Forbidden Love

“Alexander, quick!” The door to the apothecary was flung open, sending a wave of dust into his eyes. “You’re going to be late, the King’s procession has just started!”

“I’ll be there in a minute, promise.” Replied Alexander, as he reluctantly stepped aside from his work, which he had yet to finish. “Come on father, you heard him.” With each hasty step they took, a trail of footprints emerged from the dust, that blanketed the creaky floorboards.

A stream of knights flooded the streets, before King Otto revealed himself from the commotion. He wore a flamboyant cloak with intricate embroidery at the sleeve. But his crown became the centre of attention - a pristine gold base, encrusted with lustrous jewels, that glistened like a thousand stars illuminating the night sky.

Suddenly, something caught Alexander’s eye; in the very corner of his periphery stood the most elegant, alluring woman he had ever seen. “Alexander? Son!” Helios (his father) whispered loudly. He gave Alexander a nudge, trying to break the trance that the woman had put him under.

But it simply wasn’t enough. She turned to face him, the magnetic force pulling the two closer. But it was forbidden love. This woman just so happened to be Princess Hera, King Otto’s daughter, he could never let his daughter of royal blood marry a commoner. Alexander’s eyes burned into hers; they each took a step in each other’s direction. Helios tugged on his ragged shirt in attempt to pull him back, but then again, it just wasn’t enough. They ran towards each other, before his hand was met with a tight grasp, not by the Princess, but by a knight instead…

The next day Alexander awoke: “Where am I?” He was trapped in a rusty metal cage - the silver was tarnished due to its age. He felt vacant and slightly concussed, but nothing could erase the events of last night from his memory. Helios racked his brains, thinking of every possible solution that could lead to his son’s freedom. Beads of sweat trickled down his forehead, which he swiftly swept away with a shaky hand, knowing that the few people to be thrown into the labyrinth, were never to be seen again… No one knew exactly what lurked behind the bars to the entrance, but everyone knows it is not human. Alexander’s father was a respected soldier, who never failed to lead his men to victory. He was loved by his men, yet rightfully feared by his rivals. Helios lived this life until he discovered his passion for apothecary healing. From medicines to complex concoctions, he had a cure for everything.

“Perhaps if I fight off the guards I could… but no, I might get taken. Ahah! I shall make a cake, infused with my lavender sleep oil. I’ll offer them a slice each.

And with that, he got to work: Eggs… check! Lavender… check! Butter… check! Soon a sweet aroma filled the air, overpowering any other fragrance in the apothecary. He added the thyme, cumin and the herbs that would ensure the guards endured a deep, powerful slumber.

As night fell, Helios threw his sheer grey cloak over his shoulder and set off through the narrow, meandering streets, where the labyrinth loomed into view. A cluster of trees chatted among themselves as Helios surreptitiously approached the two guards by the gate entrance. He held out two slim slices of cake and began to speak: “ What lies in my palms is a gift from Plutus, god of riches – a single mouthful of this will supply you with endless money, that is only in ones wildest dreams.” Without hesitation, the impoverished men fell upon the pieces of cake, devouring each and every crumb ravenously. They instantly dropped to their knees, and without a second to spare, Helios reached into one of the guards pockets and pulled out a key. He jammed the key into the lock and the archaic door creaked marginally open.

As fast as a lightning bolt, Helios ran until he was surrounded by a maze of dark, damp, dingy tunnels. Suddenly, in the distance, a bloodthirsty beast emitted an ear splitting roar, that echoed throughout the labyrinth. A three headed, 11ft tall, dog towered over him. It snarled and spat, and let out a menacing, melodic roar. It’s nostrils flared; the sickly sweet fragrance of lavender sugar captivated the beast, that was known as the Cerberus. In an attempt to defend himself, Helios threw the remains of cake at the beast. The cake fell straight down one of the three throats - it chomped, chewed and then choked vigorously. Spluttering and squawking, the Cerberus gasped for air, and in a vain attempt to take a breath, Alexander was catapulted from the jaws of the beast. He flew to his fathers feet, hyperventilating and longing for breath. Helios was too stunned to speak. His expression remained blank as he cradled his son in his arms, and they bolted back to the entrance. As they made their way past the sleeping soldiers, a mysterious figure emerged from the opaque mist, with an elegant cloak, to keep their identity concealed… Friend or foe, who could it be? She lifted the silk that covered her face – Helios and Alexander gasped in disbelief. Princess Hera stood before the two, looking happy, yet apologetic. “Princess Hera? You came back!” cried Alexander.

“Of course I did. Your face has been engraved in my heart. I love you Alexander, I knew I had to find you!

Aphrodite, goddess of love had been watching them intrigued as to how this would all play out. She felt that this really was pure, true love, and it simply couldn't go to waste. So she plucked them up to the heavens above, so that they could spend eternity together.