

Pandora

You think you know the story. Everyone does. I've heard it all before. I've heard that I'm the problem so much I'd started to believe it. But hearing it over and over doesn't make it true. Especially if what's said is just about as far from the truth as anything can be. Let me tell you, my story.

It all started with fire. Fire, burning, charring. The end of ends, my beginning. When fire was given to the humans, chaos rose in the home of the gods. Prometheus had done the unthinkable- he had disobeyed Zeus. As a result, he was sentenced to have an eagle tear out his entrails for all eternity. But (of course) that wasn't enough. Someone had openly tried to defy the tyrant's rule. Zeus needed to exert total control, so that no one would try again. So he made a plan.

Prometheus' brother was called Epimetheus. He was the sweetest, gentlest man you could ever hope to meet. But he was lonely. He mourned the loss of his brother more than anyone, and was never the same after. Because he so

fully supported his brother, Zeus decided to punish him as well. What a great guy! Zeus is eternally paranoid, because his grip on the world is shaky, and he knows it. He decided to teach the humans- and Epimetheus- a lesson. He would send Epimetheus a gift, and when he opened it, it would unleash every ill Zeus could think of on the human population. And when it came to suffering, that god had more ideas than the muses had about poetry. But Epimetheus was smart. Frankly, anyone with an I.Q over one could realise a god who hates you is not going to give you amazing gifts. Zeus was stumped. That's when my mother comes in. Aphrodite was in a spot of bother with Zeus. He blamed her (as opposed to actually accepting his mistakes) for his latest marital discord with Hera. Again. It was her fault, he claimed, that his eye kept straying, to literally anyone wearing a dress. Anyway, you can see why Aphrodite would do anything to get back into Zeus' good books. So, she came up with an idea. On the night of my creation, I was later told, she approached the large marble dais in the great throne room and spoke up. "Zeus." She interrupted whatever drivel he was currently spouting. He glared at her with a look that could've soured milk.

"What." When she didn't reply immediately, he yelled at her, "Dammit Woman! Speak!"

She responded with a glare of her own, before glowering at the floor. The good deferential servant she was.

“I have a solution.” She said quietly, rage simmering underneath her flawless brown skin.

“To what?” Zeus asked softly, as though speaking to a stupid child.

Aphrodite looked up, her chin tilted defiantly, her cloud of black hair crowning her head like a dark halo. “To the problem that has been plaguing you the past decade, my lord. What else?”

“Speak.”

“Epimetheus has everything. He is a man with the ability of creation at his fingertips. He will not accept anything we give him, for he can just craft it if he is in need.”

“So?” Zeus demanded when she fell silent again, marble fingers tapping against a marble throne. My “mother” hesitated, before continuing. There was no going back.

“There is one thing he cannot craft. He cannot craft a human.” My mother’s face rose to catch his eye. “He cannot craft a wife. He is alone. He can refuse a gift we send to him as much as he wishes, but not a gift for his bride.”

Zeus’ eyes widened a fraction as he began to understand.

“And how would you propose we use this?” he said like it mattered nothing.

But my mother could see the flicker of interest in his eyes.

“What he cannot make, I can.” Aphrodite said. “With help, I can make a mortal so exquisite, he would have to be blind or gay to not notice her. And he would notice her even if he was blind, for her voice would be the sweetest of flutes.”

Zeus leaned forward.

“I’m listening.”

So that was my beginning. After Hephaestus carved my body from marble, I was born. Hah. No, not really. Hephaestus and my mother are married, but everyone assumed it was loveless. because they had no children. But what only a few knew was this: there were no children because there could be none. My mother’s body didn’t work like that. They had tried everything. But they loved each other still. What was supposed to be revenge was actually asking for permission to create what they couldn’t have, and couldn’t make without help. My father carved my body from dark brown limestone, rough at the edges. Athena and her wife Arachne wove my hair out of golden thread, and Hades conjured up two jewels from the underworld to be my eyes. Poseidon carved my veins, then filed them with the purest water from the source of the Styx. Dionysus clothed me in the finest garments, and Apollo gave me a bright personality- while Artemis gave me a

distain for men, and made me distrustful. Finally, Hestia gave me sense of home, telling me who my family was. And *then* (finally I promise)

Persephone gave me the gift of life. She's the goddess of spring, new things coming to life, so because we didn't want Zeus involved, she did amazingly.

The first thing I saw when I opened my eyes was my family, smiling at me against the backdrop of the Italian mountains. My two aunts, Athena's wife, my uncles and their wives, my cousins, and their smiles, one mysterious- and one vaguely sad at the corners. Then finally, right in the middle- a radiantly beautiful woman with tears in her eyes, skin the colour of chocolate, and a cloud of black hair fanning away from her face. *Mother*. A second figure, arm around the first- although decidedly ugly, with light skin and ginger hair, misshapen legs, and muscle-swollen arms- grinning a grin that rivalled all the sun gods in the world. *Dad*. I ran to them, two complete strangers who I felt I had known for years. We hugged, my mother's tears running down her face and into my hair. I feel my father's strong arms around me, and I think he's crying too. I don't know these people, and they don't know me, but we know each other perfectly. I look up at my mother, and she smiles.

"Come here daughter." She says, "there's a lot you need to know."

My mother told me about the world, and about Zeus and his rule. About how women were treated as objects, with no thoughts or will of their own. And men suffered to- forced into boxes of what you could or couldn't be. She told me about how Athena had to keep her marriage a secret because she didn't fit into the stereotyped view Zeus had on the world, and how Apollo had to watch as his lover had turned into a tree, because they were nonbinary, and so "a freak, who wanted attention from major gods," and was "being stupid, just pick a gender, honestly." This does not seem like a valid reason to turn someone into a tree, but Zeus had always been a bit unhinged. A lot of gods are. Apollo had never quite gotten over it- no scratch that. He literally said he would never be married after it happened. He's never been the same- but he acts fine around Zeus. Any weakness is punished in men. Any strength is snuffed out in women. Everyone is forced apart and into different cages, made of words that tell them what they can and can't be.

My mother explained why I was here. To help him bring revenge, and to show the world that there is nothing he cannot do, nowhere he cannot reach.

"But you have another purpose too." My mother says, running her hands through my glossy black hair. "Zeus' reign has gone on long enough. We need to overthrow him. He is too powerful for any god to defeat! But he has one flaw. Part of the reason he wants you to be with Epimetheus, is because he thinks he can control you- and Epimetheus would do anything for his

wife. Epimetheus is the only free person of two who knows the way to kill Zeus. Properly kill him. He was alive during the war of the titans, and was there when Zeus killed his father, Cronos. He is the only unchained person who knows where the weapon that killed a celestial is, and so far, he has done nothing with that information. But Zeus lives in fear that one day he will tell someone where it is, and they will use it against him. Because that is the only way he can be killed. Using that weapon. Not even Zeus can remember where it is, because he took a potion that made him forget, lest someone try to look into his thoughts. But over time, his fear of it grew, until he decided to destroy it. But he didn't know where it was."

"But Epimetheus does." I said (partly because I had been sitting in silence for a long time, and needed to say something, before I forget how to talk.)

"Yes. And if you are his wife, you can get him to tell you where it is, and deliver it to Zeus." My father rumbled from the chair on my left side.

"And then he will destroy it?" I asked. My mother inclined her head.

"And we will have lost our last chance to overthrow him." My mother states grimly. We sat there for a minute, letting that sink in. I hadn't been alive very long, but already I could tell that this world had suffered endlessly over Zeus and his chase for power. I already wanted it to end.

I had a feeling I was going to be the one to end it.

It had been three days since I was created. I had spent those days training, and had found that how I was created made it very easy to use the skills I needed. I could act perfectly. Lie with a face that was as blank as snow. I was powerful. I had no magic, but I could fight fluidly, and also had all the skills a housewife was supposed to have.

“For cover” my mother explained. It was spread around the gods who were loyal to our cause, that they were to help me. My job was to get Epimetheus to tell me where the weapon was, so that Hera could use it against Zeus. She was arguably the most set against Zeus in the whole rebellion. Millenia of forced abusive marriage can do that to a person. She had suffered endlessly over Zeus’ antics. At first it was all roses and three-week-anniversary presents, then after a century or so, it started to grow sour. Like, tamarind sour. It started as little things, a elbow to the ribs when she made a comment, or had an opinion, or a playful little slap on the head when she did something wrong. But it got worse: if she spoke, he would hurt her in some undetectable way, putting her into the image of a silent and deferential wife, the envy of those pig-headed enough to follow him. He would carouse around with women, and never respect her. Until one day she snapped. She told the world what was happening to her, what she was going through- and they laughed. Said she was being dramatic, that she was just jealous of the women Zeus

dated, that she had no place to question the king of the gods. So, she quietly stepped into her image, all the while plotting.

She recruited others who had suffered, and created a network of intel, waiting to hear of anything that could be used, all the while pretending to dance to Zeus' tune. That's where they got the idea for me.

"It was all your mother." Hera said, looking proudly at Aphrodite. She flushed slightly from the praise. Hera emits this aura of quiet power, while her heavy-lidded eyes have seen stars, galaxies and hold all the sadness of a thousand oceans.

So, I trained. My fighting was perfect first time. My weaving was taught by Hades, who was a patient and gentle teacher. Of course, I excelled at the flower-arranging, archery, sewing, karate- but I sucked at baking. I could cook like no one's business, but I couldn't bake a cupcake to save my life. Ares tried their best to teach me, but it just... well. We'll get the icing out the cracks in the walls eventually. I honed my skills for three days, until Hermes flew in with a message.

"Hey there Pandora!" he said cheerily. Hermes was vital to our operation, because we needed to see all the messages Zeus sent out.

"Hi Hermes" I said, yanking my sword out of the training dummy I was currently hacking to pieces.

“So. Big news. *The. Biggest.*” He said, enunciating every word. Hermes was one of my favourite gods, because of his general enthusiasm for everything and anything.

“What is it Hermes?” I question, smiling.

“Well, guess who wants to see you? The big boss. The great cheese. The head honcho. Zeus wants to see you- now! He doesn’t like waiting...” he declares, bouncing around in the air, winged sandals flapping furiously.

My limestone heart stills. It was time. What we had all been waiting for.

“Thank you, Hermes.” I say, my voice about an octave higher than usual.

“I’m going to go get my mother now.”

An hour later, I’m standing at the top of Mount Olympus, in a throne room that is a hundred times the size of any building I have ever seen before. it looks as if it could fit every house in the little village we had been staying in inside it, and still have room for more.

“There you are,” stated Zeus. “Step forward Pandora. Let me see you.”

I stepped forward, looking for all my worth like I was the meek servant he thought me to be. He smiled a smile that would’ve brought demons to shame.

“Perfect.”

I was walking through a forest. It was lush green, with towering trees the height of giants towering overhead. There was a brook that burred and bubbled like it was imitating the song of the birds overhead. I was walking toward a cottage that looked as though it had grown from the rock around it, ivy and roses covering the walls like nothing ever seen before. It had an oak wood roof that spoke of long days spent trying to fix the bloody thing, and windows that told of sunrises looking through and into the quaint, mismatched rooms inside. I tripped over roots and branches in my best dress, made by Dionysus and Arachne {or Diona as they were going as now}. It floated around my ankles and arms like the finest mist, billowing and flowing like wind in bedsheets on a washing line. My dainty slippers snagged on a root, and I toppled over, smearing mud all over my lovely dress. I groaned, picking myself off the floor and looking at myself in dismay. I was *covered*. I was just debating whether or not I should go back so I could change when a gruff voice sounded somewhere above my head and left ear.

“Are you alright? That was quite the pratfall.”

I whipped my head up and glared. And froze. Above me was a face that could put Eros to shame. Golden brown skin. Longish brown hair. Brown eyes that remind me of the softness of a bear’s coat. So, this was Epimetheus. He’s... quite handsome. Yup. Fairly handsome. Why on earth did no one

warn me he was going to be so handsome? I was probably staring in an odd way, because he pulls away slightly, a confused look on his face.

“Do you speak English?” he asks, seeming genuinely curious. A flare of annoyance lights up my chest.

“Yes of course I speak English.” I snap. A flash of amusement dances across his face.

“Just checking! He says, sticking his hands in his pockets.

“Well, don’t.” I say, standing up and brushing myself off. And without further ado, I stick him in the arm with one of Eros’ arrows. We had discussed how we were going to get Epimetheus to fall in love with me, and had decided that this was the best way to do it. I feel a slight pang of guilt as a number of expressions flash over his face, shock, confusion, then finally love.

“You know, I don’t know why, but I suddenly feel I am in love with you.”

He says carelessly, but I can see that he wants this to work so bad.

“I see.” I say, smiling. “Then maybe it would be a good idea to get married.”

Three weeks later the wedding of the century happened. The wedding of the millennia probably. It is the biggest must go-to event of the age. There are

white flowers, ivy and wisteria climbing over everything. The altar is the finest marble, carved by my father. Hymen is officiating, his torch held high. He will light it at the end of the vows, how bright it shines an omen for the marriage ahead. I was actually surprised at how hands-on Epimetheus had been. Since the very start, he had discussed venues, planned food, and helped with the guest list. He hadn't even tried to veto names, though his lips had whitened, and his eyes had narrowed slightly when he saw that Zeus' name was on the list. I had found that we made really good friends, despite that it was all fake. I'd actually found myself wishing slightly that it wasn't- he was easily the best friend I had ever had. Anyway, the big day rolled round in a burst of clear weather and golden sunshine {courtesy of the best man, Apollo. He and Epimetheus had become fast friends, for whatever guy-Ish reasons. They were total opposites, with Epimetheus' outdoorsyness, and Apollo's...well, not that. I guess it's just opposites attract. I was forever grateful to him for being so good to Epimetheus while I've been busy. Gah, stop thinking these sappy thoughts! Focus Pandora.} My mother helped do my makeup, painting my lips a dewy pinkish-brown, and my eyes a shimmering bronze. My dress was long and ruffled at the back, with a train about a mile long. I was surprised someone didn't trip on it. Then it was time. The music started playing. The guests stood up. I rounded a corner and stood underneath a flowered arch. And my mouth essentially fell open in

shock. the most amazing sight I had ever seen greeted my eyes. White columns lined a stone path, scattered with white petals. The woods outside sent dappled beams of sunlight into the congregation, who were all standing, turned towards me. Animals crowded around the edges, deer, rabbits, mountain lions and goodness knows what else. And under a tree, was Epimetheus, wearing a tailored chiton, that looked as though it had been designed to give poor mortals like me a freaking heart attack. The music played. Apollo strummed on his lyre as the muses sang. They sang something that sounded a bit like this: da-DA da-daa, da- DA da-daa. I walk down the aisle, my senses overloaded by the perfume of flowers in the air, and the sight of this wedding, my wedding. Even if it wasn't real. We said our vows, and now it was time for Hymen to light his torch. His torch symbolised whether or not the marriage would be happy. If it burned brightly, there would be happiness, if not... His hand shook as he raised his match to the torch, and he stifled a sob. His quavering hand touched the match to the oil-soaked cotton, which lit- and stuttered. It streamed like the wind was hitting it full-force, and then bowed like a dancer at the end of a performance.

The flame went out. Shocked gasps echo around the room. This hasn't happened since the wedding of Zeus and Hera. My chest feels tight. I know why this is happening, but will Epimetheus guess? Maybe not all the

specifics, but it's fairly easy to guess that I don't love him, now that's happened. I turn my head to face him, trying to mask my panicked look. He looks at me and sighs, before pulling me into a hug.

"it's all right. The torch has been wrong before..." he whispers into my hair. I lean in and wish I could believe him.

Later, Zeus hands me a wedding present. It is a carved *pithos*, a jar, usually made to store oil. But when he presented it to me, Epimetheus' breath caught, and he glared at Zeus with eyes of fire.

"You cannot give her that!" he said, half shielding me with his arm, as though he could stop me from taking it. Because I wanted that jar. From the moment I had seen it first, the thing called at me, tugging my arms and fingers to take it with little voices that sung in my ears, more potent than any siren.

"Why not? She is of my court, isn't she? And I am her king, and I can give her whatever I see fit." He pressed the jar into my hands, and warm sparks ran up my arms. I grasped the handle and was about to pull it out when my husband suddenly said "WAIT!" Epimetheus snatched the jar out of my hands. Zeus smirked.

"Listen to your better, Pandora. You must never open it." And with a flick of his cloak, he walked away.

Days turned into nights, which in their turn become weeks, who then take their place as years. I have been married for two years. Two years filled with, camping, and playing with the nymphs, and visits from my family, and Sunday lunches, every Sunday without fail, no matter what was going on, with my husband's best friend Apollo and my best friend Artemis. We loved them both dearly. But something bothers me all these years. The jar. The jar. The jar. That's the only thought in my head whilst I'm alone in the house, all my thoughts centred on the lantern sized thing on a shelf in the attic. The moment we had got home, Epimetheus had hidden it from view. But it was always in the back of my mind. A big part of me was surprised the marriage had lasted this long. But then again, I had no idea how long the love arrows worked. Maybe he would never wake up from this. Maybe he would never have to leave me. I had tried my best over the years to get him to disclose the location of the weapon, but he never budged. He often laughed, and said "It's closer than you think."

One day, I couldn't stand it any longer. But I couldn't break Epimetheus' trust anymore then I was doing every single day. I felt I had no choice. I went to the oracle at Delphi, and begged the seer to tell me, what the jar was, and why I couldn't open it. Her neck cracked as she inhaled the sacred sage green smoke. Her eyes began to change colour from brown, to the same green as the smoke, and they appeared to stretch and bend, giving her the appearance

of snake eyes, complete with a split black pupil in the centre of an iris, of no discernible colour, instead of shifting colours, like grains of sand in a storm. It hurt my eyes to look, but I forced them onto the ragged woman in front of me. Her long black hair whipped around her head in an unearthly wind as she spoke:

“THE WEAPON YOU SEEK IS THE PITHOS. ZEUS GAVE IT TO YOU SO YOU WOULD NEVER REALISE WHAT IT WAS. HE NEVER DRANK THE MEMORY POTION, AND HAS BEEN PLANNING THIS FOR YEARS. BUT HE HAS ANOTHER REASON. IF THE JAR IS OPENED, WHOEVER OPENED IT WILL DIE HORRIBLY. BUT, IF THE PERSON WHO OPENED THE JAR DIES BEFORE THEY CAN RECEIVE THE CURSE, IT WILL BE INFLICTED ON ALL THEIR SPECIES. YOU ARE MORTAL. IF ZEUS KILLS YOU BEFORE YOU CAN BE CURSED, IT WILL GIVE THE MORTALS THE PUNISHMENT HE WISHES FOR. AND YOU WILL DIE BEFORE RECEIVING THE CURSE, BECAUSE A SPELL WAS WOVEN INTO YOUR BODY WHEN YOU WERE MADE. PANDORA, IF YOU OPEN THE PITHOS OF SOULS, YOU WILL DIE, AND THE HUMAN RACE WILL SUFFER ENDLESSLY.”

I was shocked, shattered. My head spun in circles like the room was spinning, and my stomach felt full of iron.

“So... I won't open it. There we go. Simple as that.” I laugh, feeling a lot lighter. I had resisted it for two years. I could resist forever. The seer's eyes roll back, and she laughs like she'll die if she stops.

“YOU CANNOT RESIST! THAT IS THE ONE IMPOSSIBLE THING. DO AS YOU MAY, BUT YOU WILL NEVER AVOID IT.”

“I think you'll find; I can't open something unless I touch it. I will bind myself to the bed, so I never open it while sleeping. This prophecy is filled

with holes.” I remark, turning to leave. There is nothing important here now. The seer gives another soul-shaking laugh. Her head rolls. She peers up at me with a grin from beneath her putrid waterfall of black hair, eyes almost entirely dark green.

“YOU WILL OPEN IT. YOU DONT HAVE TO TOUCH IT. YOU DONT HAVE TO BE ANYWHERE NEAR IT. BUT THE MOMENT ZEUS DECIDES HE WANTS YOU TO, YOU WILL FIND YOURSELF OPENING IT. IT IS IN YOUR BLOOD, SOUL, SKIN AND MIND. IT IS YOUR GENETICS, HAIR AND TEETH. YOU CANNOT ESCAPE YOUR FATE, LIKE I COULD NOT ESCAPE MINE.” She licks her pearly white teeth, blood flowing down her chin. The feeling of helplessness, the crushing wait of defeat pressing down on me like the world on Atlas’ shoulders. And I mean wait, not weight, because it is a wait, of knowing any second I could somehow open something containing every problem the world could hold. I would cause so much suffering, purely for something I was apparently made to do. Who? Who wove that spell into my creation? I couldn’t’ve been Zeus, he wasn’t there. What, who, why!? My thoughts spiral and become frantic, a broken music box, spinning over to time, again and again.

“I AM IMPRESSED. YOU HAVE NOT EVEN ASKED WHO DID THIS YET.” She tilts her head to the side like a bird. *“THOUGH I CAN TELL YOU WILL. WHO WOULDNT?”* I hate to give her this, but I whirl around and sit back in the rickety stool I had been sitting in for the past half hour. I grit my teeth.

“Who?”

A smile stretches over her face, a smile that spoke of forked tongues, and scaled bodies, of fangs, and a perfect kill.

“SOMEONE WHO WOULD -AND HAS- DO ANYTHING FOR ONE PERSON. SOMEONE WHO DIED IN A WAY THAT WAS MADE A MOCKERY OF, BY AN UNHINGED KING. A KING WHO WAS WILLING TO BRING THEIR LOVER BACK IN RETURN FOR THIS. THIS PERSON COMMITTED EVIL AFTER EVIL,”

her snake tongue flicked out *“AND WOULD COMMIT MORE, IN ORDER FOR THEIR LOVE TO COME BACK. HE DID THIS. WHEN GIVING HIS GIFT, HE HID ANOTHER ONE INSIDE. A WOLF IN SHEEP’S CLOTHING. A CURSE, TO UNLEASH EVERY EVIL THAT COULD BE THOUGHT OF.”*

She smiled a saccharine smile.

“His *name*.” I ground out, feeling myself tip closer and closer to the pit of despair.

“*HIS NAME?*” she said with a careless smile. “*WHY, DONT YOU KNOW HIM? I WAS UNDER THE IMPRESSION HE WAS QUITE CLOSE TO YOUR FAMILY ACTUALLY*” her eyes twinkled, and squinted playfully.

“*HE WAS YOUR BEST MAN, WASNT HE? WHAT WAS HIS NAME... OH THAT’S RIGHT. MY WARDEN. THE PERSON THAT MADE ME*” she gestures with long spidery fingers to herself
“*HOW I AM.*” She smiles languidly again.

“*APOLLO, WASNT IT?*”

A void opens in my stomach. I was floating. I was dead, burning alive, being torn at from the inside by claws of red-hot iron. My head was swimming. I was aware of gasping for breath, swallowing for air, every thought, every word in my mind clawing at me, while tears stung my eyes. I had trusted him. We had trusted him. We had cared for him. We had *loved him*. My thoughts shattered at the betrayal. He had always seemed slightly broken, the death of his love visibly hurting him like brand. But we had never guessed... never known. The seer's words came back, how he would do anything to get them back. And *had* done anything. He had made her how she was. I raised my raw eyes to the decayed figure in front of me. She gave another Cheshire-cat smile at my realisation.

“YES. YOU SEE. EVERYTHING I AM NOW; I AM BECAUSE OF HIM. HE BROKE ME.” I suck in a fast breath. As much as I hated this woman for taking pleasure in my pain right now, no one deserves this.

“What happened?” I ask quietly. This provokes another baby doll laugh.

“ZEUS HAPPENED. WHEN HE TURNED DAPHNE INTO A TREE, HARDLY ANYONE WOULD LET APOLLO GRIEVE. IT WAS JUST TO- FUNNY! OF COURSE;” she tilts her head and says confidingly, like we are old conspirators *“IT WASNT ALL THAT FUNNY IF YOU WERE THERE.”* She gives a high, girlish giggle *“I WAS THERE. OR AT LEAST, I SAW IT. THEIR BEAUTIFUL FACE TURNING TO WOOD, THEIR TEARS BECOMING AMBER THAT ROLLED DOWN THEIR FACE. THEIR HAIR TURNING TO LAUREL LEAVES.”* She made a mock sad face.

“POOR APOLLO. ONE DAY IT BECAME TOO MUCH. HE WENT TO ZEUS, BEGGING HIM TO BRING THEM BACK. HE AGREED ON THE CONDITION THAT HE VISITED THE CAVE WHERE HE ONCE SLEW A GREAT SNAKE, PYTHON, AND BROUGHT WITH HIM A MORTAL GIRL. I WAS THAT MORTAL GIRL. WHEN WE ARRIVED, HE FORCED ME TO DRINK A VIAL OF PYTHON’S BLOOD. I SCREAMED AND WRITHED AS I CHANGED, SCREAMING OUT FOR SOMEONE TO SAVE ME. NO ONE DID. I WAS LEFT TO BE ABANDONED, MAYBE FOR DEAD AS I SCREAMED. FOR THIRTY DAYS AND THIRTY NIGHTS I LAY ON THIS FLOOR AND INHALED THE FUMES FROM THE DEATH BELOW. WHEN I AWOKE, I COULD SEE. I COULD SEE EVERYTHING. I TOLD THEM YOUR MOTHER’S PLAN TO OVERTHROW ZEUS. I TOLD THEM ABOUT HOW HERA WASN’T LOYAL. I WARNED THEM, AND THEY THWARTED EVERY PLAN AT EVERY TURN. I TOLD THEM ABOUT YOU.”

My breath catches. My throat feels like sandpaper.

“Why?” I manage “They did this to you. Why would you help them?” she looks at me with eyes that are barren and desolate, devoid of all hope and humanity.

“BECAUSE YOU NEVER CAME TO SAVE ME. NOT YOU, BUT YOUR FAMILY. THEY SAY THEY ARE SO MUCH BETTER, BUT THEY NEVER EVEN TRIED TO HELP ME. HOW CAN THEY BE ANY BETTER THAN WHAT THEY CLAIM ZEUS IS, WHEN THEY DID NO TRY TO SAVE ME.” My heart aches

for this corrupted figure. She did not get to be this way by herself. But that does not excuse it. She had a choice. She made it. And now I had a choice.

While I was alive, I was a danger, able to ruin everything. I was a variable that needed to be wiped out. While I was alive, everything my parents and family had ever worked for was in danger. I didn’t have time to tell my family what I knew- the seer would see what I was planning any second now.

But there was one face I couldn’t die without seeing one more time. I turned

and sprinted out the cave. My feet flew under me, as I sprinted as I had never ran before. to the forest. Over the stream, through the mud. Bursting into that house I had seen for the first time two years ago. Epimetheus is there, carving something made out of wood on the table. My nose wrinkled instinctively. I'd have to nag him to clear up the shavings later, or there'd be nowhere to eat dinner- it hits me like a sucker punch to the gut. I would not be here for dinner. There would never be another time where one of our projects had taken up the only table in this tiny house, and we would eat dinner on the roof, laughing over my bad baking and eating burnt cupcakes. I was about to lose everything. I was always going to end up losing everything. But now I was losing my best friend. And I wish we had more time. But there was one more thing I could do to help this man- though it would break my heart before I died in a way that seemed more final than death, and hurt in my chest in a way that I never thought possible. My ears ringing, my tears spilling over as I run to a cupboard on the far side of the kitchen, ignoring Epimetheus' increasingly more worried shouts. I must look mad. My hands shaking, I reach into the cupboard, pulling out something I wished I would never need. A vial of liquid, painted with a rose with petals falling to the ground. The counter-spell to Eros' arrow. I had asked for it from him on my wedding night. He had given it to me with a smile that was sad, and knowing.

“Sometimes... I wonder if my arrows do more harm than good.” He had said as he passed it to me. Now I believed him. I turned to Epimetheus holding it. And I told him everything. Starting from the top, I told it all, and I couldn’t watch his face. I was shaking and sobbing more than I thought I ever could.

“...but this can reverse it!” I say desperately, filling with sadness and despair at the thought that he may hate me. That he hates me. I take off the lid with shaking, anguished hands. I proffer the vial to him looking at his unreadable brown eyes and sobbing all the harder. I’m about to lose everything. He holds out his hands... and pushes the vial back gently.

“Pandora, the arrow ran out ages ago.” He says, looking slightly amused, but all worried for me. Everything stops.

“What?” I say, stammering “but- how- what?”

He laughs, and says,

“Eros gave you an impermanent arrow. He told me everything- the day it ran out, right before our wedding.” I was shocked. That long?

“But... why didn’t you call it off?”

“I didn’t want to. Not because of whatever noble reason you think- I love you. There we go.” My heart fills and rises. I smile up at him, and with it tell him all the things I cannot say. Then suddenly- a scream bursts from my mouth. The pain, the pain. Makeitstopmakeitstopmakeitstop! Buring knives

rip through my skin. Poison courses through my veins. Arrows stab my heart, again, again, again. I can hardly hear Epimetheus' scream, his hands, trying to see where it hurts. *I'm burning. You can't save me like that- put out the fire!* My convulsing body is dragged up. I stagger, screaming upstairs. I hear Epimetheus' shout as he realises at the same time I do where I'm going. *the pithos*. The prophecy. This is what she meant- I couldn't resist any more then I could tear my own skin off. My hands grasp the smooth pottery. I scream attempt to stop my grasping hand. There is heartbreak in this room, in the air. Anguish in my lungs, in the fear in my veins. I grip the lid.

Slowly

It

Opens.

Bring the old pain back. That's my first thought. Because what is happening right now is *so* much worse. Screams can never be loud enough. No one can ever help, though I'm begging them to. There are no more words. Nothing can describe the agony I feel. I AM

BURINGANDDYINGANDSCREAMINGANDBEGGINGHELPMESOMONEHELPMEMAKEITSTOPMAKEITSTOP. PLEASE! HELP! I look down.

My hands disintegrate in front of my eyes. My whole body is being slowly erased. The curse. If I die... all this will go to the mortals. But I can't save

them. My plans are in ruins. There is nothing to do. I succumb slowly, giving in. but then a light, more beautiful than anything I'd ever seen floods my eyes. Epimetheus is sobbing, and asking me what's going on, what is happening. I reach out to cup his cheek, and my consciousness dissipates, the last thing I ever see blazing in my mind, those kind brown eyes and that kind sweet, strong person, who would survive without me. I smile, and go under.

I'm in I white room with no walls, no floor, and no ceiling. Just light.

"Where am I?" my voice sounds like the child I never was. A familiar voice answers.

"In the sun. isn't that obvious?" Apollo says from behind me. I whirl around expecting anger and rage... but I feel nothing. Apollo notices my blankness and shrugs.

"Feelings belong to the living. Don't ask me. I don't even know why you're here." He sighs, sadness in every feature of his face. "I feel awful that Epimetheus will have to go through what I do, because of me." I know I should be feeling heartbreak now, but there's nothing. There will never be anything again. "And your poor mother and father..." he continues. He looks at me.

"What do you want to do?" he asks.

“I... don’t know.” I say. I think back to earth. I wish I could help them, but I don’t know how to undo what’s been done.

“You could give them hope.” Apollo says sadly. I look at him, confused at his tone. He shrugs. “I never had any. Maybe it will help.”

Hope. I could be their hope. I could not undo what I’d done, but I could make it better. Make it bearable. As I think, gold wings unfold from my back.

Butterfly wings. My body shrank. I was a butterfly. Apollo smiles at me sadly as everything starts to fade.

“go be their hope.” He says softly. The last thing I see in my human eyes is his sad smile, as earth comes back. I open my eyes.

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