*By Persephone Baker*

**Adonis and Aphrodite**

In our lives, we tend to have values, ideals and things, whether they be beings, objects or concepts that we hold dear. In my life, I cherished love, for what could be more beautiful than the art of passion and ardour? Such fervour in the pursuit of one’s heart can be valued as nothing less than elevating, inspirational, fortifying. One could never imagine one could dislike such a thing, let alone abhor it. The idea, to me, and I’m sure to you, is inconceivable, so I am sure that you shall be shocked to hear of a girl despised it with every fibre of her being.

This girl was royalty, the daughter of the far-famed King Cyprus. She was named Myrrha. Now, I am sure you can imagine that I hate Myrrha. I hated her when I knew that she hated what I stood for, and with that me, but I was twisted with an undiluted detestation for this repugnant girl when she did what she did next. Before I tell you, I might add some context to my seemingly thespian feelings for her, my description of her and my reaction to what she did, but what you must know is that as a divine being, my strength comes partly from praise. Of course, I can function without it, and have for many centuries before the creation of humans, but it is almost like an extremely helpful increase to my potency. Humans praise me through temples of which are built in my honour, shrines where humans worship me and, in return, I give them the beautiful gift of love which I so adore.

As I have said, Myrrha abhorred love, and in turn abhorred me, so, she took away the increase to my potency by bolting up the great doors to my temple, starving me. She directed all praise and sacrifices to Artemis, the goddess of chastity. Not only did she take away my praise but redirect it to such an awful cause. As you can imagine, I quaked with untarnished ire, and immediately conceived a progression of penances to enlighten her as to what happens when she commits such crimes.

Such a great insult towards me would be punished, of course, but I had to develop a succession of punishments that would give her what she deserved; pain, a lot of it. She was made pregnant. In many cases, pregnancy is a gift, the embryo being a blossom formed by unfiltered love, however, in her case, she was unmarried and with child, enduring all the constant pains of pregnancy whilst being looked down upon. I then turned her into a tree. Her torso became the trunk, her arms steady branches and her fingers smaller twigs which perched upon the branches. Her legs and toes formed the roots which dug deep and firm into the ground. Of course, I could not simply abandon the baby, although its mother was such a wicked woman, the baby could be taught to cherish the thread that ties the world together, love, and perhaps experience it itself.

Now, the process of birth was unusual, of course, this was because she had been turned into a tree. Like human mothers, she had the baby grow inside of her until it was ready. After this, it became increasingly unusual. When the baby had grown so big it could no longer be contained inside of her, she released it through the only means possible, she began to crack and splinter and soon her baby launched out of her trunk onto the soft grass below. A mixture of her blood and tears landed with the baby, which is now known as myrrh.

The baby was sweet, beautiful and with that helpless. The fact that the baby was seemingly susceptible added to its charm. Of course, with the mother being a cracked, splintered tree, she could no longer care for the baby, after it was born out of her body, she no longer had any control as to what happened to it. One could blame this on me, but perhaps what happened next made the baby better off.

What you must understand is that I have been loved before, by many over many years, but, I had never fallen in love myself. The thing that I stand for, the thing that I create, is something that I have never experienced. I loved this creature, however, kicking helplessly on the grass, that tear-stained face, the delicate features. Many babies are disproportioned, stretched or somewhat damaged, altered in some sort of way during the process of birth. It might have been the unusual way of being born that changed the way this baby looked, or perhaps the perspective of which I was looking at it from above, but it seemed perfect. How could I not experience love for this creature?

Poor mortal child. How could I, full of love with no object to infuse it into, leave it there? What else could I possibly do, in good conscience, leave it there? I could do nothing else but lift it up in my arms? I felt something then. Something of a pain. Now, this may sound confusing, but it was not a pain that was painful in an unpleasant way, but rather something thrilling, something fluttering. Something came into place then. I loved this child, and with somewhere to put my love, the world seemed much more complete.

I could not let this child come to any harm.

I went to my husband’s workshop, and he fashioned a cradle for the child. It was a beautiful silver box lined with soft lamb’s wool. It would be perfect. He looked at me in a way that I had never seen him look at me before. A look of confusion, almost. It could not be true, however. Confusion was not a feeling that any god or goddess could feel. What other feeling could it be? He looked positively perplexed. I had no time to think more about him, I had a sweet, innocent life on my hands.

I travelled for many hours that day. I travelled through desert so inhospitable, storms abrasive, rivers and seas ever so deep, until I reached somewhere where death dare not venture. I had passed the threshold through death and life and came to that one place where this child’s fate could not be sealed in the same way as all other humans. The palace of Hades and Persephone.

For those of you who do not know, I shall provide some background. Hades, the lord of the underworld, the king of terrors was the one who monitored where humans go when they die. All humans go to the underworld, a nasty place, really. He was gruff, aloof and short-tempered, disliked by some, hated by most. Persephone on the other hand was amiable, the Goddess of Spring, she is pleasant in both air and disposition, and that she was. If she were any other way, I might not have trusted them in the way that I did.

I opened my mouth to speak, smiling at the soft gurgling from the cradle, the light taps of fingers trying to explore its surroundings. The curiosity of humans was great, often to their detriment, but the curiosity of human babies was overwhelming. “This child is a mortal. Nothing but a human man-child. You must keep him from all harm and look after him.” I placed the silver cradle on Persephone’s lap.

Persephone looked down at the baby, and I could see from her expression that she now had experienced love. Goodness knows she never loved Hades, but she experienced love for this creature. She would experience the pain of her heart throbbing violently in her chest, and she too would go through all that the world threw at her to get the man-child to safety.

“But what is his name?” She asked, stroking his cheek with such gentle tenderness. The curves of his jawline which were padded with a comfortable layer of skin, that of which cushioned all new-born children from when they were in the womb. Unlike many babies, he had a level of muscle to him. He was not too padded with human fat considering his mother was a tree, but he was beautiful.

I had not thought of what to name the child. What name could describe him? From when I first saw him, he made me fall in love with him. From when I first held him, he made me battle through all dangers of the world to bring him to safety, and because he was mortal, he made me give him up. He triggered such feelings in me, such overwhelming feelings. How could I describe him? The lord of my heart and mind? Then I knew. “Adonis.” I spoke.

“Adonis…” Persephone smiled, “Yes,” she paused, “I think that is fitting.” She paused once again to look at the child’s face. “Lord.” I nodded. Her smile grew, “It is very fitting. I could not have chosen it better myself.” And with that, disappeared, something that I did not want to do but goodness knows that I could not see him look at me whilst I walked through the door. At that moment, I had promised myself that I would return to him. Some day.

As a god or goddess, I am immortal, making time no object. For mortals, time is exceedingly important. What are many years for them is simply a blink of an eye for us? Adonis was only a young man, and in my time, it would have been a short wait, but it felt as though I had been waiting my entire existence to see him again. I returned where I had left him.

“Adonis.” I walked in, looking at Persephone. “Where is he? Where is *my child*?” My worry grew and grew when I realised that he was not there with me. Where could he be? Persephone looked at me, and after contemplating for a few moments and called Adonis in. I saw him. He had not lost his beauty; it had only grown. He was more handsome than anything I had ever seen.

“You say your child. He is not your child.” Persephone tilted her head and frowned, “I mothered him, I went through the pain of looking after him day and night. He is mine. This is where he belongs, his home of childhood. If you wanted him so badly you should not have abandoned him here.” She paused. I shook with anger.

“You *dare* say to me that he is your child? I named him, I walked through scorching desert and unforgiving storm to bring him here! Do you *dare* say I abandoned him? I would never! I brought him to where I knew he would be looked after…” I could not finish my sentence. She looked at me, her stare unmoving.

“He has been looked after. He will continue to be looked after. Here.” She snapped.

I could not believe what I was hearing. Was this all a joke? Who did she think I was? I paused for a moment before looking at her. She gave me a withering stare, that, I am sure, if I was mortal, would have sent me to the land of her husband. “Give me back my child.” I retorted, “My child, my child that I saved, named and loved with all my heart!”

“You have done nothing but bring him to his home, and for that we are thankful, but you have done nothing more for him. He does not know you, but he knows me. This is his home! This is all he knows! I have mothered him, I have cared for him and believe it or not I have loved him, far more than I am sure you have, for you barely know the boy. Adonis has a way of making people fall in love with him from first sight, but that love becomes deeper when you get to know him for a few days, let alone all his life. Nae, Aphrodite you may have brought him here, gave him his name, but you have done nothing more.” Her tone began to calm, but her eyes and stiff facial expression made it clear that she was experiencing extreme anger. Her anger may have been extreme, but I was livid.

“You speak as though I am *nothing* to him! If not for me he would not be alive. You run your mouth as though you are his true mother, but it is I that have a connection with him. Give me my child!” I shout, and with that we stood face-to-face. There was nothing stopping me from showing her what I do to those who disrespect me in such ways, there would have been nothing to stop me from defeating her and regaining my child. Nothing but Zeus.

“Enough!” A voice said. It was familiar. I turned around; it was Hermes. “Enough!” He said again, which also attracted Persephone’s attention. “You two are goddesses, not mortals, you should not be fighting like this. I have been sent by Zeus. He will settle this matter, thank goodness.”

I blinked, what was there to settle? He was my child, belonging in my care. Zeus would agree. His wisdom would bring Adonis back to me, so, I flew up and so did Persephone. Persephone did not take a second to breathe before at once taking the liberty of explaining why Adonis should belong to her, always and forever:

“Zeus, I rely on your wisdom to make sure Adonis stays with me. I met him when he was but a child, and yes, Aphrodite brought him to me but that was all she did. I watched him grow, and with that I mothered him. I tended to him when he cried tears so furious and looked after him when he toddled in the days of his extreme youth. I taught him everything he knows; I am everything he knows. Would you have the heart to take him away from me?” I scoffed and retorted,

“Nonsense! I travelled through the world’s greatest dangers to bring him to somewhere where mortal fate can’t harm him. I loved him more than anything, and I am the goddess of love, who has more love to give than me?” Persephone shook her head and opened her mouth to argue before Zeus slammed his fist down on the arm of his throne.

“Enough, I have heard enough.” His voice shook through the cliffs and caves of Mount Olympus, “I have come to a judgement, the only judgement I believe is fair. For four months a year, Adonis will be with Persephone in the land of the dead, for another four months a year, Adonis will be with Aphrodite, and for the rest, he can do as he pleases.” I suppose it was fair, but I could not help but want more time with him. I had missed so much of his life, and to only have four months a year to try and catch up on what has passed was not nearly enough.

In accordance with the judgement, Adonis spent the dreary cold months of November to February in the land where the dead roam, and in Spring, March to June, he stayed with me. For the rest, he delighted himself with recreational hunting, chasing boar and deer through woodland. A dangerous practice, no doubt, but how could I be satisfied with only four months? For a few years I went along with it, but I was no longer satisfied. I was so enamoured with Adonis, my only love. How could I only see him four months a year? I then realised. There is no reason that he would not be allowed to choose to spend his free time with me, for, of course he loved me too. So, I descended and said to him:

“We shall hunt together.” I would say, and he would not say no. With that we would caress each other and set forth to take part in that activity that he so enjoyed.

Perhaps I would have hunted more if somebody had told me how delightful it was. The howl of hounds, the raw exhilaration of the chase itself, the eating of the fresh meat from the hunt, it was purely magical. During this time, of course, I had to pretend I was a mortal, but for moments in time, I felt as though I was truly a mortal. I allowed myself to enjoy the beauty of the world created for us, and the emotion that it drags from our heart. I had grown to love hunting, as I had grown to love every part of this mortal-like life, although, make no mistake, I thoroughly enjoy the power that divinity provides.

When darkness crept across the sky, we would sleep in each other’s arms. Such peace, such contentment is something I have never felt. I would have stayed there forever.

We had feasted on the fruits of our labours, the succulent meat of the boar, the charred venison of the deer, enjoying both the sport and the source of food. This pattern seemed simply perfect, and I could do nothing but wish that The Fates had something in mind to keep us together, for who else could I rely on? Zeus was no help.

One fateful night, the night that changed my life and locked up my heart in the vault of my ribcage, never to be accessed by anyone ever again. The night that my love died. I was sleeping peacefully as usual, dreaming of the day to come, when, I heard a scream. Not a scream that you would hear of fear, but of all-consuming agony.

This scream jolted me out of my slumber, and lugged my head up from where it rested, to see a wild boar digging its tusk into Adonis’s thigh, extorting the blood and muscle from within. I was filled with the deepest sadness and anger. The boar kicked up the ground and smashed into the undergrowth.

I saw him there, lying helplessly just like when he was first born, but unlike then he was drenched in his own, mortal blood. Leaping for him, I held him in my arms, and kissed him softly, for, what else could I do? The Fates had betrayed me, betrayed all that have ever met and therefore loved Adonis, and betrayed all who never got the chance to meet him. When he breathed his final, sharp breath, I howled, my face saturated in tears, I ripped out my hair and cried so that the whole world could hear me, so that Zeus that rested so smug on his throne on Mount Olympus could hear, for this can all be blamed on him, or perhaps Persephone and Hades, in the land of the dead, soon to see Adonis again. I would never see him again.

From the pocket of my girdle, I took out nectar which I then mixed with his blood. It started to bubble, and with that the first anemone was created. There would be many more anemones, however, but there could never be another Adonis.

**The End**

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