scientists completed the task and named this woman Pandora.

But Dr Zeus, a cold, calculating and immoral person, sabotaged the project. In order to do this, he created a box-shaped intelligent device in which he introduced toxins that would infect the new colony on Alpha Centauri A. This device was programmed to open up after resolving the most difficult puzzle ever created, which only Pandora with her divine intelligence could open. Pandora, who was also endowed with the gift of curiosity, could not resist herself and ended up opening the box. The toxins quickly spread in the atmosphere of the new planet, condemning the new population of Alpha Centauri A, which was already settled. Pandora was accused of being the culprit of all evils and the only person responsible for the failure of the *New Eden* project. Pandora decided to travel back to Earth to confront Dr Zeus, who had managed to be able to mutate his own genetic code to achieve immortality. When she landed on Earth, she found a devastating panorama as the planet had been destroyed and Dr Zeus was the only survivor.

Pandora wanted vengeance. She collected data from the immoral experiments Dr Zeus had done and found irrefutable proof that it was he who had created the device. Before leaving, Pandora took revenge on him using intelligence and courage. She injected him an experimental medication that destabilized his system and infected his blood cells. Pandora returned to Alpha Centauri A and soon became a renowned doctor and researcher for cures against the diseases the toxins had caused in the population.

Now an empowered woman no longer controlled by her creators, Pandora rejected the role of a reproductive machine that she had been assigned and decided to

help the population of the new planet, thus beginning to be the woman she had always wanted to be.

**Alba Bastante Sánchez-Carnerero**

## Hope

Life seemed to be a blurry version of a dream. Sounds were diffused, confusing. Images before her eyes seemed blurry. It was almost as if she stepped under the water where she was alone, all by herself, unseen by their eyes, protected by a thick layer of liquid. She had left home. She was so in touch with herself and yet so far away from her spirit. Her body was not her body; her body was a vessel of life, a utensil that brought a strange creature into the world. Pain was taking over her body and everything she could do was stand and watch her own body surrender to it.

Pandora was an enduring creature. Her eyes were filled with strength. Her visage showed resilience. Still, she felt there was something uncanny about the occasion, something that would bring uneasiness into the world. Nevertheless, against all odds, she carried her pain bravely. Her heavy breathing modelled itself after the rhythm of her rapidly beating heart. Her compelling outcry rolled out of her mouth like a ball of fire. Tears brought her relief and extinguished the blaze from her cheeks.

Suddenly, the rouge opening of her female cavern gave *him* to the world. There he was: thy Adam. Little did she know she would be to blame for the bearer of chaos and sorrow. He would be the first human and humankind would wear the face of his sins. He would fight wars in the name of religion. He would bathe in innocent blood for a piece of land. He would discriminate his fellow creatures based on the hue of their coating. He would poison his companion with an idea of inferiority. He would feed and relish in cruelty, jealousy, terror and secrecy. He would erase the innocence of Mother Nature by cutting all her green limbs off and have it reduced to silence. He would forget that Hope was the second child their mother bared in her womb. He would let her be the pray of forgetfulness for all humanity. He would ignore her to the point of oblivion.

There she lay, next to the lifeless body of the Mother, covered in sanguine fluid. Hope wore with slyness her mother's eyes and a hidden force in her chest. She had been lying on her knees for centuries and became both witness and complice to Mankind's wrongs. But in an outburst of despair, confronted with the truth of their impurity, she proudly rose to her feet and caught a glance of Adam's eyes. She continually stared both into his eyes and also at humankind. The vision she had was utterly distinct from his angle.

Nothing but some forsaken thoughts linger in my mind when trying to decipher the mystery of her troubled countenance. Will she endure the burden of her own self, gained power and carry out the mission imposed by her name? Will she fall into the mud again defeated? Will she let herself be dominated by chaos and misery? Will she abuse her position? Will she respond with cruelty to cruelty? Will she annihilate thy Adam? Will she find forgiveness?

All I know is that she incessantly glances at their blood-soaked mother lying on the cold, damp earth while holding Adam's hand.

**Maria Luiza Dobre**

## Pandora's truth

Prometheus with all the other gods on the top of Mount Olympus. From the top of the mount he never got tired of watching the rivers, forests and mountains. He liked the Earth so much that he decided to make a human being out of it. This man would be the first to stand on Earth.

Prometheus decided that in order to keep the first man on Earth safe he would provide him with fire. The fire was sacred and protected by Zeus. So in order to capture the fire he planned on waiting for the passage of the sun and, with a very long pole, he would manage to light the stick. Once he managed to light the stick he swooped down to Earth and taught men how to make fire.

Zeus was furious and angry with Prometheus so he planned on punishing him. He ordered Hephaestus, the god of iron, to forge a beautiful woman. The woman everyone knows as Pandora is me. My name means 'the one who has all the gifts.'

Once I was created Zeus called all the gods to admire my beauty, although I must admit I wasn't very keen on everyone staring at me. Many told me that I was the most beautiful woman in the universe. This idea didn't make me happy. It made me wonder why Helen felt so happy when being observed by all the men that passed her by.

The gods were so amazed at my beauty, that each and everyone of them decided to offer me a gift. Pallas Athene dressed me with a coat whiter than the snow and she put on my head a crown of gold, adorned with colourful and fragrant flowers. Aphrodite, as you all know, known to be the goddess of love, taught me all her charms, which I wasn't keen on knowing. I wasn't interested in making any man fall in love with me, but I had been told by Zeus that I had been created for this. I was to make Prometheus fall in love with me and then I was to marry him. I obviously didn't want any of this but I had no choice. I had to listen to Zeus. After all he had created me.

The only thing I could possibly do then was to give my version of events and try to explain and to let everyone know that I had never opened the box that Zeus gave me. But I will proceed on explaining this in detail later.

I was saying that all the gods gifted me with something, wasn't I? Terpsichore, the muse of dance, gave me lessons on how to walk with lightness and elegance like other women. Hermes taught me how to speak with grace and sweetness, so that no one dared to cross me. Zeus decided to give me the gift that came in the form of a box, a beautiful pearly box, all decorated with precious stones and a fine tied gold thread around it. He handed me the box and told me that, once I married Prometheus, I had to show him the box but neither I or Prometheus were to open it. I told him that I didn't understand why he would give me a box that I wasn't allowed to open. But he just laughed and made me promise that I would obey him.

So after being taught how to act like a woman—not that I needed any help—I was sent to Prometheus and basically I was forced to marry him. I didn't think that Prometheus was ugly or evil, but I didn't even know him and I couldn't understand why

Zeus insisted on me marrying him. But I did and once I did I handed him the box that Zeus had given me for him and I told him that I had promised Zeus that he wouldn't he wouldn't open it.

Epimetheus, Prometheus' brother, wasn't happy with this. He said that if it was a gift we should open it. But Prometheus said that he didn't trust Zeus and that the best thing we could do was to keep the box untouched. Zeus had also given me a key for the box. I decided to hide this key in my bedroom because I didn't trust Epimetheus. Since Epimetheus laid eyes on the box he was curious to know what was in it. I tried my best to keep the key hidden from him.

I will admit that I was also curious about what the box could contain but I also had a feeling that if I opened it something terrible would happen. I never understood why I was created in the first place, but I had a feeling that if I opened the box I would understand why.

After being married for nearly one year, I started developing feelings for my husband. At first I didn't want to marry him but after getting to know him I started to like him—I wouldn't say that I was in love with him but I definitely felt that I could trust him and that I cared for him.

One night Prometheus told me about the day he had stolen the fire from Zeus and this is how men had come in contact with fire for the first time. It was all thanks to him. Whilst telling me this I began to understand why Zeus had created me. I explained to my husband that I didn't believe that Zeus would simply forgive him after doing such a thing and that he had a plan to get his revenge. As I was explaining this to him we heard a noise coming from our library. We ran to the library and we found Ephimetheus, who had found the key to the box and had managed to open it. As he opened it we saw how all evil escaped from the box and we knew that there was no going back. Ephimetheus had released all evil and I was blamed for this. Prometheus said that I should have never accepted the gift from Zeus. But I tried explaining to him that I never knew that Zeus was seeking revenge and that I had been created with this purpose. I thought that I was created in order to marry Prometheus and that was it, I never thought anything else of it.

I was furious with both Prometheus and Ephimetheus and decided to open the box again and it was then that we found hope. If I hadn't had opened the box for a second time we wouldn't even be here—all evil would have ended with us.

I still don't understand why I was blamed for releasing all evil in the first place. Prometheus and Ephimetheus say that I'm to blame because I never should have brought the box from Zeus. But I believe that if they hadn't stolen the fire from Zeus none of this would have happened.

I guess that despite everything I can't change the past and I simply have to accept what happened. I do feel better knowing that I have been able to give my version of the events.

**Tamara Lee Halstead**

## Deceit

There was just a topic of conversation in these days. Everybody knew about the last gossip. There was a mysterious jar filled with all hideous ideas: grotesque images of sickness, the worst possible vices, wicked sorrows, the most terrible crimes apart from the melancholy of old age. Nobody knew why such an evil jar was created, but it was clear that it existed and that it was somewhere. Just to mention the jar was enough to frighten anyone, since the myth about this object was more mystified than the jar itself.

Pandora was moulded as the first mortal woman, so Zeus made sure to create a beautiful and astonishing lady. It was often said that the god of fire, Hephaestus, conferred her a beautiful voice and goddess Athena taught her how to weave difficult patterns. Despite being a total mortal, she was popular among the gods. She was a woman with a good heart, maybe that was something to do with gods bringing her to life. Maybe too naïve. And that is the feature that mean people take advantage of.

On the day her wedding was announced, there was tension among the citizens because of the mystery of the final candidate for her. The many suitors had been trying to impress her for some weeks. One of them was Epimetheus, who was a strong young man that had always lived in the shadow of his brother Prometheus. He would never forget that episode when they were almost kids and they joined the games of the city. After all the rehearsals and the training sessions, the special day came with excitement in the air. Like every time, the most awaited test among the audience and contestants themselves was the sword fighting. To heat up even more the atmosphere, the two brothers had to confront themselves. More than just any other test, this one was to establish at last the supremacy of one of the brothers, and both of them were perfectly aware of this. One was in front of the other, both focused on their strategy, when the sound that told them to start was heard. Their swords started to move aligned with their bodies. After many movements and attacks from Prometheus, Epimetheus realised something: his brother's sword was not the usual one. He almost noticed how his heart made a loud sound and his pout showed annoyance, but mainly rage. Indeed, that was what Prometheus did—he took the trouble to get a stronger and dangerous sword. Epimetheus tried to explain that to the judges after he lost the game, but everyone took for granted that he was lying and that he said so not to be so embarrassed with his resounding defeat. There was nothing he could do: he had pushed himself to the limit while his brother Prometheus made not effort. He had cheated.

But this incident was forgotten by the villagers and Epimetheus proved he was worthy so many times that he attracted Pandoras's attention. Hence, for those knowing her, it was not surprising that Epimetheus was the chosen one finally. She was not in love with him but she was forced to get married, so she thought that he, at least, would not hurt her. The wedding was arranged and everybody was very enthusiastic to see beautiful Pandora dressed for that special day.



Just the day before the wedding, Pandora was summoned by Zeus, who had a special wedding present for the couple.

‘Welcome, Pandora. Here is a special jar. You see, it looks as an ordinary one, but as it is so powerful, there’s something you have to promise.’

Pandora was terrified, she feared it was a wicked jar.

‘Why... why is it so dangerous? What should I do with it?’

‘You have to deliver it to Epimetheus and you have to keep it, but you can’t open it. Do you hear me? Never open this jar, or something horrible will happen.’

Those were the last words of the god.

As she left, she could not believe that the jar that everybody was talking about was going to be their wedding present.

‘Inside there is a curse for each of us.’ She heard someone say.

But Pandora decided that she would obey. She would deliver the jar and she would never dare to open it.

After two days, Pandora was a married woman, and no mishap would disturb her until Hermes turned up. The fact that Zeus gave them the jar in private did not mean that the rest of the inhabitants did not know about it. Weddings are, of course, magnificent occasions to talk about everyone, and the young couple and their relation with Zeus did not go unnoticed. Then, Hermes was also aware that Pandora had in her possession the jar and he had his own plan.

‘Hello, Pandora. Is your husband at home?’

Pandora was amazed that the famous Hermes was talking to her in her own household. But mainly, she was worried because she knew he was an odd man.

‘Hermes? Mmm, well, no. Epimetheus is not here now, but please come in.’

‘I was wondering if you could let me see this jar that was given to you. I’d like to know if it is true what people say.’

‘Yes, it is true, although we did not tell anyone...’

They were moving towards the main room and in a corner of it, Hermes could see that the item was standing there.

‘Okay, it is there, you can watch it but please...’

‘Oh, don’t worry! I know you are not allowed to open it.’

Pandora was shocked and scared, as neither she nor Epimetheus had told anybody about Zeus’ prohibition.

‘But, aren’t you curious to know what is inside? Haven’t you thought about the hidden wonders?’

'Wonders? But people can't stop talking about how dangerous it is! How do you know something good is hidden there?' asked Pandora with confusion in her voice.

'Believe me, Pandora, I know Zeus well, and he is obsessed with being the target of all conversations. He has indeed got it, no doubt, but to do that, he has misled you, and as I see, he has also frightened you. For this reason, you should not miss what awaits you inside this wonderful jar. Trust me and open it, for your eyes tell me that you are so curious about it. Anyway, what can be there that may be so harmful?'

She did not know what to think but her kind heart thought that Hermes might be telling the truth. He was right, if it was so bad, Zeus would not provide her with such a burden, and yes, he really created expectations about the jar among everybody.

Of course, innocent Pandora believed Hermes. He did not have to insist so much. She just agreed that she would open the container so that her desire to know what was inside would be over. She was holding the jar. As she was a little bit scared, she did not look close to it when it was handed to her, but then she observed all the details about the jar. It was so beautiful, with geometrical patterns and bright colours. She could not forget Zeus telling her not to open it but, at the same time, maybe just because of what Hermes said some minutes ago, she realised that something that seemed so harmless could not really be connected to sinful actions.

Finally, she opened it and she did not notice because a strange feeling appeared in the atmosphere, but Hermes slipped away at the moment she touched the cover of the jar. She started to feel dizzy, but she could not take her eyes away from the dust that came from the jar. Curiously, it smelt good and it was kind of hypnotic, even charming. However, all the gossips were right: the jar contained all the vices and negative things that one can imagine, and more. It suddenly started to rain, an enormous storm was upon them and people started to feel bad, physically and mentally. Immediately, Zeus knew what had happened. He ran to see Pandora and he was ready to punish her. There was general dismay and alteration and, in a few minutes, all of the citizens knew what had happened and who was to blame.

The next day, there was a public announcement that a punishment to Pandora had to be decided. Zeus was in the middle of the crowd with Pandora, while the traitor, Hermes, was hidden among the multitude, unrecognisable. Pandora was standing there crying, feeling guilty but mainly furious with Hermes and with herself for being such an ignorant woman.

Zeus spoke to everyone.

'You're all right. Pandora has tricked us with her pure appearance, but she willingly opened the jar I explicitly told her not to touch. All that you've heard about it is true. I would love to say that it was an exaggeration, but it will really make our world worse.'

People could not be more uneasy, and they claimed the responsible person for this act to be punished.

‘Don’t worry about her. Of course she will pay for what she’s done.’

Then, abruptly, Epimetheus ran among all the people to reach the point where her wife was situated.

‘Stop, Zeus! Please, everybody, listen to me! You don’t know the truth about this. Pandora is innocent!’

Pandora could not believe what she was listening. How could he know that Hermes had tricked her? He was out when Hermes visited their house. Or so she thought.

‘Hermes! Hermes is the one to blame! I listened to the conversation my wife and this deceitful man had. Yes, Pandora. I was at home when he came but I wanted to know what he would request from you, since I was too afraid he could harm you. So I stayed and tried to hide.’

Epimetheus begged and convinced Zeus that such a sweet and responsible woman as Pandora could not just come up with the idea of disobedience. As for the multitude, they seemed convinced with Epimetheus’ words and, anyway, they merely wanted that a punishment should be inflicted to anybody—they did not mind who it was.

Zeus realised that Epimetheus and Pandora would never lie in an event like that, while Hermes’ reputation was dubious. He ordered his knights to find and capture Hermes.

‘Over there, he’s escaping!’ shouted someone.

Hermes put his hood on and managed to flee with difficulties because people started to move all around—they were all so nervous. But one of Zeus’ men saw him and chased the liar. Hermes was really fast and he and the pursuer were now at the outskirts. Hermes hid behind a bunch of old trees and he thought he had got away with it when the knight silently put his sword in Hermes’ neck. He was shocked and he knew he had nothing to do with an armed and strong man like that. The trickster was led to the square again and now the multitude claimed justice and a sentence for him.

Pandora was pardoned but also warned that she should not believe everybody and be more down-to-earth, more cautious. Hermes would have his punishment, but the world could not go back in time to undo what happened that day and the consequences it had for all gods, demigods and mortal people.

**Ana Hidalgo Palomino**



PERSEPHONE



## White membrane

My father has had seven wives. He has bedded many a mistress. He has fathered a plethora of progeny. To some of you this polygamous familial structure may sound blasphemous, slanderous, illegal even. But for my family, and the people of our faith, it has always been the norm.

As a Mormon girl, my fate has been sealed from my conception. From the moment the pomegranate seed of my father entered into the womb of my mother and started to bud, my father and my uncles had already started to write my destiny. I was to have no voice. A beautiful thing to look at, to touch, a ragdoll to throw around. An empty vessel waiting to be seeded. Nothing more. But little did they know. Little did they know that no matter how much they hurt me, no matter how much they tried to tear me apart, leave me for ruin, I would fight back. It would be me who would sneak up behind them, when they were least expecting it, and snatch the pen out of their meaty hands, unpluck the tapestry, one tightly sewn detail at a time, seize the needle from their fierce grasp and weave my own story.

But, forgive me. I'm getting a little ahead of myself. First, there was the beginning. And in the beginning, there was sun.

My mother. The beautiful young woman from Texas my father found selling flowers on the side of the road. She was the prettiest girl he had ever seen, channelling the natural beauty of the flowers she adored. She was only fourteen then. A girl outcast by her parents. A girl craving to be noticed. My father, forever keen to spread the gift of the Lord, saw this lost and trodden girl as a lamb looking for its shepherd. An ideal candidate to join his sect. And thus, when my father read to her words of the scripture and promised her the happy family fairy-tale, she was swept up by the façade. She felt warm again for the first time in years. A life of love and children and God.

At fourteen and a half she became his wife. Only fifteen by the time he implanted his seed in her. Him, forty at least. I was her everything. Her little ray of sunshine bursting through the darkness of the life she had been lured into. They said I inherited her floral-like splendour, her slender delicate frame. So beautiful and pure and lovely was I that they called me 'Cora', after the Greek word for 'maiden'.

It was her that filled my mind with the beauty of the world. She taught me everything she knew about the natural world—the name of every tree, every flower, every herb from her nature books, which she kept stored beneath the bible in a box under the bed in our room. Every night, except those, of course, when it was her turn to be summoned to father's room, we would open up the box and read a chapter on a new plant, or flower. My favourite chapter was the one about violets, evident by the many thumbed-down pages, sun-stained pictures and smiling creases.

Due to her abundant knowledge and a seemingly inherent affiliation with the land, my father entrusted my mother to look after the corn and grain on our lot. There was no one else

on the dusty crowded compound we called home with her touch. Even the dustiness and dryness of the land did not impede upon the success of her cultivation. They called her the 'goddess of the crop'. And I grew to love the land just as she did. Very much my mother's daughter, the natural world enchanted me. Flowers, although a rarity in the compound, were my greatest source of joy.

She did everything she could to protect me against the cruel world she had come to know all too well. As I grew older, it was her that recognised the true meaning of the look that my uncles and half-brothers gave me as I skipped past them through the fields. She covered me in a blanket of love and protection, rendering me blissfully naïve. Unaware was I, then, of the veiled cruelty of my father. Like my mother before me, I was tricked by the illusion of the loving father figure, the care-giver, the good Christian man. I idolised the very ground he walked on. Many of us children even saw him as a prophet. To be honest, I felt blessed. When he singled me out and called me to his room to pray together, he made me feel special. When he cupped my face with his hand and asked me to sit on his knee, it made the other children jealous. When he stroked my leg, each time getting closer to my thigh, I didn't see anything wrong. Even when I told my mother and she cried, I just thought she was envious. In fact, I was only upset when my mother demanded that she take my place.

Despite my mother's best intentions, this sun that she relentlessly poured into my life blinded the truth. It shone so intensely in my eyes, that I could not see what was really happening until it was too late...

It was a glorious day. The sun in my eyes, the eaves of corn running through my fingers, the breeze of the wind through my hair. I was running through the fields with my half-sisters, as our mothers worked tirelessly. At the edge of the compound, something bright caught my eye, amidst the brown dust and some dried-up eaves of corn. A purple haze crossed my eyeline, causing me to stop. I blinked twice to focus my vision. A flower. And not just any flower, but a violet. My favourite. I ran towards it, plucking it from the ground to bring to my mother. I turned around to head back towards the corn field where she was busy sowing new grains. She looked so beautiful in the sun, her golden locks aflame in the beam of the rays.

It was just as I was about to walk away that he lunged at me. My screams were muffled to whispers under his thick hand. At first, I associated the thickness of the hand with that of my father, but no, it was different. Harsher. In need of ointment. I tried to hit out but it was no use. He was inconceivably strong and dragged me behind him like I was nothing more than a felt puppet. I was still clutching the violet tightly in a fist. I prayed to God but there was no answer.

After what seemed like hours we came to a stop. He pulled me up harshly. I could hardly see his face in the twilight, the trees shadowing his features. 'Hello my dear'. His voice was gruff, cloaked by a slow pant. 'Do not be afraid'. 'We are together at long last, as the Lord has planned'. A chime of familiarity rang in my ears. Then he pushed me face first into a familiar texture. Bark. He spread my legs open and tore into me from behind. I gasped out at the piercing pain, dropping the violet from my numb hands. He slapped his hand over my mouth once more. His other meaty hand clawed at my pre-pubescent breasts, ripping my dress, as he moved savagely under the fabric. His primal thrust got more and more intense, in both



speed and power, and I nearly passed out with the agony. He groaned. I shut my eyes and willed myself to wake up from this nightmare. Pleaded to the Lord in my mind. But I was alone. I was unable to escape. Tears fell down my cheek, glossing my pale face, with a moon-like glow.

After it was finished, everything felt raw. Something warm ran down my leg. I wiped it with the sleeve of my dress. A dark thick liquid. Blood. My body was shaking so much that I could hardly stand anymore and I crumpled to the woodland floor.

When I woke there was darkness. I adjusted my eyes to the dimness, as terrified as a new-born when it first sees the world.

‘You’re awake’. A figure walked towards me out of the shadows. As he approached, my heart pounded with an increasing sense of recognition. My uncle. No. My uncle? It couldn’t be. But yes. My uncle Hades.

I backed away from him. ‘How could you do this to me?’ my voice echoed against the walls, like a child’s cry trapped in a well.

‘Shh, do not be afraid, my girl. It has been written in stone. This has been all arranged. It is what the Lord wants’. He tried to embrace me but I pushed him off.

‘No. It can’t be. For you are my uncle. And what you did to me.... A sin. Now we are unclean’. My voice spat out the words.

‘No, my love. It is not a sin if we are to be married’,

‘Married?’ The word felt like ash on my tongue. A cold sweat passed over me. I felt vomit rise in my throat.

‘Yes. Married. It has been all settled. Your father has granted our union. Everything is just’.

The arrow of betrayal pierced my heart and tears pricked my eyes. How could my father do this to me? We had been taught marriage was a joyous thing. A beautiful union. Something to be celebrated. Love. But this was not beautiful. This was hideous. This was not love, but torture.

‘But my mother. She would have told me. I’m sure she would’. The words gushed out of my mouth like water, almost unintelligible in my desperate hope.

‘She did not know. Your father knew she would have never agreed. I am sure she will know by now’.

I thought of my mother, looking desperately for me in the fields, calling my name in vain. I willed her to hear me now.

‘One must follow the plan of the Lord’. Hades said, cupping my face in his hands. ‘We are to be married tomorrow’.

Months passed. Months of solitude. Months of darkness. Before I knew, we were six months married. In his tiny basement flat, sunlight never touched my skin. I forgot the feeling of relief one felt when fresh air raced through your lungs. I was now a foreigner to the natural world,

confined only to the interior of the dingy kitchen, small prayer room and the candlelit bedroom. I became the ideal compliant wife. Let him call me his Queen. I even made him think I loved him. Or at least tolerated him in a way. Pretended that I was content in our seclusion from the rest of the world. It was just easier this way. A distraction from the truth. A way for me to try and understand the Lord's plan. But it was exhausting all the same.

He gave me a pomegranate for my wedding present. A symbol of our union—the Christian icon of eternity, or fertility. A good luck charm he said. A promise of the children that we were to bring into the world. I pass it every day as I toil in the kitchen. It looks down at me like a Cheshire cat with its mocking smile. Smug in its wholeness, its completeness. An image of our union. It makes me sick.

The only human touch I know now is his. My mother's embrace slowly becoming a wilting memory, a mere figment of my imagination. And yet, without the hope of her, I would give up. Every night he comes to me, I want to scream. Every time he touches me, it takes everything I have not to recoil. And so, I do the only thing I know how. I try to fight. When I close my eyes, it is her I see. My mother. When I think of her, I see a garden of flowers. The flowers from her books grow out of the pages and she is no longer in the dusty confines of the compound. She is running through a field of violets, laughing, her golden hair is radiant in the sun, just like the day I last saw her. She is running towards me, her arms outstretched, ready to embrace me in her warmth. She dances as she moves through the lavender flowers, weaving in and out, with such grace and poise. The birdsong is her music. I watch her in awe, eagerly waiting for her to come to me.

He shakes me hard. The ground beneath my mother starts to tremble. She stumbles in the field. His rough booming voice shouts my name, and the song of the birds dies out. I will my eyes not to open, will my mind to be flooded with bluebells, with daffodils, with her. I start running towards her, her frantically crawling towards me. The flowers turn to weeds and I can't see her. I scream her name. His voice gets louder. His strong arms shake me harder, reaching down to tear the flowers from their roots. And I open my eyes. This happens every night.

Back to pretend. Back to the game of charades. A sham of a marriage. A sham of a love tale. My husband my uncle. My husband my captor. My husband my rapist. And yet, my husband, who, despite everything, I must please.

I find the letters one day when I am cleaning. I was dusting the bookshelf when his bible dropped to the floor, exposing six opened envelopes. Letters from my father, addressed to my uncle. Each marking a month since my departure. Finally, I begin to learn the truth. My mother has never stopped waiting for me. The agony has consumed her, slowing stripping away her beauty each day she is without me. She has become ill, unable to face her chores. The corn, the sowing of crops, the harvesting of vegetables, the ripening of fruit—everything has been abandoned and the compound has slowly come to a standstill. One by one, each of my father's wives grow unwell. The children begin to starve. My father has written to Hades, pleading to return me to my mother, to lift her spirits once more, each month the tone, becoming less commanding and increasingly desperate.

I read the latest letter, dated two weeks ago. This one is not written by my father. But by Hera. My stepmother. Now they are at breaking point. My father has died. Their last food pile remains. They only have enough left for a month. My mother is in her dying bed. I gasp. Tears prick my eyes. My hands shake in anger. A red rage burns in my stomach. Enough. She needs me. Enough.

That night I tiptoe out of the room and grab Hades' prized pomegranate from the shelf, its leathery shell cool against my tingling skin. I am sick of that fruit in its wholeness, in its completeness, teasing me, the façade of our eternal love driving me insane. I am sick of playing pretend. Acting like everything is ok. Using a blade, I slice into the fruit, exposing the intricate interlace of white membranes encasing the sweet red-pulped seeds. I look down at the bright red pips, dazzling rubies in the darkness of the room, shining a lustful red light, full of promises. With a steady hand, I delicately pluck six scarlet seeds from the white film and swallow them whole. Each slip down my slender throat like a delight. Their juice bursts on my tongue. I smile. Sweet like revenge.

When he walks into the room, he looks at me like I'm a stranger. His expression is different too. Not one of hunger, or lust, or passion even, but terror. He is frightened. Timid girl no more am I.

'Cora?' his voice is shaking. But it was not out of anger. It was different. Fear.

'My dear. What is going on? What is all this mess? Your dress its ruined'.

I look down and my dress is stained with red. The juice of the fruit seeping into the cotton fibres. Just like that day in the meadow, but this time it was me who had made the wound and let the blood flow. Not him.

Holding the two halves of the pomegranate I look at him in amusement. The white membrane of the fruit is slowly rotting in the air.

'This marriage is no longer a union, my love'. I almost laugh the words.

'One cannot undo the holy bond of matrimony'. He says slowly. 'You know that. But. Our pomegranate. It's cut open'. I smirk.

'Our love is stronger than a symbol, dear', he says as he places his hand on mine. I look at him.

'Yes, of course. Forgive me, my love. I am just upset about my mother'. I cup his face. 'I found my father's letters. I know the truth'. I purr the words as I caress his cheek. He flinches.

'Oh yes, I didn't want you to worry, dear'. He reaches for my hand again.

'You have left my family; *your* own family to die'. I move my arm away.

'It's not what it looks like'. Panic crosses his face.

'Let me go to her'.

'I can't let you leave me'. His voice is whiney, pathetic.

'You can't? Or you won't?'

'I am afraid I will lose you forever'. He embraces me in his arms.

'You already have. Until death do us part, my dear'. And I stick the knife into his back.

The sun is warm against my skin as I walk towards the door of my mother's room. I take a deep breath and turn the handle. Her. She looks at me and smiles, beauty filling her face once more. We embrace and the violets bloom.

**Molly McGirr**

## A pomegranate a day keeps Demeter away

As I sit on my throne, looking over my loyal subjects, I am filled with a sense of insatiable power I had always dreamed of having. It only takes a snap of my fingers for my right-hand man to appear in full armor, a swift blink of an eye announces my desire for privacy and a slight nod to the left solicits for a bowl of pomegranate seeds to appear on my side table. Ironically, I have grown quite fond of these crimson, tooth-shaped arils that leave a reddish stain on my fingers after consuming one too many. Once I'm finished, my hunger stilled and my thirst quenched, I carefully lick the remaining juice off my fingers, aware of all the watchful eyes scrutinizing my every move. However, their gawking and lustful eyes no longer have the same effect on me: their stares have ceased to weigh down on me, nor do they make me adjust my demeanor. Instead, I bask in their admiration, I live in wait for their applause, I live.

Before, my life consisted of passively obeying my mother's wishes. I was born daughter of Demeter, goddess of fertility and agriculture and an overall unbearably stern woman. Rather than allowing me to roam the earth freely and explore all it had to offer, which, ironically, stemmed directly from my mother's influences, she requested, nay, demanded to be kept aware of my whereabouts at all times. During the blazing summer days, I was to be home before sundown, which meant that when the sky started displaying a myriad of pinks and purples, I had to leave my group of friends behind. However, my curfew remained unchanged in the winter months and I had to return home sooner without the pleasure of experiencing the usual dance of colors in the air. Unlike the other lenient parents who permitted their offspring to gorge themselves on nectar and ambrosia, a favorite of the gods which bestowed upon its consumers longevity or immortality, Demeter only allowed for a strictly vegan diet, excluding the sugary liquid. Don't get me wrong. If I had been granted the right to choose what I put in my body, it being 'my temple' and all that, I, too, would have strayed away from the flesh of animals. However, I am curious as to what my peers are so allured by when it comes to nectar. Is it as sweet as a rainy summer day? Does it really hold the promise of a long and fruitful life? Would it transform my cowardice into bravery? These are some of the questions that keep me up at night, when the sky is a dark, unsettling black and only the moon provides me with an uplifting glimmer.

I always had a certain admiration for the doomed figures that rot away in the Underworld, those who were brave enough to defy the almighty Zeus and his followers, those with power of their own. Although I certainly didn't condone Tantalus' offering of his son to put the omniscience of the gods to the test, I felt inspired by his act of rebellion to stand up to my own mother as well. In lieu of toying around with mortals for my personal gain and disregarding the value of human life, I opted for a more peaceful scenario that would only affect me and a couple of gods who would surely get into trouble either way. In hindsight, I should have estimated that my overbearing mother would fall victim to my schemes. However, it was time for me to remove her claws and fend for myself. With her imprint still prominent on my skin, I conjured up a plan that would seem just as innocent and harmless as her perception of me, her flowery, golden child.

One unsuspecting morning, I proposed that we should organize a feast to celebrate the lucrative harvest of the year with traditional folk games, a glorious buffet and enchanting music played by Apollo on the lute. Naturally, my mother was in favor of the idea of displaying her crops and all the grain she harvested for the humans after a year of hard work and devotion. In a matter of hours she had put everyone to work: Dionysus, the god of wine, was to make sure there was an abundance of the intoxicating drink and Thalia, the goddess of festivity, was in charge of organizing the luxuriant banquet and ensuring everyone had a joyous time. I myself was responsible for the seating arrangement, a task I gladly used to my advantage. After careful deliberation, I had come to the conclusion that inviting Zeus's lovers, himself and his wife Hera to sit at the same table seemed too obvious. Moreover, I could not bear the idea of having the blood of these innocent women on my hands as Hera would most likely strike vengeance upon them. Although most of these women had in fact fallen victim to Zeus' manipulative games of seduction or to his blatant abuse, Hera was too blinded by love to point him out as the true culprit. Consequently, I had invited both Aphrodite, her arranged husband Hephaestus and one of her lovers, Ares, the god of war, to attend the party and stir up a hornet's nest. It would only take one or two beers and a few glances in Aphrodite's direction for Ares to erupt into anger. While the men were busy establishing dominance and ripping each other to pieces in order to gain the love and respect of a woman too engrossed in her own beauty to acknowledge their primal macho behavior, I could sneak away, unnoticed. And that, dear reader, is exactly what happened.

At around two past one, the first party of guests arrived, all dressed-up in their most appropriate tunics and cloaks. Demeter was anxiously putting the final touches to the carefully curated flower bouquets while Apollo was tuning his lyre, preparing himself for another bewitching performance. Everything was going smoothly, until it was time for the dithyramb to be sung and danced to honor Dionysus' fruitful contribution to the feast. The god of wine had quaffed glass after glass and was starting to stagger while dancing with Aphrodite. Unbothered, she let him guide her as she twirled her dress with every movement. In the heat of a moment, he spun her around too eagerly and the goddess of love fell to the ground. In the blink of an eye, Ares and Hephaestus came to her aid. However, noticing each other's attempts to help her up, they got into a heated debate that turned physical in no time. As the men were making a scene about who had the right to help Aphrodite, neither of them aware that the goddess had already gotten up and brushed off the dirt from her knees, a group of spectators formed around them. I seized this opportunity of collective distraction and made my way out of the party.

I had heard tales of Hades, the menacing god of the Underworld who, feared by all entities, lived a solitary life underneath the earth. According to these rumors, a hint of soft humming was often detected by the souls who lived in the realm of the dead and Hades had been spotted frolicking in a floral meadow just two miles northwest from where the party was taking place. Other gossip enclosed that he was in want of a wife—not in search, Hades was not one for courtship—which made him an easy target: I would be the right woman, at the right place, at the right time. By the time I had reached the grassland, I had contemplated returning to the party several times. Was this truly what I wanted? Why was I so reluctant to give up an environment that didn't stimulate my independence, that stilted my growth in every possible way? The unknown

had always been my motivator; it is easier to work towards something that is still susceptible to change than to free yourself from something that is already set in its ways. However, knowing that my mother would be furious when she found out I had left her party. I needed to find something to bring back with me that would justify my absence. With my mother's love for all things fauna and flora in the back of my mind, I started picking flowers in the hope that this would suffice for making amends. I had gathered a colorful bunch of them when all of a sudden the ground beneath my feet started quavering and a flock of birds covered the sun in a dark, chaotic ink-like stain. The flowers fell to my feet as I stood face to face with Hades, perplexed and stunned. Without saying a word, he grabbed me sternly by the waist and locked me away in a golden chariot drawn by horses. In a matter of seconds, the carriage was engulfed by the ground and all that remained were the scattered petals of roses, gerberas and forget-me-nots.

Upon arriving in the vast Underworld, I had an unsettling feeling that I was being watched from every angle, every move evaluated, as if my whole being was taken under inspection. In the distance, I perceived the faint sound of crying intermitted by shrill screams. We hadn't exchanged any words, yet somehow I could tell my fate would not resemble that of the poor souls stuck in this perennial inferno: his touch was gentle, pleading even, as if he needed my presence to be voluntary for his own peace of mind. Years of solitude and feelings of being misunderstood had probably evolved into communicational issues, hence his claim on my entire being, as if I was somehow his rightful property. However, this meek approach of his also meant that I could perhaps change his impression of the world, his idea of authority and dominance. This epiphany changed my entire perception of the dark Underworld: instead of its shortcomings, I detected room for improvement and rather than feeling imprisoned, I felt unshackled, free to meander through this lost world without feeling tied to a closed-minded mentality. This was the time to take matters into my own hands, to be able to voice my own opinion and cultivate the power to be able to deal with direct confrontation.

Nevertheless, this isn't a tale of unexpected love, nor a glamorization of Stockholm Syndrome or forced marriage: I am more clever than that. I knew that when Hades enlightened me as to what his plans were, I was simply to exist next to his side as his wife. A piece of ornamentation, nothing more, nothing less. A way to hush the rumors of his femininity, to exclaim to the entire galaxy 'look, I fit exactly into the carefully crafted box you all so desperately want to put me in.' This charade would start at the banquet he had organized later that night. When all the invitees had arrived, my captor and I made our way towards our ebony thrones, arms hooked tightly. I refrained from making eye contact with our guests so as not to make them question the integrity of this union—the eyes are the mirror of the soul, right? Nonetheless, I did allow myself to overhear glimpses of their private talks discussing the dress I was wearing, the impetuosity of this alliance and their chiding 'poor thing' and 'silly girl' comments.

One remark in particular did catch my attention: my mother was left inconsolable by my departure and was desperate to free me from Hades' grasp, unaware that I had never felt more liberated in my life. Apparently, she refused to send the fruits of the earth she had produced over to the gods at Olympus until we were reunited and all were left famished and distraught. Upon hearing this, I once again started doubting my decision to trick Hades into taking me as his wife and leaving behind my family, my

life and my past self. This posed a moral conundrum: either I devoted myself to this marriage and all the growth it represented or I faced the music, stripping away all the confidence I had built and giving up any and all of my aspirations. As we were reaching the platform, I felt my throat tightening thinking of my predicament. Looking at it from an outsider's perspective, I understand now how ludicrously easy it might appear to choose between these two possible outcomes: either my people lived in famine and my mother continued her rampage or I returned home to a mediocre life. In spite of that, returning home meant letting my mother clutch herself into my flesh again and surrender to a lifetime of numbness and submissiveness as all my decisions were being made for me. A lot of people would give anything to live in oblivion, to have the burden of indecisiveness taken away from them and to never have to be confronted with any sort of hardship. But commitment, doubtfulness and equivocation, however daunting and nerve-racking they might seem, they are part of what makes us human. To live a life without our own unique battles and adversities is to live a life of conformity and compliance.

And so I decided to create a third option. As little kids, we were always being told stories about the spirits who were stuck in the underworld, or even worse, about the sufferings of the wicked that lived in the deep abyss that is Tartarus. One thing a lot of those tales had in common was a reference to food. Tantalus, for example, could not reach out to the fruit trees above his head and the water he stood in always receded whenever he wanted to take a sip. His was a tale of denial, whereas others disclosed that if one was in fact able to feast on the copious amounts of food that were available, they would have to permanently reside in the underworld. Even though the thought of submitting to one permanent and unchangeable environment frightened me as a young girl, I felt invigorated by my ability to actively choose to remain by Hades' side. However, as much as I wanted to put myself and my ambitions first, I did not want my empowerment to result in the suffering of others. That is why, instead of guzzling all the different platters of food, I planned on eating only six pomegranate seeds during the buffet. Each seed would represent a month I was allowed to spend in the daylight with my mother while the other half of the year I could continue living in the Underworld. It seemed like a fair resolution to my problem to devote an equal amount of time to my mother as to my own personal development.

Demeter, on the other hand, did not appreciate this turn of events. One week after my marriage to Hades, my mother crashed down into my new home and declared that she refused to leave without me. After debating my release with Zeus, who had apparently given permission for my abduction, the supreme god had sent Hermes to plead with Hades to free me. Surprisingly, my husband agreeably let the chariot drive me back to the world of the living where I was met with infinite tears and hugs. It felt comforting to know that my coming home could lift my mother's worries, but it also reminded me of the fact that this return was only temporary. Not shying away from confrontation this time, I explained to her the agreement that granted her six months of her little girl by her side. At first she contested this arrangement, but eventually she realized that she was in over her head: tempting the gods' will could have dire repercussions and she was lucky to have been able to secure some, albeit limited, time with me. As a result, she agreed to allow the earth to flourish again and to deliver its fruits and wheats to the gods and humans. However, Demeter declared that during autumn and winter, the fields would lay dry, the sky would lament the loss of a daughter



and an icy breeze would remind the people of Demeter's heartbreak. Only when I could travel back from the Underworld during spring and summer and when she and I were reunited, the earth's fertility would be restored.

A few years have passed since Hades and I wed and as I sit on my throne, I am reminded of the journey that has taken me from a place of insecurity and passiveness to exercising my will and reign over my trusted subjects. My right-hand man is an extension of myself, a trustworthy companion whose faith I have earned by asserting dominance through respectful dialogue and leadership. The crystal bowl to my left is always filled to the brim with ruby pomegranate seeds: it serves as a reminder of the turning point I experienced and the lasting impact it has made on my life. Even though my stay is always temporary, I carry this bravery with me whenever and wherever I set foot on earth. I now live ardently, I live vigorously, I live.

**Lisa de Witte**

## White poplars

I have never liked pomegranates. They taste like lies.

I remember I was strolling with my mother, one placid and warm afternoon, feeling free and calm. The sun was embracing me that ending summer day, like a good old friend. I still can recall the trees murmuring, the flowers singing. Everything was peaceful and I felt safe, as only a child can. I was playing with other children, nymphs like myself, in a soft meadow, that much is true. But I was not alone. My mother was there with me; actually, she was the one who insisted on going to such a place in the first place. I was just a child at the time, so I did not question her. When one is a child, one never questions her mother, even though I had been feeling observed for some time. I just did not connect those two things at the time. And so I played and enjoyed myself so much. We would make flower crowns for us forgetting the world. Still playing, I threw myself on the soft grass and lied there enjoying its touch.

I remember how that day he came and my friends disappeared. I can't bring myself to blame them; no nymph would dare face a god. Nor would my mother. They could only feel grateful it was not one of them this time. Afterwards, he carried me as a package to his palace in the Underworld, HIS kingdom, where nobody—not my mother or my friends if feeling brave enough—could steal me. He boasted about how he had been the fastest one, just like when human farmers boast about who had best animals in the local market. My mother used to say gods were above us, but I could see no difference: he was just another farmer collecting some cattle. I remember I only wanted to vomit; to vomit his smell, to vomit the river. To vomit the day. Reality. It was so cold down there. I could not stop trembling, although it was not only due to coldness. Rather, I was thinking about cold lambs missing their old stables after being sold to strangers who would slaughter them whenever they decided so.

Of course, he came and visited me every night. I think he believed I would forget I was his otherwise. I would watch the moon outside the window, thinking about my friends, while he marked me the way gods enjoy the most, fucking us. The problem is that, after many weeks no rescue team came to me, so I started to doubt whether I wanted to go back to my former stable. I was furious and felt betrayed by my friends but, mostly, by Demeter. I had shared my concerns with her but she said I should feel praised about it. I did not understand her words at first, but I did after those weeks went by with no rescue. She wanted a daughter married with a god. I wanted to run around my river trees.

She changed her mind, eventually. The servants in the palace murmured among them that she wanted me back. Profit. Apparently, she had run after me while Hades was taking me to the Underworld. How is it then that I did not hear her? How could anyone not hear her own mother's calling? And so, she insisted on retrieving me; he insisted on keeping me. Nobody asked me, of course. Everyone was murmuring in the palace, afraid of angering Hades. He did not even go to my bedroom at night due to this frustration Demeter was bringing to him. He was used to be given everything. I tried to talk to him, but he shouted at me and then he locked himself in his private rooms, where none of his servants could enter.

After several days, he came out with what he thought to be a brilliant plan, with the confidence of a god. He came to me, while I was tending my flowers. He was smiling, confident, talking in the most lovely voice he could find in himself, as if I were a scared ram he was trying to calm down. As if he had not been speaking aloud about his plans, about how he would cheat us all terrible people who had been troubling him so much lately. He said he would magnificently let me go back to my mother and to my plants. As if I could return to my daises. All he wanted was that I ate the pomegranate he was offering me as a special farewell gift, he said. As a way to apologize for having been brought here against my will. He said he was really sorry and he repented he had not been able to control himself when he saw me. I bit the pomegranate. I became a shared sheep.

I went to my mother, who pretended having missed me greatly. I am not sure whom she wanted to convince. Anyway, I avoided her and walked on my own around my trees and flowers, crafting those flower crowns I used to love as a child. They felt strange on my skin, as if they did not belong there. So I stopped crafting those pettish crowns and instead I started really taking care of my flowers. After that, I enjoyed myself greatly in there, playing with the same nymphs I played with that last afternoon. They offered the best flowers they could find. I was tired of uprooted daises. So, they would wear and play with those crowns, while I was left on my own, free to tender the shining flowers. After six months, however, I was returned to Hades, for the time was due. Nobody asked me.

I thought he would be happy to see me again, that he might feel something towards me, but I was so wrong. I guess I was optimistic at the time. It is true that the first day I arrived there, he flattered me, and said I was more beautiful than ever. He even asked where I had left my crown of daises. He seemed crossed because I did not wear them anymore. But after several nights, he stopped coming to my room at night. He started to come fewer and fewer nights to my room, so I thought he was growing bored after he had put the lease on me. I was so scared. I thought he would kill me for months had gone by and I was not any pregnant even though he tried hard every night. He just had other interests at the time, but he kept me in my misery. He probably did not want to torture me, for I am certain that I was not in his mind at the time. I stalked him one night to one of his favourite rivers. I thought myself so mature now, so above the nymphs, and yet I was proved wrong.

I was shocked when I saw him watching a young naiad, as I now imagine he watched me before that day. I can imagine him looking at me like that the days before he took me. He was watching her as one watches a ring; calculating its value and the risk of stealing it in front of the seller. She was so young and confident on her own beauty. Innocent. I do not know why I did what I did. Since then, Hades and I always use a leave of menthe in our funeral rituals, as a pathetic attempt to redeem myself. He never asked me why. I think he knew.

He resumed his comings to my room every night. I was not happy about it, but while he was with me, there was no danger for any Menthe. I did all I could to keep him entertained during those nights, while I thought of Menthe sitting in the floor surrounded by my flowers. I had started to sniff the burnt laurel to try and see Menthe in my dreams, as I was told laurel helped one to see dead people. I wanted to explain myself. Useless. I could only imagine her and all I would tell her, but she never visited.

And that is how we spent the next winter. He would enjoy me, and I would think about Menthe while I tried to convince myself that it was the best decision at the time. But he started to avoid my room, even though I could hear him walking past my door. I followed him again, suspecting he would be following his old patterns. It was harder this time. He suspected I could be following him—that would not be the first time I did, after all. I was not wrong. He was visiting the Cocytus. At first, I saw nothing weird in the scene. Not until I saw her. He was spying on her, innocence in her eyes when we saw each other. Or so I thought. I think. I do not know. Leuce always had that effect upon me.

I started staying there late, much longer after Hades was back to the palace. Whenever we talked, I was always speechless. She seemed so confident about everything. She knew Hades was spying on her. She said it was not the first time she was observed, but no one had ever dared abduct her as Hades had done with me. I cannot even remember what we talked about, but I can remember her perfectly. Sometimes I think she knew perfectly well that Hades was going to abduct her as well, but I can never be sure, for she was always so calm when we talked.

One morning, after having missed my daily meeting with Leuce due to my doubts regarding her intentions, I entered the livingroom to eat my breakfast, but Hades was nowhere to be seen. I thought he would be ruling his kingdom, although I never really knew what his duties were, apart from abducting girls. Whenever we were together, he would talk about anything but his duties. Maybe he thought I would like to rule instead or that I would not understand any of it. The palace was so quiet that day that I finally had the time and silence required to think. I spent the day in the garden where, for once, he had sent no guardian, for they were too busy in the palace. I was alone with the daisies. I sang to them, and I like to think they sang back. But their singing was queer that morning. I started to feel uneasy, but that did not stop my thinking while I weaved a flower crown, the first I had crafted in years. I did mine out of daisies, and hers out of X. I hadn't intended to fight her last week, but I was too scared of her proposal. She said Hades was getting more and more aggressive in his courting and she feared he would end up abducting her. She wanted us to run away, together, to find a new river, new daisies where there was no Hades. I told her that was impossible, but she laughed and insisted on that crazy idea of hers. She described me where we would go. It would be a sunny forest with the freshest and purest river one could imagine. There would be no Hades or Demeter to interfere. Of course she was being optimistic; she was still unmarked. Anyway, she saw I was so troubled that we did not talk about it.

When she suggested we should run away, away from Hades and his palace, I had not thought we were able to do it but, while I was sitting in my bed thinking at night, I decided we would indeed run away. It would not be too difficult, I thought. I was not exactly highly regarded by the guards, but I had never done anything against Hades' wishes. Even when those sporadic occasions when he decided to lock me into my room for days because he said I was distracting the guards, I stayed in there quiet, looking through the window while I rested. So, I thought, if I decided, for instance, to go for a stroll with my friend, a female friend, while I was carrying the floral basket my mother gave me last time I had been on the Earth, they would have no reason to suspect I was actually running away. We would look like two very pleasant and calm ladies enjoying

some walking. And so I ran to the kitchen and grabbed some food. Apples, figs, anything I found I thought she would enjoy. Once in my room, I looked through the window towards where she would be taking her bath as usual. And I sat, I sat on my bed with the basket ready. I tried to calm myself before heading outside—I did not want to alert those guards. They never asked me how I felt, but they were always observing, and they would detect my nervousness as soon as I went out.

When it was finally midnight I set my mind and I went to the Cocytus. When I arrived at the river, it was calm, quiet. I saw, rising towards the full moon, a beautiful and elegant white poplar.

There was Hades, offering a pomegranate, smirking.

**Vanessa Roldán Romero**

## A place to return

### March 20th - Persephone's Diary

After being defeated, what really remains is greed and blame. Greed of someone who thought that being treated as a *thing* was normal; and blame due to the inability of recognizing yourself after being used.

The body I owned was no longer mine—I couldn't recognize myself as the happy and innocent girl I used to be. I just felt like a phantom limb where my mind forced my body to cooperate and move.

My mother carried that blame too, as she had a bitter feeling within her. At some state, she was happy because I was with her, but we all know that such a moment won't last forever. After summer, I would have to return to the prison I was forced to lived in. The underworld. I'm not able to speak openly about what I was forced to do when I was there. I was a little mouse in a trap. I don't know if I will ever be able to speak openly about it...

My mother, Demeter, goddess of fertility and the earth, was always kind to me. She really understood me, which brought us really close. Our relationship was sincere and somehow easy. There were no boundaries between us. But then, I wasn't able to reach out to her because I wasn't able to recognize who I was anymore. My body didn't feel right, and my mind wasn't a safe place either.

What makes me mad was the fact that I was used by two men, not only one. Two! My father sold me as a property, sentencing me to my ultimate fall. How would I be able to trust men again? How would I be able to trust someone ever again?

Surprisingly, my father is now recognized as my savior, when he is definitely not. None really saved me from anything, even when I die I will have to go back with *him*.

I am not free and I will never be.

### April 20th - Narcissus

Life has sprung again. After my mother spent most of the year searching for me, the earth seemed to scream back and everything died. The smell of thousands of flowers intoxicated me—this new 'me' seemed to hate spring. It's like everything is so bright and pompous, and I'm not closer enough to reach that taste of happiness. The smell of the flowers is sickly and disgusting, but what I really hate is the smell of narcissuses. It's penetrating and deep. I can't even get close to the fields without the fear of sensing the smell of this flower. Even looking at it seems dangerous. Although the petals are white, all I see now is a flower stained with blood red colour.

This pathetic fallacy doesn't resonate with me. If the control of the earth depended on me, everything would be very different. It wouldn't rain because I can't allow myself to exteriorize the grief I feel inside, but definitely there wouldn't be more

flowers and colours. And most definitely, narcissuses would no longer be white. I would paint them red.

Although I could spend some time with my mother—six moths!—I had to come back to the place where *he* was. And that really scared me. My mother didn't force me to talk about it, because she knew that there was nothing that could change the fact that I had to go back to the Underworld. She knew that this traumatic experience would forever continue to happen even when I died. She just tried to make me happy as long as possible by pleasing me with beautiful dresses and jewels, but there was something broken inside of me, and this feeling of not recognising your own body really chased me. The nicest dress wouldn't help me to feel my body, that didn't work anymore. It's like I was dressing up, performing a role in front of people just to clarify that I was alright, glad and happy to be back home.

But in fact I no longer have a home.

### *June 20th - Summer Solstice*

During the Summer Solstice, the door to the human world is completely open. For me, this didn't have a meaning, but being the longest day of the year my mother was even busier preparing the greatest harvest. Which meant that I would have to spend the whole day on my own.

At first, I was scared but at the same time I wanted to experience being alone. I wanted to be surrounded by my own thoughts. They were my safe place, I wouldn't have to pretend there. I decided to spend the evening in one of the prettiest lakes on the outskirts of the city, but when I arrived, I couldn't help but hear the cry of a dryad. All I could see was a mass of red hair. She was facing the lake while her crying became more noticeable. I hid behind a big ash-tree trunk while I observed her patiently. I felt like I was watching something I wasn't allowed to—the dryad was there looking for privacy. Her chant was meant to be heard just by her. Her body was trembling from the strong weep, when suddenly she started singing a beautiful song.

*There was a silence after the loss,  
Now full of cries without a meaning,  
Where justice was searched at any cost  
By her sister redeeming.*

*Her name was Dalia of the Greens,  
Blessed with beauty and wit.  
Her destiny was fixed like a queen,  
But her legacy will never lit.*

*The ashes of her singing  
Once beautiful, later her fall.  
Now converted into a siren,  
Her crying is a death-call.*

*The rage of a powerful mother  
Was the cause why her sister burned.  
In exile, her story is ignored by many others,  
While the mother's daughter was returned.*

*Oh, mother Demeter, forgive her innocent heart!  
Oh, mother Demeter, better turn her into a beautiful hart!  
Where her true essence is set free in solid earth  
and from ashes, she blooms until a new birth.*

The sad melody guided me into a profound sorrow, and somehow the empathy for her grew stronger after realizing the true story. Her sister was the nymph that accompanied me the day I was kidnapped. Because of the rage that my mother felt when I was taken, she converted her into a siren. My mother separated the two sisters the same way *he* separated me from her.

I felt ashamed because there was nothing I could do. I felt ashamed because the dryad didn't hate me or my mother as she should. I felt ashamed because I could come back to my mother for a period of time while Dalia would never go back with her sister. Dalia of the Greens was uprooted from the earth where she belonged, now destined to live alone in a lake; while at the same time, she was uprooted from her sister. She was condemned to be forgotten by her existence.

I was so centered on my own pain that I didn't realize that there were women around me that suffered too. I saw myself in the lost siren and I saw my mother in the sad sister. This time, no man was the reason for their ultimate fall. It was sister's betrayal, and I had to do something. Things needed to change, I would talk to my mother in order restore peace, to bring Dalia back to the place she really belonged. She had a home, I wouldn't be responsible for taking that from them.

#### September 21th - The day before

I was ready to stop the fire from burning me. I was no longer the innocent girl who came back from the underworld, who was impossible to recognize herself, her body, her identity. The summer was coming to an end, and the autumn leaves started to cover



everything. Which meant that I would have to come back to Hell, with the God of the Underworld.

My mother fulfilled her promised, and searched for Dalia and returned her into the beautiful and witty dryad she was. She finally returned home to her sister, whose name was Layna. Once more they were together and the ash tree they belonged to grew taller and stronger.

My mother understood the moment I told her the story of the sisters. Their story was our story too. They had an opportunity to be happy and we had to help them. For them and for us. After that, things started to be brighter for me. I reconciled my old self with this new me. I would never be the same after the things I was forced to do. I would never be the same because this new identity appeared out of the need to survive. I would have to live with the man that raped me and forced me to love him, for six months a year. But what really helped me to continue was the fact that I would return to my mother for other six months.

After all I had a place to return. I would just have to hold on for six months. My home was my mother, and she would always fight back to bring me back.

I knew things would change in the future.

One day I will be back for good like Dalia returned home.

There is hope.

**Marina Ortega López**

## Goddess Almighty

Every year Zeus organised a huge feast where all the gods and goddesses boasted about their affairs and relationships with humans. That night, Aphrodite was showing off her new necklace which a Greek commander gave her. Dionysus was telling everybody that he stole some wine from humans. The inhabitants of the Olympus were enjoying the banquet. Well, all the gods and goddesses except for Hera, who was staring at ME.

Let me introduce myself properly. My name is Persephone, daughter of Zeus the Great and his sister Demeter, the goddess of agriculture. I knew Hera never liked me because I wasn't her daughter. In fact, Hera could forgive Zeus for being unfaithful and having an affair with a human. However, I wasn't the daughter of a human, but of a goddess like her. Therefore, Hera hated me, and she was always looking as though she could control me with her sight.

Suddenly, a new guest turned up at the banquet. Uncle Hades, the Lord of the Underworld. I noticed a kind of relief and a subtle smile when Hera saw Hades—I think she was waiting for him. Hades sat next to Zeus and Poseidon in a place where all the guests could see and worship them, since they were the three most powerful gods in the Olympus. After celebrating the greatness of the three brothers, Hades got up and left the hall, and so did Hera. It was a weird situation as all the guests remained in the banquet except for those two. They returned to the banquet as if nothing had happened, but I became nervous because I felt Hera and Hades were talking about me.

Next day, I went to the beach to play with my maids. The sea was quiet and serene. Uncle Poseidon seemed to be in a very good mood that day, probably because of the banquet the previous night. All of a sudden, I heard a strange sound coming from the land—I thought it was an earthquake. In fact, the ground cracked and then the figure of Hades appeared. He came to me and took me aggressively. I didn't have time to react. I was shocked. Then, when I realised what had happened, I found myself in the Underworld. It was so confusing. I didn't know what to do. When I woke up, I found myself in a dark and wet room. I decided to call Hades, so I shouted his name. After a while, he came to the room and kept looking at me. At the beginning, I was quite afraid, but I noticed a kind of sympathy in his eyes.

Hades told me that he was just trying to protect me from Hera. I was right! They were talking about me when they left the feast for a moment. The Queen of the Olympus wanted to get rid of me as she had always regarded me as her rival. I was Zeus's favourite daughter, a daughter who comes from another goddess, an absolute humiliation for Zeus's powerful wife. She asked Hades to help her get a poison from his realm, as the substance which is able to kill an immortal goddess is located in the Underworld—where else? Just after my uncle Hades stopped talking, we heard the threatening sound of thunder...

Father!

My parents burst into the hall looking for their daughter. As the maids told my mother that I was kidnapped by my uncle, they were trying to rescue me from the Underworld. I told them the truth—that Hades wanted to save me and that my actual enemy was Hera. Zeus became furious. He couldn't believe that his beloved wife wanted to kill me. I didn't blame him. My father was supposed to be respected by his queen, but she tried to murder his innocent and precious daughter. Zeus decided to banish Hera from the Olympus, but I had a better idea—indeed, this was a fight between Hera and me.

Next day I went with my parents to the Olympus. I told everybody that Hades had kidnapped me, but both my father and Hades had reached an agreement. I became the wife of Hades, but I could visit the Olympus twice a year. When I looked at Hera, I perceived that she got nervous. In fact, only one brother among Hades, Zeus and Poseidon could have an official wife that was supposed to be the queen of all the gods. If I married Hades, then what about her? Who was going to be the Queen of the Olympus? When I stopped talking, Hera said aggressively that I couldn't marry Hades because it was impossible that both Hades and Zeus could get married at the same time. Zeus answered her objection telling Hera that he had decided to divorce her because a queen shouldn't try to murder other gods but protect them instead.

This is how the Olympus got rid of such a queen. I have always respected Hera, but she considered me to be her worst enemy even though I have never been ambitious. I didn't want to occupy her position, but she obliged me to humiliate her, and, as a result, I have become the most powerful goddess, the Queen of the Olympus and the Queen of the Underworld.

**Salma M<sup>a</sup> Corral Morjani**

## The rootless little plant

A sweet laugh could be heard coming from the forest. It was Persephone, the daughter of the goddess of fertility. The young lady was playing in the woods, lying on the grass surrounded by flowers, admiring and enjoying the different sounds and smells that nature offered her. Over her face, there was a mixture of lights and shadows created by the beams entering through the huge trees that governed the place. There in nature was where the innocent girl dressed in pink, she felt alive, an overwhelming peace.

Meanwhile, the god of death and war was observing the earth at that moment. When he saw the girl, he was instantly impregnated by her radiant beauty and innocence, wishing nothing but to possess her. Suddenly, interrupting Persephone's moment of peace, the ground started to shake. The warm beams faded making way to a daunting darkness, the songs of birds were replaced by the strong wing beats of birds running away, and the earth beneath her feet opened up creating an enormous chasm.

Persephone heard the vigorous galloping sounds of multiple diabolic horses pulling a carriage. They were coming towards her. The Lord of the Underworld appeared from the infernal chasm. This terrifying image paralyzed the girl's delicate body. Hades, a cold-blooded ruthless creature, took the frozen Persephone forcing her to go with him to the Underworld. This i show the vulnerable lady was kidnapped.

Persephone looked at her raptor for the first time. Hades, apparently a common man, was hiding a diabolic beast inside of him. The lady shouted and screamed in anger, demanding him to take her back to the earth, where she belonged. The man seemed to dislike her rebellious attitude. Consequetively, his human figure started to change. The beast snarled, writhed and finally erupted violently as a huge demon. With this act, the king of the Underworld showed how powerful he was, and over all, who the leader was. The little lady felt completely dwarfed and speechless.

The daughter of the goddess of nature was appalled as she was welcomed to hell. That sinister and dismal place was totally opposed to what she had lived before. It was a source of souls swarming in rage, fury and pain, a source of broken and hopeless souls wandering in a sea of fire. She could perceive each of those decaying feelings devastating her fragile body, like a storm lightning colliding with her. She would never return home.

Hades, the strong and rough male figure, enclosed her victim in this place and violently dragged her into his palace. He looked at her prize with a malicious satisfaction, knowing that she would stay there permanently. Thus, the Underworld was now Persephone's prison since there was no escape. In addition, she was watched by Cerberus, the monstrous multi-headed dog controlled by Hades, which guarded the gates of the world of the dead to prevent anybody from leaving. Hades married Persephone. Now she was truly in hell.

With the passage of time, Persephone turned into a cold person. She was an obedient and silent woman manipulated by her husband. The old sweet and playful girl had disappeared; not even the incandescent flames of hell could defrost her broken heart. She was even afraid of looking through the windows of the palace. She was too

terrified since she did not want to feel all those painful emotions of the Underworld; for this reason, she just stayed inside, counting the days to be rescued by her mother. Persephone knew that the difficult thing was not entering into the land of the dead, but going out. The grieving girl missed everything regarding her life on earth, like running around in the crops, grabbing flowers, the touch and connection with nature, her mother... and above all, she missed the feeling of being free.

As the days passed by, Persephone was confused. She had always been told several fairy tales that ended up with a happily married couple. However, she was now married but she did not feel love. Persephone lost all hope to be rescued. She urgently needed a solution but, unfortunately, the truth was that she was permanently watched by the monstrous heads of Cerberus. The young lady could not make a move without being followed by the reddened eyes of the beast along with a menacing grunting noise addressing her.

Suddenly, while Persephone was crying, one of her tears shone and gleamed. It was like a little diamond going out directly from her soul. When this teardrop touched the ground a little shiny plant flourished immediately, the only living being in the Underworld apart from herself. Emerging from the little plant, she heard a familiar voice telling her to trust her own might, to remember her roots—'You are Demeter's daughter.' Persephone heard her mother's voice!

The little plant began to grow up increasingly in front of the gasping girl. Surprisingly, a little bud appeared at the top of the plant, which opened up into a beautiful deep red flower. Persephone noticed several tiny particles arising from inside the astonishing flower. She was stunned peering closely at those particles that ended up creating a path for Persephone. She followed it. As she walked, more and more vegetation came into view. It was a magical moment. The path was actually leading Persephone eventually to the way out of the Underworld.

Although she bumped into Cerberus, the creature looked like a little and obedient dog, rejoicing in seeing its owner. Persephone became aware that it was a sign of her superior strength at that moment; she was actually connected with Cerberus because it was an animal, and she had now achieved a total control over anything related with nature. There was something in her eyes that indicated that she was not the same anymore. The innocent, fragile, and submissive lady was flourishing into a radically changed woman.

Hades appeared suddenly and tried to stop Persephone without success. She stared defiantly at him and the god became frozen. Before leaving the Underworld, Persephone, who looked more radiant than ever, forged a prison for the man who had been her raptor during all that time. She used just some hand movements to create magically a resistant jail made with the most robust trunks along with thorns. Hades, unable to speak, standing there with a blank look, stayed trapped for eternity.

**Raquel Maturano Fernández**

## Six or Twelve?

In the middle of the spring, we were planting flowers, colouring Earth. The truth is that that day I was taken from my mother's hands. Not a single word from her stopped Zeus, my father, who was determined that I should marry Hades. Even if I did not want to.

Months went by and I became the Queen of the Underworld. Sometimes I felt like I was dead even if I was not. But life is not that bad here. I am the Queen, for god's sake. What else would I want? But I cannot be untrue to myself. I miss my mother and sometimes I really want to go back to earth. Home.

One night, tired of being here, alone and without my mother, I started to think of how to get out of here. I sent a message to my mother with one of Hades' minions. She kept growing flowers and plants, trees, fruits and vegetables, but this was meant to be the last time. The message I sent to her was to stop giving life to the earth. She, Demeter, the goddess of harvest and agriculture. I knew the plan would work. And so it did. Immediately, Zeus begged my mother to grow plants again, but she demanded one thing, just as I told her. She would start planting and farming again if her daughter was taken back to her. Obviously, Hades would not let me go without a price. I was supposed not to eat anything while I was being rescued, but Hades made eat six pomegranate seeds. The sly thing. The truth is that by eating six seeds I would cyclically return six months to the Underworld. Hades thought that I was being tricked, but I knew all that. Of course I did. I could have just not eaten them but I did. Why? Because I still wanted revenge. I still wanted Zeus to pay for giving me away to Hades. Six months a year, with the help of my mother, the earth would not have any flowers, plants, fruits, or vegetables.

Ten years passed and I spent six months on earth and six in the Underworld. My mother knew that, when I wanted, I could go back home forever. In fact, she asked me to go back and stay there with her the whole year. It is true that I took revenge on my father and he does not know yet, but I was still taking revenge of Hades. Hades was so happy down here with me, but what he did not know is that keeping me here alive in the world of the non-living was destroying the Underworld. He still thinks that I feel dead. He still thinks that I am DEAD, but I am not. Not if I still go back to the earth every six months. The Underworld suffers a disorder when a non-dead stays here for such a long time. I cannot forgive Hades for keeping me here for so long.

Spring was about to begin and my mother was excited because the six months down here passed and it was my turn to go back. The world was little by little being destroyed but I realised that, when I was back with my mother, the Underworld recovered perfectly. I was not being clever. How could I think that my plan would work? Obviously not, the disorder stopped for six months when I was outside.

I felt useless and silly. I was thinking of giving up, staying with my mother. But then I would ruin everything.

Mother, I just have to thank you for all your help and all the work you have done for me, but this year, I will not go back to Earth. Yes, you are right. You probably realised too that if I stay here the whole year I will die. It is my decision. I want revenge. No man on earth or anywhere will do this to me again, even if I die. That is the only way to escape. To stop all this. To stop him.

**Luis Baone López**

## Blood pressure

I have decided to write down my story in order to arrange my memories and clarify some of the thoughts I've been having lately.

For those who don't know who I am, my name is Persephone; some people call me Kore too. In any case, the two reasons for what I am known are my mother's marriage with Zeus and my husband Hades' fame.

I will start talking about my childhood. My mother Demeter, goddess of fertility, raised me in the Olympus with the rest of gods always hanging around. However, my father, Zeus, wouldn't pay a lot of attention to me due to his many chores as supreme God. My mother could not stand this because, as she said, she had also many things to do apart from paying attention to me. Nonetheless, she was the best mother in the entire universe. Thanks to her, I grew up being taught about the Earth, the Olympus, and all their divine and extraordinary processes in the universe. However, my mother would never talk about the Underworld. This was a taboo.

While growing up, I used to spend a lot of time with the rest of my friends making theories about Hades and his territories. Taking a look backwards, for us, it felt like fiction because nobody had ever talked about it. Other people were scared, but my group of friends and I felt like we had to explore it and could not stop talking about it. My aim those days was to get to see the Underworld, in which everything would be romantic and people there would have just the same personality as my adolescent me. This is when I started to seek for a way to go inside that place. I should admit that I was blinded by my own obsession

During this period, it happened that my body *flourished*, as my mother used to say. Suddenly, many demigods, centaurs and other kinds of creatures would start following me around or send Hermes to read me all types of messages about the shape of my body, process during which both of us would feel completely embarrassed. I was only fourteen by then.

My mother felt like I was driving her crazy. At the same time, she was denying five marriage proposals a day and tried to ignore my long, enthusiastic discourses about the Underworld. What I did not know back then was that the most persistent suitor going after me was my uncle Hades. He had asked for my hand more times than my mother would have wanted and more than his patience would allow.

After that, all I know is that there were many times in which we casually came across each other. We had all types of conversations, in which he talked like a prince charming. I felt so pleased hearing his stories about his wonderful lands, and how good I would feel living over there with him. Finally, after asking a couple of times I decided to accept running away with him. Our plan went out this way: we arranged to meet each other in a meadow, where my mother would let me go picking flowers with my friends every Friday. He told me to look for the most beautiful narcissus in the place, and that he would show up as soon as I smelt it. Looking for the flower was pretty easy. Its smell attracted me in the moment I got with the rest of the girls to the countryside. As soon

as I picked it from the grass, there he appeared, on his carriage, with his black chariot, ready to run away with me.

The following months were not as I expected them to be. Compared to everything my mother had taught me about, I found the Underworld the saddest place in the universe. People there would always scream and cry, and everything was filthy and dark. As for Hades, he spent long hours talking about the good couple we were. He organized our wedding as if it was any other kind of procedure and did it at the speed of light, in order to be able to say that I belonged to him. He would not let me choose anything, would ask for nothing and would spend a lot of time talking about the way in which I had changed him for better. This way, I felt bad saying that I was disgusted by the Underworld and that I wanted to leave. Nonetheless, he had made all kinds of favours to me, including disobeying my mother and arranging our marriage. It was my fault that I could not adapt and he was too good for me so I felt like I could not abandon him.

Some months passed, and I was completely isolated and did not know what was happening in the Olympus. I could only talk to dead souls and devils that would hang around our place. Actually, I was completely convinced, or so did Hades repeat every time I told him I needed to see other people, that the rest of my friends and family did not want to see me because I had decided to leave them behind. It was then when I decided I would stay, in order for him to be happy.

I had been over a year in the Underworld when Hades started to be weird around me. He walked nervously and was too busy going back and forth to meet me and talk for a second. A week later he did not have any other option but tell me what was happening. He said my mother was threatening Zeus with starving the Earth to death if I was not given back to the Olympus. Zeus had organized a trial in order to get into an agreement.

The day of the reunion, I dressed up. I rode the carriage. I sat there in front of the judge. Nobody asked me anything. They would only let me stand there in silence, watching them fighting over me without asking me a single question. My mother did not stop repeating that my husband had brainwashed me. Meanwhile, Zeus seemed bored—he only payed attention to Hades, with whom he kept a couple of accomplice looks. Finally, my father was so fed up with the problem that he decided to divide me in two. From that moment on, I would spend half of the year with my husband and the other half with my mother. This way, the Earth would only be dried out half of the year, Zeus would be left alone by all those complaining about the famine without having to fight with his brother, and my mother and husband would be satisfied with the situation.

At the beginning, it was very weird to go back to the Olympus. My mother would not stop crying. She said that she did not know how to take me out of that relationship. I did not understand what she was referring to, since I was not being tortured in the Underworld, and Hades was not bad to me. Coming back to the Underworld was less shocking than the other times. Even if it is very dark and it makes you feel like crying all the time, Hades says that he is the best version of himself when I am there. Even if I am not genuinely happy, I am comfortable and I feel like when I am there, I save him.



My life is a bit bittersweet. I don't like going back to the Olympus these days because my friends and mother insist on trying to convince me of dumping him, because, as they say, I am the only one who can finish with the situation.

At the end of the day, I should accept that living with my husband is not bad. He says I am his most valued trophy and that nobody will love me as much as he does. I should be happy with that. I am happy with that. Nonetheless, to be honest with myself, I guess that if I had known in advance what was waiting for me down here, if only justice would have taken the sides of my mother, I guess this blood pressure that does not let me sleep would have never showed up.

**Clara Herrero Celdrán**

## A whole new world

My mother, Demeter, was in charge of the fertility of the earth. One of my earliest childhood memories was lying down carefree on the wet grass, the cicadas whispering soft melodies in my ear, while my mother would run her duties as the Goddess of Agriculture and Harvest. With just one soft touch, she would transform the earth and bring the most abundant harvest. She was an example of a perfect mother, the two of us against the world. I felt like the world could not touch me and spoil me with its tainted nature, that I was an unreachable entity under the protection of my mother.

I think she must have forgotten and embraced me for too long, because it all began to change when I started growing up. Her warm hold was growing cold, her hands were piercing my limbs, her nails were biting my skin, my lungs were miserably grappling for air. She never released her hold on me.

Because, to tell the truth, my mother was a complex woman. While she took great care of the plants and made the flowers bloom, she refused to allow me to blossom. I was her shadow, being sheltered from the sun and the real world. Even my second name, Kore, which meant *daughter*, signified that I was merely that—a daughter. All sense of identity stripped by just that label. Daughter. Daughter of Demeter. Daughter of Zeus. A daughter in an ocean of daughters, a nameless figure hidden behind her vigilant mother, never quite tasting the elixir of life. It is ironic, really, how my mother was praised for the birth of life, yet I found myself imprisoned under her confines, her overprotective nature—never able to blossom and stand on my own two feet. I was a trapped flower wanting to be released, to grow within the other flowers in a vast garden of beauty and life.

I was not a little girl anymore. I was starting to feel like a woman, and I wanted to explore the sensation of being one. I noticed, while going on my usual stroll around the forest with my maidens, that I received a few glances from men. It was an innocent peek or two, never lasting longer than a few seconds, yet their observance unlocked a new uproar within me. Their careful gaze would work their way to my sun-kissed hair, and for the first time I felt seen—not as Demeter's daughter, not as Kore, but as Persephone. It was a peculiar sensation, mixed with the fear of danger, like a wild ocean calling helpless sailors into dark water, yet I wanted to dive right in. And as much as I was tempted by this Garden of Eden, I knew that for as long as my mother would live, she would not grant me my independence. She would not allow me to taint my body and my soul in the hands of strangers, because she believed women should remain pure and unblemished until delivered in the hands of their husbands. The grasp of her hands around my neck was too tight, and I could not find the strength in me to oppose her.

Once, while I was walking in the Nysian meadow, my eyes fell upon the most alluring flower I had ever seen. I stopped to examine it, touching its soft petals and smelling its enchanting smell. 'It's a narcissus', a voice from behind me whispered. I turned around and saw a hooded figure, approaching me with careful steps, as if it was the hunter and I was a deer waiting for the final blow. 'It represents rebirth and new beginnings', the voice said again, this time coming closer to me.

New beginnings, huh?

So for the next month, I would sneak out from my mother's temple and walk along the forest path. The hooded figure, whom I found out later was Hades, would leave narcissus flowers on the trail and I would secretly meet him. It was a little game for us, a way for me to gain an ounce of independency and detach myself from my mother. And as much fun I was having with Hades, I felt like it was not enough.

'Take me away', I remember telling him once we were embracing each other under the moonlight. 'I have always been the extension of my mother. I want to be a free, independent being, able to make my own decisions. She keeps me sheltered from the world, like I am fragile and just one blow from the wind would fragment me. And she says that women should be pure, kind, untouched, always willing to bend themselves backwards for the sake of men, for their husbands. Yet she does not allow me to meet any man. And why would I want to be a carpet for men to walk over me? What is the point of marriage if it is not between equals, rather than between a master and a slave? You are my equal, Hades, and you have never once treated me the way men were tyrannically supposed to treat their lovers'.

That night, the moonlight shed some light upon the narcissus I was holding. I think it was a sign from the Gods. If the narcissus signaled new beginnings, then new beginnings should come.

'I'll be in the meadow again, tomorrow. My mother allows me to take a walk once a month under the protection of the maidens. I'll make sure to stray a bit behind, and once that happens, take me away. Plant a narcissus on the ground as a signal, and allow me to embark on my new beginning. It is time I take matters into my own hands'.

Our plan was successful, and once I stepped into the Underworld, the realm of the dead, I felt more alive than ever. I had the power to do what I wanted, released into the world without the terror of my mother. So I danced with the lost souls that were lurking in the shadows, I guided Orpheus, Sisyphus, Tyresias, and I felt like I found my place in the world. I was an equal in my marriage with Hades, and I was as much responsible for the Underworld as he was. For the first time I felt independent, and not just because of Hades, but because I dared to defy my mother and choose for myself. 'Queen of the Underworld'. That had a nice ring to it.

At that time, I was too busy living my new life to notice that the life on Earth was slowly dying. When Hermes entered the Underworld and grabbed me by my arms, I felt my life starting to drain out of me, like I was being suffocated in my mother's embrace again. I couldn't think, I couldn't speak, the world was slowly closing in on me.

'Persephone, they are dying. Everyone is dying. The earth is drying up; the people are tortured every day because they can't harvest food. Your mother is slowly killing the entire population, even poor animals are suffering. She's in pain, and her pain is resonating and devastating the whole world. You must return at once, save her from her misery and her desperation.'

A tear rolled down once Hermes finished his speech. I didn't realize it was mine until I tasted the saltiness on my lips.

I promised I would go back. I was not as selfish, and I would sacrifice myself for the sake of humankind. Not for my mother. But I could not abandon my profound sense of freedom. Hence, I ate a pomegranate seed from the Underworld. The rumors say that if someone eats pomegranate seeds from the Underworld, they will be bound to it forever, unable to leave. So I made a deal with Zeus, that I would go back on Earth for two thirds of the year, to cure my mother's misery and make the Earth fertile again.

But I would return immediately to the Underworld for the remainder one third of the year, alongside my husband and my new life.

I touched the Earth's soil again. My mother greeted me with open arms, tears rolling down her face, waiting for me to run for her embrace once again. The grounds were fertile, the birds were chirping, the plants were exploding their colorful petals on the ground. There was life once more on Earth.

But I was dying.

**Sinadora Lagou**

## The abduction of Paige

Any seventeen-year-old girl should be allowed to go out to a party without fearing for her life. Not Paige's case. Any girl her age should have had the right to keep her privacy after such a traumatic event. Not Paige's case. It shouldn't have been such a disastrous night. Not Paige's case.

It had been more than two weeks since that terrible night, and the case was already all over the media. Once again, a girl had gone missing mysteriously after a night out. Tabloids, newspapers, televisions all over the country had made sure that everyone knew all the details surrounding the tragic incident. By then, almost everyone knew where it had taken place, when, who was with her, and even what she had been drinking. One could think it was all about the latest celebrity scandal, but nothing could be further from reality.

Paige's mother, Danielle, wasn't sure she could take it any longer. She just wanted her daughter back. She just wanted her baby back home. However, the media had other plans for her. She was so sick of answering condemnatory questions that even she had started to wonder: 'Could it really have been her fault?', 'What was she doing there?', 'What was she wearing?' As if she didn't have far more difficult and worrying questions to answer, such as 'Is she even alive?'

Moreover, she remembered distinctly the last conversation she had had with her daughter. Regret and guilt were eating her up. She couldn't help but feel that the argument they had before Paige stormed out and disappeared for days on end had been her fault. But what else could she do? That ex-boyfriend of hers... Danielle knew there was something wrong with him. She had let Paige know in several occasions.

'He always seems tense, ready to burst at any moment...' said Danielle one day, after months of watching and remaining silent on her daughter's boyfriend. 'I just don't like the way he talks to you'.

'He only does that when he is angry. Everyone gets angry, mom. Plus, things are getting better. Really, you have nothing to worry about'.

However, things did not get better, and, yes, she did have something to worry about. The arguments didn't stop, and it all came to a point where Paige had to break up with him. But, just as Danielle had predicted, the boy became obsessed with Paige. He wouldn't stop calling her or showing up at her house asking for a second chance, even after being asked repeatedly not to do it. That is why, when Paige told her mother that she was going to a party where Hayes would be too, Danielle tried to keep her home. Her daughter got upset and went anyway.

Danielle had tried to explain all of that in the trial when Hayes was finally taken to court as a suspect. Of course, Hayes denied it all. Paige wasn't there to tell her version anyway. Her dead body had been found, after all.

Days of investigation, hearings and declarations went down to nothing. At the end, to her own surprise and exasperation, Danielle was forced to come to an agreement

with her daughter's murderer. Apparently, there was not enough evidence to find him guilty. He would spend several months under house arrest, but would never make it to jail. All that had happened, everything both mother and daughter had suffered, didn't matter at all. And just because a good guy's credibility was far more valid than a dead girl's one. Danielle didn't care what the judge said. She didn't care what the public claimed her daughter had or had not done. She didn't care how many times Hayes stated he was innocent. She knew the truth.

And the truth was that Hayes was lying. He had seen Paige the night of the party. He had talked to her. That conversation had turned into a fight after he had been rejected by her. But that didn't matter. She was drunk, he was not. He held the power, she didn't. The outcome seemed almost inevitable.

Hayes had followed her outside the house where the party still raged on. No words of apologies would work on Paige. And even though he had made her decision and expressed it loud and clear, Hayes would not accept it. That's what led to their argument. That argument led to a slap. The slap to a punch. And, after the punch, the rest of it came. Of course, Hayes needed to be in power. He needed to repair his broken ego. That's why he took everything from Paige. Her dignity. Her body. Her life.

Up until that day, Paige had always been convinced that being kidnapped, raped and killed was the kind of thing that only happened to reckless girls who are always in the wrong place, at the wrong time, with the wrong people. But as she lay there, on the mud of some abandoned farm, with the cold rain droplets falling over her unresponsive limbs and life creeping out of her body, she couldn't help but wonder: what did I do wrong?

**Andrea Gallardo Hernández**

PHAETHON





## Water in the sun

The boy was water, ancient water and strong as the old titans. The boy was young and vigorous as a flaming arrow through a starry night, dazzling and fleeting as a dream. His name was Phaethon, the son of the oceanid Clymene and the solar deity, Helios. When born, the semi-divine child was as regular as any other boy, tanned skin with deep hazel eyes. The truth is that he showed no divine skill or trait related to his father. He was just a regular boy. What he indeed inherited was the physical appearance of his mother and the swift and sweet tone of her voice.

Clymene raised Phaethon telling him stories about his father, making a big impact in the small dark skinned boy with glimmery eyes full of curiosity over the figure of his divine progenitor, the tales around him and the duty he carried. The mother would lie with the boy in her bed and tell him many stories about the sea, the mystical beings that lived underneath. But, in the end, the story that Phaeton enjoyed the most was the one about his father carrying the massive star that emerged and vanished every day on surface of the sea. He dreamt every day with touching the winged horses and the bright gold chariot which was driven every day by his father.

With the passing of years, Phaethon grew to be a humble and beautiful boy, with thick and curly hair and bright hazel eyes full of curiosity. He would go every day to the beach in his coastal town and swam gracefully. The boy loved to pass most of his time with his mother, a thing that Clymene enjoyed but in the end prevented Phaethon from spending time with the boys of his age.

‘My son, it is not proper for a boy to stay that amount of time at home with the sole company of his mother. Meet your friends, make new...’

The sweet words of his mother were a bit harsh for him as he didn’t feel any connection with the boys around him, but surely he had friends. They were rude, manly boys who ran up the hills, to the shore and even pushed him. Precisely one of them, Epaphus, would always try to make jokes about Phaethon and his manners, how boring he was. Phaethon always thought that he did not fit with them. He would play with them, but every afternoon he would sit on a small broken wall, near a cliff, the remains of an old temple. Alone for a few minutes, watching the sparkling ocean, and the sea gulls flying and squealing over the Mediterranean water. The sun would shine over his thin face and his curly and brown hair would shine beautifully. Every day the boy watched the tide, the sun going down.

But Phaeton had another friend. Cynus was his name.

One day Epaphus and his gang left early, leaving Phaethon alone for the rest of the day. The young boy went to a small ruined temple that was up on the hill, near the cliffs. He was amazed by the impressive view of the vast sea and small islands in the distance, the seagulls flying near the surface of the Mediterranean water and just the faint noise of his town.

Since the day Cynus and Phaethon met, they would see each other religiously, talk for an hour of their lives, counting the ships and boats in the seaside, the number of seagulls. They laughed happily every minute they were together. That day, when the

sun went down, Cycnus reached Phaethon's hand and smiled for a few seconds. All the water inside the boy—he was the son of an oceanid—streamed all over his flaming and tanned skin giving a glimpse of a confident but also naive smile.

‘Tomorrow, will I see you?’

‘Always. You’ll find me here.’

Many moons passed and many times the sun rose with shining beauty. One of those days, Clymene saw her son coming with tears in his eyes, enraged and deeply sad. The mother tried to embrace her son, but he refused many times yelling and crying. When Phaethon sat down and wiped away his tears, he told his mother what had happened. Epaphus started to push him around and told him that he had no father, only a mother, that he would not be a man ever.

‘If you are the son of Helios, why are you so weak? Why aren’t you carrying the sun? You are no man.’

The boy cried, and tried to fight back because that was the thing that he was supposed to do, the manly thing to do. But he didn’t. He wasn’t like Epaphus. He shouted and shouted, even without a strong voice, that he would claim the chariot his own. Clymene, trying to calm him down, took his hand.

‘You are better than any of them, my sweet child.’

But he could not listen to his mother, even if she was everything he had, aside from Cycnus. Phaethon left the house at night and waited up in the hill, waiting for hours, waiting for something to happen. For the first time, he saw the man, a radiant man, tall and strong, with a copper mane and dignified clothes. The boy knew who the man was.

‘My father!’

The sun-god took Phaethon by his side and mounted in a dazzling and gleaming gold chariot moved by flaming winged horses. The boy watched the vast sea while he talked to his father for hours. Helios, far from getting mad at his son, understood him and talked for long about what had happened.

‘This weight that I carry everyday, my son, is something that I’m grateful you will never have to bear. This is an exhausting world, and old world.’

From the horses emanated fiery tongues of flames that were as shining as the sun in a summer’s day.

‘Phaethon, you are not like me, and the gods and men like Epaphus. You are special. Are you sure you want to take the bridle that I have to take everyday?’

The boy reached out to take the bridle, with tears in his eyes, burning without even touching it. With no further hesitation, he shook his head.

‘I know now.’

The radiant sun-god left Phaethon unharmed by the flames of the horses and smiled one last time before disappearing in the horizon between the sea and the sky.

Phaethon, as said before by his father, wasn't nothing like Epaphus. He wasn't like his mother Clymene either, but he was indeed truly brilliant the way he was, the magnificent man he could ever become. He would have a chance.

That day, he went up again and met Cycnus and felt alive. He was water, a kind of radiant water that flows over stones and sticks.

**Esteban Ruiz García**



**PHILOMEL**



## Phil and the black-billiard table

Not many come around here lately—I still don't know why—but this time it was such a surprise! No idea how that remote and vile rat found me, with its eyes full of repression. Even at some point—and I still don't know why—its black horrid eyes reminded me of a friend of mine, of the smell of humanity. But thank goodness that I found this inoffensive needle spinning around here! It moves as if it were a clock that never stops but never tells me what time it is. But the clock hands are so aggressive, so torturing, that I am thinking about butchering the demon myself. A rat that is demon-like and human at the same time, what nonsense! Well, my story is not often much welcome, though with this needle, I can sort of tell you a bit. Some of you will believe it, some of you will not. And not that I care. But not that I *don't* care.

Was it when I was only sixteen? Or was I already twenty-two? Anyway, I don't think that it matters anymore. Such a deed would leave *anyone* with a wood ball bouncing inside their head, cracking all the leaves and branches and corners. Now that I think of it, it can be said that they played with me as if I were a billiard table. I remember well. How amusing it was for them! To play with such an innocent girl. And my very friend! It made him feel so proud and happy when the cue balls fiercely struck and entered into the board holes. And now I get to think that probably he just scored the white ball so that he could retract it over and over again, until he finally got relieved by winning the game and putting the cue stick on its case. Of course, how would anyone regret such victory? But how would anyone, also, decide to start such a violent and evil game?

It all began one Friday afternoon at three o'clock. I was drawing a few sketches in my bedroom that I would later put into lovely figures with my wool and needles. I loved crocheting—it is something I still enjoy doing in this dark place, though I sometimes fancy new patterns that I have never seen before, with the hope of, someday, surprising my great friend and his buddies. I also hope that, one day, my designs will illuminate the shadows of this place and of the others that I see behind the crystal walls. My greatest wish is to see my light tearing them to pieces and visit those who also became nightingales. As to that, I'll tell you later. I fancy it is again another nonsense of mine.

As I was finishing my drawing, my father came in. 'Phil, how are you?' asked he, 'are you again with your artistic junkies? I wanted to suggest that you go out tonight with Proc and her friends, I think it will be good for you to get some fresh air, and you two will take care of each other.' Not that I minded going out with my sister, who was only a year older than me. Not that I didn't like going out. But her friends, and especially her boyfriend, Terry, were a bit older than me—six years, I think—and there was something in their manners that never gave me good feelings. As always, I had to

follow my father's orders, so I prepared myself for the night, though a strange one, since it didn't look like wanting to say good-night. The sky was like a sea of ink, as if the gods were about to let black roses fall upon the earth. Then, my father closed the door slowly, but I felt it sounded as if a thunder had struck with no resentment. Nevertheless, I heard him from behind, 'take an umbrella. It will most probably rain tonight.'

As usually, I put on my lipstick—a very red one, since my father said I couldn't have more than one at home—and then I decided to wear my beautiful white dress. Let me tell you that I looked almost like an angel. Then my sister entered and said: 'Aren't you wearing your glasses?' I had almost forgotten them! It would have been such a shame! I couldn't really see much without them. Also, let me tell you that they felt so comfortable, so protective, almost like a secret garden in my eyes. It was as if they hid a tree with a sly barn owl on it. Still, from the outside, I looked just almost like an angel.

When we arrived at the club, my sister introduced me to her boyfriend and his friends. We began the party by ordering a drink, and then chatting, very curiously, about a night battle in the Peloponnesian War in which the invaders became dazzled by darkness and killed themselves. How revolting to begin a conversation like that with those men! But even if it was naughty on their part, it kind of makes sense to me now. Certainly. As I told you before, there was something in their manners, something fiendish and savage, and especially in *his* manners. I could almost visualise a clear claw in his eyes, growing up as fast as bamboo and as dangerous as hemlock each time he looked at me.

Nevertheless, I started to relax and have fun since we began to play pool. My sister approached me to make sure I was doing well.

'Having fun in that white pool, Phil?'

'Yeah, sure. You, Proc?'

'Yeah, me too. But it's weird, though. Pool tables are not usually white.' She paused for a moment, and then asked: 'Would you mind if I leave you with them for a moment? I need to take a breath outside.'

I didn't really mind staying there, as I was starting to become comfortable—I even won the first game. Also, the guys were beginning to be kind to me. Even my body was beginning to calm, decompressing itself slowly from the top of my head to the bottom of my toes. I felt almost as if I could sleep there, as if I had some sort of foam pillow in the back of my neck. My muscles began to react with difficulty when holding the cue sticks.

But soon I would discover. My senses would not betray me up to the point of making me think that it had been only one drink. They had deceived me. With the glance of my eyes across my glasses, I managed to see that, in the bottom of my glass, the two ices were sunk, with some bubbles floating around, alerting me, indeed, that



someone had manipulated my drink, in case you didn't know. I wouldn't be surprised if you were unaware of this trick. When I spent hours reading at home, my father always told me that those things would never be of any use to me, but I was one of those who never listened to him.

I started to feel blurry, and they put me on a chair. I couldn't see very well. All was becoming foggy. Then, it went dark.

Suddenly, I recovered part of my senses. I was still there, in the club, and looked at my watch. It was 5.00 am. There was no one around. I could finally differentiate the letters on my phone, and I saw a message my sister had sent me: 'You okay, Phil? Terry has driven me home because I was really tired, but he said you wanted to stay more as you were having so much fun, so I didn't enter to tell you anything. Don't come home too late, have fun!' And then, I also saw one message from my father: 'Where are you, Phil? Your sister is already home. She came back some time ago. Please, come back in Terry's car right now. It's very late,' and there was no other option because home was far from where I was. I felt how my stomach paralysed for a second. There I was. There. And I was afraid, of course. Though, I asked myself, why would I? After all, Terry and Proc were really happy in their relationship! It would never occur to Terry to throw it all away.

As I got out, he was outside, and we were soon in the car. We were both silent, and he started the car. My brother-in-law was supposed to take me to the palace. He was the one who could drive. He was the one who would drive me home. He had the power. And yet. And yet, and yet, and yet! He decided to turn the steering wheel, and he drove to the forest. In the dawning of the clear day, and despite the romantic tracks, there was a feeling that this nature was disturbed, that it had not been washed by Athena yet. I could hear my heart crying, '*Phil, Phil, hold on tight.*' '*In the mountains, there you feel free.*'

And down we went.

The car approached a bare and bleak moor. There was almost no sound, but I could hear the sound of some nightingales nearby, and the pulse of my heart. There we were. Far from everything. I was trembling inside. I knew running was not an option as I was still dizzy because of the drugs. Still, I could visualise a kind of garage or old cottage. Terry said 'come in, I'll show you something before taking you home.' With my hands prepared for anything, I went in. As my eyes caught every corner of the grim place, I didn't know if I was still drugged or not. Then, I saw, in the middle of the ground floor, a black-billiard table with two cue sticks attached to it, one crushing the other. 'Let's play,' said he, 'and see who wins this time.' As we all were always forced to do in that world, I replied, as if on a stage: 'Let's play the game.'

So, after a few rounds, there were only two balls left on the board. Apart from the black ball, I had to score the blue one, and he had to score the red one. 'It seems like we are reaching somewhere,' he said. And then, with the grasping of his hand and the power of his eyes, he strongly pushed the last shot of the game, and scored both the red and black balls. 'Bravo! Well played, Phil!,' he exclaimed. 'Yes, it was funny,' I replied. And approaching me slowly, he added: 'Oh, wait, we haven't finished yet. There is one ball still on the board.' I glanced at his eyes and said: 'yes, the blue ball I didn't score.' Two seconds of silence, and then, I realised, all weakened. 'No, Phil, dear. Don't you see it? That is not the ball that I mean.' And with his rough claws and his beastly gaze, he touched me and started to reclaim his trophy.

In my complete vulnerability, he violently forced me up on the black stage and started to perform his part. I could feel his fleshy cue stick fiercely striking. Once, twice, thrice. Over and over and over again. The brutal pain bounced infernally all inside my body and soul, just like a pinball receives a million blows when the metal orb vaults suddenly from the hand outside the crystal. I can still hear the voice of the tiger echoing in my head: *But what hammer? What hand? What daring grasp? What dread clasp? What brutal soul? What kind of devil did he serve?*

After he finished fulfilling his desire and saved the stick in its case, he fell down, exhausted, by my side, by the side of my drained bones. No other sound, but only the cracking bouncing of the left white ball repeating in loop inside me. I felt completely shattered, but then, when he tried to get up and I saw in his wild gaze what he was about to do next, I resorted to my last forces, and these would also be my last words. I took three needles that were attached to my waist and stabbed him. It was the only thing I could do to try to save myself. It was the only thing I could do before I left the earth.

In a second, and with the sticks pricking hard on his chest, he took the knife I had previously envisaged from his pocket, grabbed my tongue, and I could see all of my dreams flying away from me in an unspeakable, dreadful red tide. All my voice, my songs, my feelings and my life were escaping from my hands in a blink of an eye. And in the last bit of it, with my eyes all closed and frightened, I felt a rotten, harrowing pain in my stomach. This time, it went white.

When I opened my eyes again, in the middle of a blurry space, I could only see the face of my sister, Proc, weeping all over my face, crying her deepest pain, cursing all the creatures in the universe, and asking for the most grieving forgiveness, as if she were the guilty one. As if she were the guilty one. My heart had been broken, twice, when in my last seconds I realised that she had been the only person in the world who had actually loved me. I couldn't move, I couldn't talk, I couldn't tell her. I knew it was too late. I was already fainting away, but I still hoped that, someday, somewhere, I could tell the

truth to the world.

And that is how I reached here. This dark place where I see all of my flying, musical partners resting, healing their pain. Now, you may think it is time for me to heal from this eternal wound. You may think it is time for me and my sister to take revenge against Terry, who is now in jail. But no, I wouldn't take revenge. I wouldn't give him the taste of his own medicine. Do you wonder why that is so? Because it is just not my way. Because it is just not *the* way.

Or maybe... maybe I have an idea, but I need your help.

Yes, I know there is a way. There is a way by which I can fill this hollow. This broken wing that I share with many of my nest. We may weave it, all together. Even along with the help and touch of other men, of human beings on which I still have faith. Because I have it. Because I sometimes see their heart from here. Because I still can picture it. Because I know there is a place. A place where birds will sing from dawn to dusk gluing together the million pieces that one day were broken. A place where we will all be immortal mortals because there will be no harm. Because the dancing over the oblivion of the damage done will be the most beautiful revenge. Because everyone will understand that the shadows of abuse and violence can disappear if we pour light on them. Because I know there is a place where all of our nightingales will chant as one, and the walls that hold us here and there will break and be of crystal no more, but of the ever-lasting love and empathy that we will draw together in the clouds of the sky. I know this is the way.

And in the case that you still find my tale incongruous and crazy, congratulations, because I find it too. But once someone told me that it was not only me. It was not only me who was mad on the inside for fancying and dreaming for such a magical place. What's more, isn't this reason enough to say that you and I are both mad? Because *you must be mad too, or you wouldn't want to reach there.*

So, this is my story. I wish it reaches the hands of somebody. Someday. Somehow. This is the last wish from someone who just wanted to be heard, someone who wanted to be loved, and to love. I thank you for having accompanied me through this journey, and I hope you come back home safe and sound.

The next day, in the morning of the rising sun, all the nightingales took flight, and a virtuous fiddle dawned in the forest, while the sound of these lines followed, dancing in the air.

*Try not to abuse your power, I know we didn't choose to change, you might not wanna lose your power,*

*but power isn't pain.*

Once upon a time, in the little room of a humble house, a small girl was playing with her toys. However, she carelessly entered into an old room with old books, and took one which was thin and white. She brought it with her and asked her mother: 'Mummy, mummy! What's this book?' The mother, who was cleaning the kitchen, dropped what she was holding, and with tears of the shape and colour of dew in her eyes, answered back: 'Itas, my dear, that is the book of the bravest, strongest, most passionate, most intelligent, most compassionate, and most beautiful warrior, woman and person that I've ever known.'

The little girl paused and stared at her in amazement. Then, she asked: 'Can I be like her, mummy? Will I be like her someday?'

And with her eyes full of gleam and joy, her mother said: 'Itas, of course you will be like her someday. We all have her soul somewhere in our heart. We only have to remember it and look for it inside us, no matter what. She is *in* all of us, my dear. Always, and for ever.'

**Daniel Lozano Medina**

## Dinner time

I was full of rage the day I left Athens. I knew it would happen, just like it happened to my mother and grandmother before me, but still I felt outraged. Who is ever prepared for a life of loneliness? My father orchestrated the most opulent wedding for his dear daughter, as if that could compensate for selling me. My husband, the famous and strong Tereus of Thrace, purchased me as his wife. The wedding was exhausting and the wedding night sucked; but I already knew that too. I just lay down and closed my eyes very tightly; maybe that was the reason why I did not see the unclean screech-owl sitting next to our chamber. Some people say that bird haunted our union but I disagree. A union based on interest does not need any extra element to collapse.

As I was saying, the following day I left Athens full of rage. It is true I hated my father and I obviously wanted to leave. However, it would have been nice to choose at least the place where I would spend the rest of my existence. Of course I did not talk to my husband during the trip; we had nothing to talk about. None of us made the effort to pretend we loved each other.

This way, we arrived in Thrace and less than one year afterwards, my son Itys was born. My husband seemed relieved the conception process was over so soon. I thought the reason was that he truly wanted an heir. It seemed common sense. What really surprised was the fact that he did not touch me again. The truth is that that situation was fine by me, so I did not think about it too much.

Itys looked exactly like his father and he loved spending time with him. I used to look at them from the library window. Watching them was better entertainment than all those shitty, ladies-in-danger books. I could laugh openly every time my three-year-old son failed to pierce a rabbit with his sword. His face showed his huge disappointment and he asked his father to teach him again how a real man killed a living being.

Five autumns passed and I missed my sister with all my heart, so I asked Tereus to let me see her. Either to visit Philomela or invite her to our home; I did not care. At first, he said no, but few days later he suddenly agreed to bring her with us. I was so happy that I did not notice his real intentions. His sudden decision turned out to be the result of his friends' comments about my sister's beauty. Apparently, all men desired her and they would have done anything to deflower her. No real man would say no, of course. No real man would let that opportunity get away either. And Tereus had the perfect chance to be with her, so he ended up going after her. Because he was a real man; of course he was.

My father welcomed Tereus and his bunch of testosterone friends after they unloaded. My husband was explaining the reason of his visit when Philomel entered the room. She received the attention of everybody; they scrutinised her in detail. From top

to bottom. Obviously, my husband felt a burning desire for her too. His heart set on fire and he could not wait to touch every edge of her body. Or at least, that is what he says.

Once my father accepted to let her go, there was a royal banquet to celebrate his decision. The following day, my sister left home anxious to see me. All men on the ship looked at her while they described the many different ways they would undress her and push her to bed. They even raffled who would sleep with her first. Obviously, the first one would be my husband, as he was their master, but the rest also wanted their piece of cake. Tereus laughed with them and constantly shouted his dearest wish was on board with him. He repeated all the time he was the winner, because his plan to be with Philomel had succeeded, and in front of his friends he highlighted his sexual appetite for her.

Later on, I knew he never intended to bring Philomel home. From the start, he wanted to kidnap her in order to prove his value. He was a real man; he was supposed to take advantage of women. And hiding her so that all his friends could also enjoy Philomel's body was the best way to win their respect. This way, everything happened as it was planned. They all left the ship and then the king dragged Philomel off up to a cave in the woods. A hidden place far away from any sign of civilisation. She fiercely opposed to go, but they won in number. Then, trembling in fear and crying desperately, she screamed my name asking for help. Tereus, all alone now inside the cave, hit her savagely. All his fury was projected in my little sister. He brutally knocked her down, split her dress and penetrated her, a virgin, desperately. Tears and blood fell down while she kept calling me, our father and the gods to rescue her. Her shouts empowered Tereus even more, as he knew his friends could hear them from the outside. He knew they were laughing and praising him.

'Who is the man now? Tell them who the man is! Tell them! Tell them now!' Tereus' screams filled the place.

His eyes were widely open, but not looking at Philomel. They were fixed at a point behind her while he kept hitting and raping my poor sister. Suddenly, he stopped. But he didn't leave; he stood there with a lifeless gaze. She tried to cover herself, tore her hair and, still shocked and crying, yelled at him:

'You brute! How do you dare? What about my sister? What about my reputation? You just made me Procne's enemy! She is supposed to hate me after this, but I tell you she will not! She will hate you! Criminal! You, you betrayed her! What else do you want? Be brave and kill me, so that my ghost will always pursue you. If you do not, you will pay for this anyway. I promise I will tell everybody what you have done until I die. I will shout your crime! My voice will be your torture!'

Tereus, blind with anger, seized her and raised his sword. Then, just like a woman cuts bread, he cut her tongue away. It fell to the ground and bounced a few times. The tongue wriggled while blood leaked outside. Slowly, the spasms ceased and it finally died. A lifeless piece of meat next to Philomel's feet. After this brutal crime, Tereus went back home as a victor. His companions acclaimed him all the way back

home while Philomel remained locked in the cave. This way, any of them could look for her and meet their needs.

I remember Tereus arrived crying. When I asked him about my sister, he said he had died during the trip and that he could not do anything to save her. His sobs and tears barely let him speak properly, so I hugged him and went to my room. I could not cry. I was cold and petrified. I took off my shinning robe and jewellery, and I dressed for mourning.

A whole year passed. Tereus became the indifferent husband he had always been and Itys followed him everywhere he went. They spent hours together and it was obvious there was a great mutual understanding between them. I was always excluded from their jokes or games, but I did not care. I did not care about them at all. Their issues were no business of mine. However, one day a woman brought me a piece of cloth carefully wrapped, although she could not tell me who sent it. I unrolled the cloth where someone had sewed a story, and I read the most tragic news I could ever receive. Philomel had been kidnapped, raped, assaulted and locked by my husband. But not only that, during that year she was visited by each of Tereus' friends. Tereus returned several times, although he only sat down in a corner, stayed there for a while and left. That big jerk cried for her death on my shoulder. That big jerk consoled me when I could not endure my sufferings while he was aware of the real truth. I felt fury and anger. I cannot describe with words the rage that grew up inside of me. My fingers trembled and I clenched my fists, but my mouth remained closed.

It is true the story I read could have been a lie. It is true anybody could have written it pretending to be Philomel. A queen always has many enemies who try to hurt her. But this was not the case. This was my sister's sewing; I had no doubts. I knew her weaving better than mine. We women have our own sewing style, just like we all have our own fingerprints. Our weaving is personal, unique; and both Philomel and I have spent many years weaving together at home, so I could recognise her sewing among thousands. It was unmistakable. That is why I knew the story I read was true. She had sewed it. My sister was still alive.

My entire soul wanted vengeance, but I had to be intelligent. Accusing my husband would be useless because he would call his guards to lock me too. I was in the library thinking about the best way to proceed when I heard both Tereus and Itys walking in the corridor. For the first time in a long time, I paid attention to them.

'Remember Ytis,' said my hideous husband, 'a man should do what he has to do. No matter the consequences, your honour goes first.'

'I know, father. I will follow your advice. But poor aunt, she must be cold there.'

'I told you, son, a man should do what he has to do.'

'But we could give her a blanket. This way, she would be more comfortable.'

'In the heart of a real man there is no space for compassion. Everybody will destroy you if you do not behave as a man.'

‘Fine, father. Although I still think she must be cold there...’

I could not stand up anymore. My own son knew what happened to Philomel and he did not tell me anything. He betrayed me. He was an accomplice, a puppet in his father’s issues. I must admit Tereus had done his work very well. He had a good heir to continue the lineage. But what could I do? I was all alone. A woman, despite being a queen, has nothing to do in a direct confrontation with a man. Thus, I needed to rescue Philomel first, and then, together, carry out our revenge. Together.

It was Bacchus’ festival and, at night, a group of loyal maids and I went through the woods looking for Philomel. The moon was full and it lighted up the path. At last we found the hidden cave and, with the fury of all my female ancestors, I broke the door and seized my dear sister. We hugged each other as only sisters can do, I covered her face with some leaves and took her to the palace. Philomel was horrified when she realised she was in Tereus’ home. I could see the fear in her eyes. She tried to avoid my look, the shame was too much. But she had nothing to be ashamed of, so I took her face in my hands and forced her to raise her head. We looked each other in the eye, and our sisterhood was stronger than ever.

‘This is no time for mourning, but for the sword. I am ready for any crime Philomel! We will restore your honour at any cost!’

As I spoke, my son entered the room. He was holding the sword his father gave him few years ago.

‘You are so like your father! You also deserve to be punished!’ I yelled at him as I never thought I could do.

He looked at Philomel but quickly glanced down to the floor. He put down the sword and got closer to hug me, kiss me and tell me he was sorry. My heart was touched by his apologies but when I saw his face, I saw the same pity expression his father had when he told me my sister was dead. So I went mad again. I lost my temper and pushed him backwards. My sister was standing next to me, unable to speak. Unable to pronounce my name. Unable to tell her truth. Deprived of the most basic right a human being has: self-expression.

Why can one of them speak words and the other has no tongue to speak at all? Why?

I would never betray my birth, so Itys also had to pay the consequences of his acts. Then, with the rage of a lioness, I caught his arm, covered his mouth and dragged him to a hidden part of the palace. Philomel seized his feet so that he could not run away. We threw him in a corner of the dark room, while he kept trying to persuade me of his deep love. But he would not deceive me again. So I struck him with a kitchen knife below the ribs and then Philomel slit his throat. We never looked away; we wanted to witness his sufferings. No servant noticed our crime, so we used Philomel’s cloth to wrapped his dead body and take him to the kitchen.



I told the cooks I wanted to prepare my husband's dinner that night. I said I wanted to lavish him as a wife must do. This way, nobody suspected my real intentions. Once everybody left, Philomel entered with my son's body. We both cut him into pieces and cooked them all. We boiled some, we stirred others.

Tereus was waiting in the dining room, sitting on his ancestral throne. I brought him his dinner: flesh of his flesh. He chewed and swallowed, congratulating me for my culinary skills. After a while, he asked me to call his son.

'Bring Itys to me! Let us dine together!'

Innocent, he did not know he had enjoyed eating his own son.

'You have him here, inside!' I said with cruelty.

At that moment, Philomel came in and threw Itys' head to Tereus. He was pale. The vision of Philomel in the palace and of his son's head on the table made him crazy. He yelled at us. He cursed us. He attempted to attack us with his sword, but we escaped. The truth is that the king had been exposed and defeated in his own house. There is no bigger shame than that.

Later on, people said we became birds and we flew away. Obviously, that makes no sense at all. It was just a beautiful ending to conclude this demoniac story. The truth is that both Philomel and I returned home to see our father. We would not live in peace if we did not forgive him. He condemned me to marry a man I did not even know, and that man mutilated Philomel. His two daughters went through years of pain because of him. But we had to forgive him. Not because he deserved it, but because we could not move on with resentment.

Afterwards, we both moved to a different country and lived together until Philomel died. I attended her during her illness but this time, I could not save her. All alone again, I decided to look for Tereus. I went back to Thrace and asked to talk to my still husband. I blamed myself for a long time for my son's death. I thought I was a monster, so I needed to face him. I needed to understand. He told me that there were rumours about him and that his companions made jokes about his softness. He said a man can not allow that.

I did not say a word. I just stood up and, when I was about to leave, Tereus said he was sorry. He apologised few times. I turned around but he was staring at the floor. He was weak and old. Maybe his repentance was honest, maybe not; but I would never forgive him. I could not. All the women subjugated and humiliated before my sister and I prevented me from doing so. I know I did what I had to do.

**Elena García Guerrero**



PLATO



## De la oscuridad a a la luz

Esta historia tiene su centro neurálgico en España, más concretamente en un barrio a las afueras de Granada, en una casa donde vivía una familia en la que todos sus miembros estaban condenados desde la niñez a la sombra de un férreo régimen patriarcal en el que sólo contaba la opinión del padre. Dicha familia la componían el padre y tres hijas.

Aisha era la mayor, a continuación, le seguía Fátima y, en última instancia, Ángela. Además, todas ellas eran de raza negra por lo que se acentuaba aún más el desprecio que el padre sentía hacia ellas. La casa estaba cubierta por cortinas que les impedían tener contacto con el mundo que emanaba del exterior.

Esta situación se convirtió en un calvario. Se llegaron a sentir infravaloradas, humilladas e incluso tenían una sensación de total aislamiento debido a que se sentían vigiladas y observadas por su progenitor las veinticuatro horas del día con sus respectivas noches. Su educación fundamental consistía en realizar las tareas domésticas en unas condiciones totalmente infrahumanas.

Un día Aisha se armó de valor y decidió reunir a sus hermanas para que, entre todas, fuera más fácil deshacerse del sistema que estaba vigente en ese momento. Entonces ella, que llevaba la voz cantante dijo:

—¡Padre, ya estamos hartas del trato tan vejatorio y ruin que recibimos por tu parte y de que se nos maneje como si fuéramos marionetas de trapo! ¿Crees que porque seamos mujeres negras no nos consideramos capacitadas para recibir una educación digna e ir a la universidad a estudiar una carrera al igual que hacen las mujeres blancas?

Al oír estas palabras, las hermanas asintieron demostrándole a su hermana mayor que contaba con ellas. El padre enmudeció por completo y su cara se tornó blanca como la nieve al ver que todas sus hijas se volvieron en su contra. Cuando el cabeza de familia salió del shock en el que estaba inmerso replicó:

—¡Pero si vosotras sólo estáis autorizadas a permanecer recluidas en esta casa y bajo ningún concepto podéis ver la luz del día ni, los objetos que hay ahí fuera!

Ni a Aisha ni a sus hermanas les hizo gracia el tono pedante y chulesco que mostró el padre. Estaba tan fuera de sí y tan furioso que llegó a propinarle una brutal paliza a la hermana mayor dejándola inconsciente en el suelo. Afortunadamente, sus hermanas la ayudaron a levantarse y, cuando las aguas volvieron a su cauce, las hijas le imploraron al padre que hiciera el favor de abandonar el hogar familiar y no volviera a molestarlas en lo que les restaba de vida. Ellas ya eran lo suficientemente independientes para saber cuáles eran sus derechos y deberes.

En ese mismo instante, las cortinas, poco a poco, fueron desapareciendo dando paso a un atisbo de luz y esperanza, que se arrojaron a los ojos de nuestras protagonistas que estaban mermados por la oscuridad que yacía en la casa. Sintieron que se habían liberado de las cadenas que les prohibía forjarse una opinión del mundo que las rodeaba.

Y fue así cómo la luz del conocimiento y la razón llegó a esa casa, que había estado siempre en penumbra.

**Noelia Lirola Rueda**

PSYCHE





## The three labours of Psyche

Aphrodite, goddess of beauty and love, is my mother in law. The story of how that came to happen is long and boring to most people—I won't lie. She was jealous of my mortal beauty in the beginning, of her altars and shrines being empty, and of not receiving enough praise from the little ants she enjoyed 'enchanted' with her beauty. I was living the most peaceful life you could imagine, being my normal, shy self, accepting present from suitors that promised the same future my sisters had accepted in the past. A husband and a house for the rest of my life. I couldn't very well refuse, as it would have been frowned upon. What woman in her right mind would refuse to be a wife and mother to the next generation in favour of cultivating her mind through extensive reading? Abnormal women, those. So I just sat, quiet and nice, and allowed men and women alike to sing my praises, shower me with gold and make promises of eternal love. To my parents and sisters, this was an honour, it was as if I had enchanted all these souls and I was being rewarded with richness and abundance. They usually left with unanswered proposals and then I would just retreat to my chambers and read some thick tome to reward myself for the tiring day that had just passed.

My life those days was a nuisance. How could it manage to make one of the most powerful deities of the Pantheon angry? Well, that's a question you should be asking her. Because the only things I've managed to get out of her are these useless tasks to prove my love and devotion to my husband, her son. What is it to her if I am so madly in love with her son that I would take the time to separate seeds into three piles? Seeds, impossible to distinguish, minuscule seeds. She doesn't care whether I love her son or not—she only wants to make me pay for what I've done to her, the sins I have committed in her eyes, and that is being born the way I am. She managed to concoct a plan to make my life miserable, a plan she deemed perfect and flawless. Using her son as a guinea pig, marrying him off to me, but not allowing him to show his true self, making me believe he was a horrible monster who would eat my liver in my sleep.

Until she actually left me in the mountain that would become my home, her plan worked to perfection. After hearing the prophecy, my father became frantic and scared of the consequences of disobedience. Not of the fate that would most likely befall his youngest daughter, of course. He ordered the slaves and maids to prepare the wedding just as someone would prepare a sacrifice, making me feel as some worthless object for him just to give away, but I guess the consequences were just too great for him to even consider any other option. And thus, we ascended that mountain, and I was placed at the top, a juicy price for the monster that was to become my husband.

That moment, that place was where Aphrodite's plan failed. You see, once I was out of sight she went back to being worshipped as the superior deity she was, and I was no longer a threat, so she forgot about me. This fact allowed my dear husband the opportunity to treat me the way he thought I should be treated and not the way his mother ordered. That is, with a minimum of respect. I was told that the whole palace was my domain, that I could eat and drink whatever I desired, go wherever I wanted; the only thing he asked in return was my trust in his decision to not show himself to me. Those words wrecked me at the beginning of our marriage. How could a creature with such gentle touch and soothing words be in possession of such monstrous features,

so much so that he didn't dare show me his face? He must be terribly disfigured, I thought then. But as the days of our marriage went on, his appearance stopped being such a big problem for me. He offered companionship, he read with me, he didn't seem to be offended or threatened by my wish to maintain mentally challenging conversations with him until the crack of dawn. He was my first and only companion in life, my early experiences with other beings paling in comparison to him. You might blame it on the ignorance typical of youth, but you will allow me this much. Growing up in a palace had taught me many things, as had being the youngest of three sisters. Brothers aren't as problematic, you see? Once they decide you are not worth half as they are, they start patronising you, so you can as well ignore them. But sisters, oh sisters, they enjoy their fair share of torture if you end up in their bad side, by chance. Envy is the deadliest weapon on the hands of women like my sisters.

It didn't take me long to learn that lesson. Seeing me lonely was saddening for my husband, so he allowed my sisters to visit, and that was a mistake. Once upon a time, I must have loved my sisters, we enjoyed the same status inside the palace and we could call each other friends. How many siblings could boast of this kind of relationship? Not many that I knew of. So what was the harm in inviting them up to my luxurious house so that they could enjoy the lavishness of it all with me? That was exactly what I did. I sent a message and, previous agreement of their husbands, they both came up and saw me for the first time in months.

Envy was the first thing I saw on their faces, not joy. They watched me as we used to watch the princess from the neighbouring kingdom every time she visited: calculating and a tiny bit malicious. That was the first warning, their attitudes telling me to stay alert less they cause me or my husband any harm. It wasn't as if my husband was around for my sisters to harm them. As the days passed, I could see a plan forming on my sisters' minds—they would whisper continuously between the two of them and their conversations instantly ceased once I approached them. It was hard not to notice. At night, my dear husband would ask me how my day had been, in the complete darkness that was our bedroom; I would lie and say that I enjoyed my day with my dear sisters and so did they. I would tell him what we did and where we went. He wasn't a fool, contrary to what they may have been telling lately. He's no monster that doesn't pay any mind to the worries of his wife. He just won't let me see his face.

As I was saying, a few weeks after their arrival, my sisters started spewing their nonsense. I could see right through them, their fake frowns and pouty mouths saying how sad they were on my behalf, that if they had to live with an absent and uncaring husband like mine they would weep all night long. Even a child would have picked up in their lies had they lived with them for more than a week. My sisters' marriages were even worse than mine. At least I had the freedom I had always desired, and a caring and gentle husband who was more preoccupied with creating a lasting friendship between us than with procuring an heir. They had gotten pregnant not a month after their respective marriages, and they hadn't seen their filthy rich husbands afterwards, for what good was a doting wife when they could be going around in their boats and sharing the stories of their battles while feasting at each other's houses? My sisters were simple trophy wives, designed to be that way and happy to be. The problem there was that they couldn't just be happy for their little sister, whose husband was a decent one who slept in her bed every night. They couldn't just let me be happy.

Knowing what I knew, I could have just ignored it, but my curiosity about my husband was already big enough, and with their constant nagging it only grew. Why was my husband so adamant about not showing me his face. I knew from touching his face while he slept that he was a very handsome young man. Someone just couldn't disfigure that kind of face and leave it in such a terse and young state. So why would he want to hide himself from me? What could I do if I saw him in the daylight that could be so threatening?

'Poor thing hasn't even seen her husband once,' whined my sister, in her annoying nasal tone. 'I think you should just wait for him to leave in the morning when the sun is coming out and catch him unaware.'

'That would be dishonest and I would be breaking his trust,' I answered with my sorrowful wife tone, perfect to every ear to hear, and yet the falsehood behind it only there for me to notice.

'He's breaking the trust you placed in him, little sister,' now apparently was the turn of my second oldest sister to put her nose where it didn't belong. 'If this marriage hadn't been blessed by the Gods, you would have married a normal man, with whom you could have walked these hills in the daylight. It is not fair to you to condemn yourself to solitude when the sun is out.'

They kept on like this for days, hour after hour, since they left their chambers in the morning until they retired after dinner, their nagging only increasing by the lack of a visit by the host. The day they were set to leave was getting closer and closer, and they seemed to be in a sort of competition to see who could spill the most hurtful words per second. I wanted to tell them that I knew what they were doing in the hopes of spending a few days in silence, but that would mean losing their confidence and offending them. I couldn't care less about this fact, but their husbands were powerful men, and it wouldn't do to cross them. So I remained poised and quiet myself, smiling at the right time and retiring early into my chambers to read until my husband arrived. My life in my own house had become what it used to be when I was living in my father's house, and I hated it with all my being.

The day they left, oh your Majesty, that day was the happiest of my life. I couldn't contain my smiles and, if they noticed, they did a pretty decent job hiding it. They were leaving, turning in their heels every two seconds, waiting to see me run off to my house and lock the doors, but I wouldn't give them the satisfaction. I stood still and smiling, knowing that they were satisfied with the image I had given them, and also knowing that they wouldn't be returning to my life any time soon. I could go back to my life before their visit, to my books, my strolls and my faceless husband. Oh, but I planned on doing something about that part. The endless nagging of these two women had helped me on my resolve to end the masquerade that everyone named my marriage. I was going to find out what my husband looked like, and if something went wrong, well, I could always blame it on my sisters' convincing arguments and my gullible nature. But from my point of view, this situation couldn't possibly go on any longer. What was I supposed to do, spend the rest of my life being alone during the day, bored out of my mind, and being in the presence of my husband only when I was sleeping? No. So thus I made up my mind. One night I would wait until my husband fell asleep after our nightly conversations, get up from the bed without making any noise and light

a candle. The faint light of the candle would be dim enough not to raise him from sleep, I would satiate my curiosity and everything would go back to normal as if nothing had happened.

It was a few weeks after my sisters' departure that I saw my chance to set my plan in motion and I took it. My husband had come home late that night, his voice was tired and his tone low. He said it had been a really long day. So I didn't have to wait long until he was completely out of it and in Morpheus' arms. Getting the candle proved to be a bit more complicated than I thought, but I finally found one in one of my drawers in the antechamber. Lighting it, I slowed my steps so that my naked feet wouldn't make any noise hitting the marble floor. As I approached the bed, wax started dripping from the candle, but a little wax could do no harm to me. The bed was so close now, as was the revelation of seeing my husband for the first time. I desperately wanted to see the sweet features of the person who always had the right words to say, the right argument to counter-attack mine and the right mind to go with mine. It was so close I could almost feel it from the tip of my toes to the last of my lashes. I noticed the proximity of the bed, and carefully moved the candle closer to my husband's face. Something white and soft met me in its place. A canopy of white feathers stood in place of what his face should have been, and I panicked. As my hands trembled, some of the harmless wax dripped into the feathers and then everything happened really fast. The feathers, your Majesty, must have been more sensitive than my hand, for the second that droplet touched one of them, my husband sat upright, awake and I could finally see his face. The betrayal he felt plastered all over his face.

I don't exactly remember the features that I saw that night, only the look on his eyes before he extended his beautiful wings and flew away into the night. At first, I was confused. I only meant to see his face, not harm him in any way, but as the days went by and he wouldn't return I retreated into my library. I always found the answers that I was looking for among my loved books, and this time it could be no different. Looking for references to a beautiful winged creature I came across magical creatures—Pegasus and Sphinxes, but never the one I was looking for. Never a man with shining blond hair and clear blue eyes. I honestly was about to give up the search, accept that my first and last hope had failed me, and look for another alternative, when I came across a genealogy of the Deities of Olympus that I had read as a child. Maybe the answer had been in front of me all that time, but I just didn't want to make it truer than it was. Perhaps I had known all along and just didn't want to believe that the person who I thought of as a friend before a husband had betrayed me in such a way. Seeing it written in elegant black letters brought the realisation home. My husband, your Majesty, was none other than Eros, son of the very same jealous Goddess who, angry at her worshippers ignoring her, had determined to end my life in the most effective way she could think of, the same way Zeus had thought would constraint the same Aphrodite so long ago. But she hadn't taken into account the kindness of her own son. He is nothing like her, I guarantee it, he is kind where she is scheming, soft where she is all sharp edges, selfless where she was jealous and demanding. He may have entered our marriage with different intentions, obeying his mother, but he did not do as he was told. My father told me that the Goddess planned on marrying me off to a monstrous being, and he turned out to be quite the good husband. I must admit it was guilt and remorse what moved me to visit the Temple of Goddess Aphrodite. Some people may romanticise it, over-do it, but I am telling you the real story. It was my greed and my non-conformity that lead a good

person, who had done me no harm, to flee from our house in pain and feeling betrayed. If not only for the friendship we had formed, it had to be done, I had to look for him and ask for his forgiveness.

Needless to say that his mother didn't take the news very well, feeling affronted herself but not on behalf of her son. I haven't asked her, truly but I would say that what she felt then was years of harm from those she trusted and all that frustration that not being the most beautiful in the world had caused her. Anyway, this justification may seem an excuse to you, but I do believe that it is her circumstances that have shaped her the way she is. Not content with seeing my distraught face, she insisted that I must prove to her if I am a worthy wife, deserving of her son, and thus she came up with three tasks that I must complete and if I happened to fail in just one of them, she wouldn't allow me to see her son. At a certain point of these tasks, I must confess I felt as some dog hopping through endless minuscule hoops, but that is another issue and it does deviate me from explaining the tasks at length. As I was saying, I was frankly surprised at the only thought of having to prove my love for Eros through these gigantic and dangerous tasks.

The first of the tasks that I had to complete for the Goddess to allow my reunion with her son was a titanic endeavour. She presented me with a huge pile of seeds in the side of a hill and told me to separate them according to the kind of seed, she then proceeded to leave me alone with the pile and my thoughts. If I was punishing someone and gave them a task to perform, I wouldn't leave them alone for a second, giving them the chance to use subterfuges to finish their punishment. I wanted to meet my husband as soon as possible and fix what I had broken in my foolishness, so I wasn't about to spend years separating seeds into smaller piles, I wanted this task done rapidly and efficiently, so I took a look around and saw a thin line of ants trying to get to their anthill but unable to do so due to a rock blocking their paths. I told the ants that if they helped me with the seeds, as they are experts in distinguishing what seed is what type, I would lift the rock from their paths and this collaboration would be mutually beneficial for both of us. They agreed and my task was done in a night when it would have taken me years to complete.

Naturally, Aphrodite didn't buy it and rightfully thought that I hadn't performed my task on my own. She punished me by sleeping on the hard floor and withdrawing food from me. While it is true that during my whole life I had never gone through hardships, one night without food and sleeping in a somewhat uncomfortable position wouldn't deter me from my goal. And so I awoke the next morning, ready for the second task, and more than a bit worried about what my mother-in-law had come up with.

This time she took me to the source of a river, its waters ran dark and mysterious and handed me a flask without much ceremony. 'Fill it in the waters of the River Styx,' she said, and once again, left me alone to complete my task. I wasn't about to correct her mishap, so I quickly went and examined the river. The river itself was big and a lot of water jumped from the banks into the soil on its sides, but the rocks surrounding the fluid looked slippery and dangerous. My goal was to see my husband, not to kill myself in the process of completing this life-threatening task, so another alternative had to be found. This time, the cry of an eagle over my head caught my attention. The animal was circling the same place, and once it caught my attention, she descended and stood on

my shoulder. Her leg dripped blood over my dress, but I didn't care about the garment. The animal was wounded, so my task could wait. I took a look at the wound and healed it to the best of my abilities. The good thing about reading so many books is that at the end of the day, their knowledge stays with you, and thus I used what I remembered about botany and zoology to mend the leg of the animal. I was expecting her to take flight, healthy again, but she remained on my shoulder, where I put her after healing the wound, looking at me with calculating eyes. Next thing I knew, she had taken my flask on her beak and flown above the waters of River Styx, filling it to the brim. Thanking her, I returned to the temple and presented Aphrodite with the flask as she asked.

Just as I thought she would, she went livid and accused me of being untruthful and threatened me with making me her servant for eternity if I failed to complete the third task. The way I saw it, your Majesty, it wasn't about Eros anymore. I had personally affronted her one too many times and thus had to pay for it with blood, sweat and tears. Maybe she thought that my beauty would wither in the face of hard labour and I would no longer be a threat to her. What she doesn't understand, though, is that I would give her my beauty any day just to live a peaceful life with my husband. So making a little detour to get my belongings ready, I followed the Goddess to the doors of Hades.

'You have to visit the Queen of the Dead, Queen Persephone, and ask her to deliver part of her beauty to me in this box. Fail to accomplish this task,' she said, a malicious glint in her eyes, 'and I will not only make sure that you don't see Eros ever again, but I will make you my servant and you will pay your affronts to me until your skin falls off your fingers. Have I made myself clear?'

That threat didn't really phase me, I must admit. I was about to enter the Kingdom of the Dead and ask for an audience with its queen, my mind was preoccupied in other things. Again, and at last, Aphrodite left me alone to complete the quest. In the distance, I saw Charon, with his imposing boat, which made me reach for my bag and the pouch of money I had packed just in case. Charon took souls to the presence of King Hades, but not for free. In the mortal world, where I come from, we put a coin under the tongue of our dead for them to pay for the trip aboard his ship. Maybe if I offered him all the money that I carried, he would help me and make my journey through the underworld easier, maybe he would take me to the presence of the queen. Determined, I took off and even though he was difficult to convince—'I would be irresponsible if I left my boat, what about the souls that need to cross the river?' He asked—I managed to say just the right words and he took me from the river to the palace, and finally, to you, Your Majesty.

'So, what I am hearing is that the dear Aphrodite has made you go through the literal Hades for some petty thought of hers that you are a rival to her, and she doesn't care that you are only doing this to get your husband back?' Asks Queen Persephone, far from being the warm and bubbly Goddess that she was before she was kidnapped. She now looks grand and dangerous. So much so that I am glad that her anger is not directed at me.

'Yes, your Majesty,' I answer. 'She just wants you to drop some of your beauty in this box, and then I'll be on my way to my husband, to fix what I've broken and gain back his trust.'

‘The first thing, dear,’ she says, taking my hands in her warm ones, and looking straight into my eyes, ‘is that nothing justifies the childish behaviour of Aphrodite towards you, and I intend to have a word with my husband so that he gets talking with that brother of his and fixes this situation. He may be a good-for-nothing, flirty, unreasonable and capricious man all the time, but when it comes to his brother, Zeus usually listens. And secondly,’ she adds, ‘I am not going to give part of my beauty to Aphrodite, I do not care for such superficial things, dear, and you shouldn’t either. From what you’ve told me, you are quite an intelligent young woman and I would hate it if something as insignificant and transient as beauty would ruin the life you’ve built next to your husband.’

I am incredibly amused by the words I am hearing, but I couldn’t agree more with what the Queen is saying. I intend to do just that.

‘Once I am reunited with Eros, I intend to ask for his forgiveness. What I did was wrong, I broke the trust he had placed in me, even trusting me enough to sleep next to me. I will fix this on my own.’

‘That’s the spirit, dear. But tell me,’ her eyes now have a curious glint to them, ‘from my personal experience, it is quite complicated to turn an arranged marriage into a relationship like the one you share with Eros. Mind you, dear, my marriage was a bit more complicated than yours, but I can say that my husband and I see eye to eye in almost everything and, even though I didn’t wish to marry at the time, I am quite content with the husband I got. What do you think?’

As the glint of her eyes has turned quite mischievous, I dare look at her directly and nod.

‘Your marriage is an example, I must say. Man and woman being equals and enjoying their companionship. It must be hard to be separated for such a long time every year, but I can see that you deeply care for the king. In my case, Eros not only appreciated the wealth of my family or the beauty that got us in so many problems in the first place. He also appreciated me for who I was, he furnished a library for me and enjoyed long conversations with me about what I had read in those books. Being with him was calming and I didn’t feel like I had to hide in among the books to keep my façade up, I could be myself around him and he encouraged me to be better. I feel like this is what I lost with my behaviour towards him, and this is what I intend to gain back.’

With a slight smirk and a powerful glint in her eyes, she gets up from her throne and approaches me, enveloping me in an unexpected hug.

‘This, dear, is why I’m not going to fill your box with my beauty. Because you seem to be handling the situation frankly well on your own. This being said, a bit of help is always welcomed so, what do you say to go look for my husband and arrange a little welcome party for you, dear? I have a feeling you’re going to stick around.’

**M<sup>a</sup> Victoria Fornieles Verdugo**





**SEMELE**



## Ashes

There are too many stories about Zeus in Greek mythology. You've all heard about him and his countless examples abusing his power. He, the God of all Gods, the Supreme Deity, the God of honour and justice. You'll also probably know something about his countless and innumerable affairs. The God of the Universe incarnating whatever form possible to lure women into his bed. How funny and entertaining this is to read! You'll think. Well, as amusing as it may seem, we are much more than just secondary characters in this Greek—allaboutzeus—soap opera. Surprisingly, as it turns out, we have proper lives beyond all this classical adultery drama, wow!

I know you think you have heard all about us. I'm sure you are familiar with names such as Demeter, Alcmena or Letho. Now that I finally have the chance to speak, I could start telling you everything I know about these women, all the ins and outs. But don't you believe they are sick and tired of people speaking in their name? I'll tell you what, they just had enough. So, as I can only speak for myself, I will tell my own story.

I was the daughter of the respected Cadmus, king of Thebes. I was also mother to Dionysus, the famous God of wine. I was a daughter, I was a mother. That's pretty much everything. Oh, I almost forgot! I also seem to have been someone's mistress, or so they say. I was one of the many women who have been fooled by a man. The point here is, this one turned out to be not exactly human. But, let's not rush things. First things first. I am Semele. I thought it was kind of important to introduce myself first since I am about to tell you such a personal thing. Well, having said that, I'll start from the beginning.

A few millenniums ago, I was swimming in the river Asopus when I was approached by a young, captivating young man. Apparently, he had got lost in the woods while trying to hunt a deer and wanted me to show him the way to Thebes. As I was talking to him, I started to feel a little bit awkward and also kind of lured. So much that I don't even remember how I ended up joining him on his way back to the polis. As it was a long way, we got the chance to talk for a while. The guy started telling me all sorts of stories about gods and goddesses that I remember finding quite strange to hear. However, I was so delighted by him that I did not mind at all. When we finally reached Thebes, he made me promise we would see each other again the next day. From then on, I happened to be visited every night by this young man. I was so enchanted by him that I started to spread throughout all the polis that I was being visited by a young, handsome mysterious man.

A few weeks later, I was on my way to the Agora when I was approached by an ancient woman who claimed to have read in the Oracle I was being deceived by my lover. Apparently, the Oracle said he was not who he said he was. She advised me to ask him to reveal his identity. At first, I did not want to believe her. However, no matter what I did, I couldn't get the words of the woman out my head. After two days, I decided I could not stand these thoughts anymore. I was going to ask him the next time he came to see me.

The end of the day came, and as with every sunset, my mysterious lover appeared. After a little bit of hesitation, I asked him to tell me things about his life. As his responses started to get weirder and weirder, I explained to him what the old crown had told me. As soon as he heard my story, he got really angry saying I did not trust him. Seeing that he was trying to hide something, I demanded the guy to reveal his true identity. Even though the guy begged me not to ask such a question, I persisted saying I deserved to know who he really was. After a much too long explanation, the guy finally revealed he was Zeus, the God of all Gods. As I started to laugh, I could see how my body began to perish until I got consumed by flame.

Already turned into a deadly soul, it was Charon, carrying me all the way to Hades, the one who told me the real story. While I was swimming in the river Asopus, Zeus noticed my presence and disguised himself in the form of an eagle to observe me. After a while, he took the form of a beautiful mortal in order to lure me into his bed. Apparently, disguising into a mortal to trap young women was his way of combating the boredom of the Olympus. In order to get revenge, the goddess Hera, Zeus' wife, disguised herself into an old witch to plant the seeds of doubt inside my mind.

If you believe discovering your lover is Zeus and turning into a soul on its way to the underworld is already too much to cope with, wait till you hear this. When Zeus turned me into ashes, I was also pregnant. In order to prevent the baby from turning into ashes with me, Zeus took the fetus and sewed it to his thigh. The God of justice had finally taken everything he wanted from me, a little bit of fun and another powerful semi-mortal baby. Neither Zeus nor anyone seemed to care about the fact that I had been turned into ashes. I was just another used and consumed body.

In case, at this point of the story, you think I blame Hera for making me ask for his identity, I don't. Hera, like every woman, was made believe I was the one to take the blame for his husband's infidelity. For years, even I was made to believe that what had happened was my fault. I was the one who decided to trust a complete stranger. I was the one who accepted to have an affair with someone I did not know. However, now that I am an old and wise soul, I am able to see everything clearer. I have learned not to take the blame for something a man, mortal or divine, did. I was just an innocent girl lured by the wicked plays of a God. I did not seduce him, I did not try to get him to notice me. And what's more, I learned I got to be so much more than a mistress or a mother. I was a woman whose story deserves to be told. I refuse to be defined by an affair I was tricked into or a baby that I don't even consider my son.

Now that I finally had the chance to speak for myself, I encourage you, women, to tell your own story. You deserve to be known, you deserve to be heard.

**Victoria Galdeano Olmedo**

SISYPHUS



## Mountain

‘Are you gonna say something?’

A clear voice dilutes the wall, breaks it as distant noises slowly arise from silence. I may be tired at this time of the day, every day a little bit more, old and weak as days go by.

‘You know this is big trouble... I mean... Why did you tell such a thing? He has power, he rules.’

Still, one feels the cold in the bones and the blood running up to the eyelids, swelling up, blackening, getting bigger, avoiding one to see the face of those beloved.

‘Nothing, my dear. Just the truth.’

The words might sound as calm as possible, but instead they sound as astray as their owner. Lights are off; though I can’t see them, I can feel the dark. It’s inside, inherent to every man. I can feel it creeping up on everything. The need of a cigarette grows inside as well, not for the sake of fading the jitters, but for feeling the heat of a flame that won’t be seen.

‘And that’s all? You expect me to trust you when you come home blind, beaten and bruised.’

Her voice becomes a cry—one of those full of anger—as the lighter clicks in the room and lights the cigar. She seems to be afraid, not for her husband, but for both of them. She married a fool, and as so, she’s been swept along the foolishness.

‘There’s gonna be consequences, you know that.’

‘Consequences. You cast that word as a spell, but I won’t retract if that’s your intention. I did what I thought it was correct. Fear is already a consequence.’

‘You’re not scared. You’re a man.’

‘Sometimes men can feel fear too, even if they’re not supposed to do so.’

‘That’s not what I meant.’

The wind outside breaks suddenly into the room, door-opening, violent and deep. And as it irrupts, the cigarette is put out. This air is everywhere. One cannot walk without participating in it, breathing it, inhaling it. It’s the same air for everyone, except for the dead. The cold makes my body shiver, constrained to the coach, old and weak; it’s late in the night, or at least that’s what it looks like among the shadows. I get up, but my legs are not accustomed to the darkness my eyes are put down to. Saving me from falling down, two firm, but soft arms hold me. They’re warm. As I recover the balance, she is still holding me and I let myself be held.

The sea reverbs low in my ears and wakes me up. I don’t know why I like water, its changing shapelessness, its ability to hold life in it. Air spreads fires, erodes and

oxides. We wrinkle because of it. Water extinguishes fires, preserves treasures from their hands to be plundered. It can be also cruel, but maybe we see this, because men were built the wrong way. I dress in darkness because my eyes have not recovered yet. Carefully, I make my way into the kitchen, where the local radio shouts the news. Nothing about yesterday—maybe it has not been known yet; maybe, it doesn't seem important enough to appear in the news. I touch the table looking for the breakfast Merope has so kindly prepared, as my nose can tell. The speaker spits headlines about economy, the forthcoming tractor fair in town and highway cuts due to the snow. I can't stand a silence being that noisy.

The street receives me unpleasantly freezing. The feeling of the air comes off thicker, almost like it's hard to swallow. Its weight has also increased, falling straight down. It may be just my body, but it finds itself feeble under the same air I breathed yesterday. As I walk up the street helped by a cane and nothing else, I sense the harsh glances of the neighbours staring at me, judging my actions, my appearance, my recently acquired 'unnature.' All those eyes, cold as stone, weigh upon my shoulders. Denouncing him was like denouncing the town. Opening someone's eyes required mine to be closed.

After some time, I don't know how much I've been walking, but what is certain is the tiredness that fills me. A couple of minutes ago, when I entered the old town, the wind started again to blow quite aggressively. Cold and wind prevents me from moving forward, and I'm tired. The sound of scattered conversations and the clinking of the cups against the small plates warns me about the presence of a café a few metres ahead. My presence alters the sound when I reach the door, cups are still on their plates and conversations leave space to silence. A deep voice pronounces the first mockery, crystal clear, piercing and direct: 'sissy!' All of a sudden, a swarm of whispered insults reveals among the wind whistles in my mind. All my way to here has been an unnoticed exhibition of rejection. These words made the air heavy. The distraction makes me lose foot. I fall down but the hit doesn't really hurt—men are designed to bear it easily. Some laughs arise from the tables, inside and outside the café. I'm getting old and I'm tired.

A hand grabs my arm carelessly to help me. I don't know who is it. The screech of steel chairs against the floor invites me to take a sit. Thankfully, the wind is kept outside for the moment and we're safe, in spite of the people surrounding us, murmuring to avoid being heard, even though I already know what they say. The smell of coffee and baked pastry floats in the warm air, almost as if I were home.

'I didn't expect you walking by after what happened yesterday.' The words of Asopus emanate concern and pity. He sounds restless, nervous.

'Look, what you did for Aegina... I thank you, but what can a man like me do in this situation. I'm... I'm just a fisherman, Foe.'

This chair is really uncomfortable, I notice. My back hurts and I cannot leave its weight on the floor.

'Asopus, you have to take action on this. You have to care after your daughter. None cared when she came all down the road, bruised and naked in the cold of the night, when she was shivering and the air came out of her mouth, white and solid.'



‘It’s not my problem if the girl decides to waste herself for an irresponsibility. If she’s mature enough to get into someone’s bedsheets, she’s so to accept the consequences. She has to learn how this world works.’

‘You are her father; she just experienced a nightmare in her flesh! Don’t you see she was...!’

No words. Not for that. My throat is now too weak to pronounce that very word that chokes me both in mind and tongue. I’m tired and old. I feel my body standing on foot and how my voice has eradicated the murmurs around.

‘She was raped.’

‘No. I deny it.’

‘Asopus, she was and he was the one who perpetrated it.’

I touch the air to find my chair and sit, trying to recover my composure.

‘It is what it is.’

‘Look Foe, a man like him can get the woman he desires. He chose her and she didn’t know how to play his game. They are like that sometimes.’

He makes a pause and drinks from his cup. When the cup is back on the table, I hear his trembling in the clinking.

‘She will learn from that. That is how it is.’

After a couple of tense minutes, I finish my coffee, say goodbye and find my way out of the place. Outside, nothing has changed. I light a cigarette with difficulty due to the blowing wind that keeps shoving my body against its will. The sound of a gob of spit hits the paving stones close to my shoe. The necessity of escaping from that place prevents me from noticing a few streets ahead that the swelling of my lids is remitting. Just as I crawl in tiredness back home, light appears, washing slowly the darkness away. The walk back home resembles a leaning slope as my back is agonising and staggering.

By the time I get into my front yard, the sun has begun to set. The light and figures are still dim and blurry but, little by little, I start to recognise the world again. The conversation with Asopus has been disappointing. I can’t stop thinking about how I’ve been a fool for telling him about her daughter. In my mind, I still hear the shock absorbers bouncing loudly in the street, her steps running away and the engine of his car a few seconds later starting and leaving the place. I helped her as I could, called her father and told him what I saw. After that, a thrashing that left my body old and blind.

I turn the key and open the front door. My hands are still trembling from that memory. Right before I enter, I notice a shape staring at me from the next door. Aegina moves quickly her eyes away from me, embarrassed, afraid of the man standing on this next door.

‘Thanks,’ I hear her say with a tiny voice along with a quick, sad smile of gratitude.

‘No. Thank you.’

I've done nothing for her, yet she's opened the eyes of a blind to let him see a glimpse of their mountain. When I try to explain myself, she's gone. I enter home and cherish warmth again. The back, the knees, even the eyes seem to hurt no more for a moment. Merope calls me from the living room. She's reading in the coach. I look at her, still half blind; she looks at me. Both of us smile and breathe for a moment, rested and strong.

The sea reverbs low in my ears, waking me up. The feeling of the air comes off thicker, almost like it's hard to swallow. Its weight has increased and I am tired.

**Jorge Vallejo García**

**TYRESIAS**



## Who am I?

It's been five years now, five years since the day I stuck my nose in someone else's relationship. Five years since the revelation, and my first five years. I was almost eighteen, yet all it took for me to finally breathe was a slap in the face.

If you ask me now, I'd say that June was a bit too harsh on her words, but I could never thank her enough for pushing that first domino piece. At the time June and Louise had just got together. It was that time in a relationship for them, the moment when you are so full of love you cannot hold it in, when a minute apart feels like an eternity, even though it took until our last year of highschool for them to tangle together. All their friends had given up hope, thinking their love slithered away, but they proved everyone wrong at the last second with their very cliché slow burn ending.

And I got burnt. I definitely did. We were on our final school trip—ten people in the cheapest hotel room you could imagine, delayed flights, broken taxis and half an entire day being homeless until check-in, but we could finally sleep, or so we thought. The brand new couple was separated by over a thousand miles, yet they remained closely knit, keeping us up all night. The phone call disrupted everyone's sleep as we waited for one of them to hang up, just so we could get half a night's rest before seeing Cornelia Street, eating Soho's most delicious yet tiniest cupcakes and attempting to walk this entire unknown city all by ourselves.

Was I repulsed? Did I envy their relationship? Their love? Was I just tired? Did I envy them? Whatever it was that pushed me to yell that night is pointless now, as was the half hour discussion with my lovesick friend. The only thing that mattered were her words, that venom that paralyzes me even now, half a decade later. I dared telling June that they didn't know how to love each other, and as sharp as a knife, I felt her slash in me.

'You don't even know what you are!'

The room finally went quiet. Why did I go quiet? Why did everyone in the room suddenly fall asleep? Could all of my friends see through me as clearly as June did back then? I never thought about it before, but it was a possibility, as everyone knew about my dreams.

Most people assumed they were made up, but they were all real. I open my eyes and I see nothing but a void. I can hear myself, I can sense myself. I am happy, at peace. I cannot see myself, but I am older. The figure is me, but I am not that figure, not yet at least. Something feels off...

It took me eighteen years to come to terms with my dreams, and the night I was burnt was the night they were no longer dreams. I had a meltdown, which was the meltdown.

'If you are looking it up, it probably means that you are', as so many sites said. And they were all correct, indeed. I always thought I chose my nickname because it was fun, Tyre. But was it really as shallow as I made everyone believe? Or was it another attempt at drowning any doubts about who I really was? A tyre really was the manliest

thing I could come up with. After all, boys love cars, or so I was taught, and if I did then maybe I was a boy too. Maybe if I convinced myself then the dreams would stop, but they never did. Not until they were fulfilled. I am no longer Tyre, and I am unsure that I ever was, but I am me now. I am Resia, and I'm the woman from my dreams. Sort of.

I hear myself, I feel like myself and the relief of that is unmeasurable, but that woman I used to hear in my dreams is still not entirely me. If only it was as easy as that, but it never really is. The relief was great, yes, but the burden is even greater now.

When my friends take their makeup off, I keep mine on. When they get an undercut, I grow my hair longer. When June wears a suit to her college graduation, I have the sparkliest dress on. And it all feels off, still. They look happy, not concerned about taking this thing seriously, about being feminine enough, about people calling me by my name. I can feel the gaze, the expectations, and I want to tear it all apart. They're looking at me, at my small chest, my covered neck and my long hair, and I can't stand it anymore. The laughter, the heavy grins above their bow ties. They are mocking me, they are calling me names. They are calling me the name. It shouldn't feel like this.

As I am wiping smudged makeup from my face, June walks in the bathroom.

'I think you were right, you know?' I say in between sobs. 'I don't know what I am'.

'The thing is, I don't know what I am either,' June says as she frowns. 'I don't know why they laugh, why they look at us, why they rejoice as they intimidate us. But I do know who I am, and I do not care what they say, what they do or how they look at us. Whatever we do, we should do it because we want to, and not because we are afraid of how they will look at us. I thought you were finally happy, but are you?'

I hug June before opening the door, and on my way out I look at her and say, 'I will be'.

It's been a few months now since her graduation, and I have to say, a makeover was long overdue. Now I feel great with my buzzcut, my painted nails, misshapen eyeliner, my worn out Martens, my dry humor, bad eyesight, and my incredible friends that I share thrifted clothes of all shapes and colours with. My name is Resie, and I am the woman in my dreams. The struggle continues, yes, as everything else in my life does—how much I train my voice, the possibility of surgery, the pills, what to tell my grandma, fear, rejection, anger...

To imply that the gaze no longer has an effect on me would be simply untrue, but I am growing and learning how to fight it. I got June, Louise, my sisters and my friends, and they got me. And most importantly, I got me, and I know who I am now.

I am happier.

**Marco Arrabal Centurión**

## The opposite of sex

The sun was shining through the branches of the forest. The light was green and golden when Tiresias found two snakes copulating, with their grey fluid bodies getting tangled together. For some reason beyond his own understanding he got the impulse of separating them. He hit the female snake with a branch and killed the poor creature. As a revenge, she turned Tiresias into a woman. When Tiresias came back to the city, no one could believe her. Everyone thought she was confused or had some accident, so she was sent by the doctors to rest. When she woke up and realized that this would be her new body, Tiresias decided to take advantage of it. She tried all the clothes she wanted, put on make up and even learnt to flirt with men. At the beginning she was sceptical and clumsy, but at the end she got used to it and even enjoyed it. One night at a party, eight years after her transformation, while walking back home, she was encountered by three men.

‘Where are you going pretty woman?’

‘Do you want us to take you home?’

‘C’mon girl, we are gonna have a good time.’

Even though Tiresias rejected the men and asked them to leave her alone, they grabbed her from the waist and the wrists and she was pushed, as if she was a doll, to an alley. She was then pulled from the hair and humiliated while they took turns to rape her. When they were all pleased, they left her barely dressed, crying and devastated.

She then realized why it was vengeance to be turned into a woman, how she was punished for killing the snake. Before this time he always thought that the female side of nature was always weak, lazy and useless and that they were of no more use than to satisfy men and bring children to the world. With a heavy heart and eyes full of tears, she dressed up again and went back to the forest, planning to jump off a cliff and end her life. She could not stop thinking of ways of killing her rapists and she got bitter and bitter with these dark thoughts. She found the same male snake she had seen eight years ago, crossing her way, so she stepped on the snake’s neck killing it instantly.

Meanwhile, in the Olympus Zeus and Hera were arguing about the differences of being a man and being a woman. The argument was getting heated when Hera saw how Tiresias was screaming while stepping on a poor snake lying dead, screaming about how disgusting men were and how much hatred she had towards them. When her ravage ended, she noticed that she no longer had breasts, but hairy arms and chest, her beard itched in her face. She had turned again into a man! Hera and Zeus stopped arguing, fascinated with this discovery, with this unique being.

They then descended from the Olympus to talk with Tiresias about their argument.

‘Tiresias stop it right now!’ said Zeus.

‘What is happening to you? A man hating men?’ asked Hera.

Tiresias was sobbing now, sitting on the floor with the dead animal in his hands without noticing the gods next to him. When he saw them backed up in astonishment, he couldn't believe his eyes. Zeus ran out of patience and asked him directly:

'You seem to be a man who turned into a woman and later into a man again, so let us ask you: Who has more pleasure in sex, men or women?'

'Are you stupid Zeus? Women are being underestimated all the time, they suffer constantly humiliations and even abuses. Most of the time women don't get satisfied during sex, men only think about themselves and about their pleasure. Of course men are the ones who have more pleasure in sex.'

Hera was astonished with the direct answer and the tone with which Tiresias answered Zeus. As a punishment Zeus blinded him and left in a hurry, leaving a burning trail in the forest. Tiresias did not seem to care about being blinded, so Hera asked him:

'How can you be so calm after all that happened to you?'

'I have nothing more to live. Men took my freedom. They destroy our planet and I feel like there is nothing to do.'

'You still talk like a woman,' she said, 'even though you are a man.'

'I don't feel like a man anymore. My genitals do not define how I feel.'

Hera then pitied Tiresias and offered two gifts: she would give Tiresias her sight back and would turn her into a mantis, this way she could use males and later kill them, carrying on her revenge against men. But Tiresias knew that this second gift was not the life she wanted to have, because she would be doing the exact thing men had done to her and asked Hera to turn her into a nymph, so she could live happily in the forest, away of men and with the other nymphs so she could heal her wounded heart.

**Juan Molina López**





