

Kiara Richardson

HU321 - Mythology

Dr. Taylor

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Her Condolences

A warrior's journey exhibited as a short novel

Eva



"I was bare, exposed, vulnerable. The fact that he saw me naked wasn't what bothered me. It angered me that someone, a human no less, was able to catch a glimpse of my divinity in its truest form. My condolences for shattering your curiosity."

ARTEMIS

I look towards my hands, drenched in blood, and start the faucet. The thick, red liquid stains everything it touches, forever corrupting it. *Just like me*, I think to myself.

I begin to scrub harder and harder and harder. So hard that my divinity begins to seep through, the gold mixing with the red. But even then I don't stop. As I shred my skin, mortal swirls with immortal inside the bowl. The ichor, clogging up the sink due to its thickness. *Goddess, what am I doing?*

This isn't me; I don't do this. Then why? Who am I impressing, pretending for...?

When I can't feel the palm of my hands anymore, I stop. A lone tear streaks down my cheek and I let out a sniffle. Am I crying? How long has it been? I grip the sink bowl tightly until I hear faint cracks in its structure. That's when I look up.

When the light hits it at the right angle it can be blinding, abusing the eyes of the one who dares to look upon it. It stands tall and proud, without a care in the world.

I don't understand why, but seeing it here shocks me. I look at it in confusion. I have passed it many times before, I see it every day, got my movers to bring it up the stairs, even had them hang it up on the wall. So why the shock now?

My hair is a mess. There's a mixture of blood and ichor within it and some dry, cracked splatters along my face. My clothes are in tatters from what happened. I look broken, weak, ungodly.

Without thinking further, my grip on the sink bowl becomes tighter and the plaster shatters, embedding into my skin, ruining my previous hard work. I'm angry, unfathomably so. I can feel the air around me sizzle and crack, attributes to being Zeus' daughter.

My breaths quicken within my breast and my hands feel as if they're burning up. I can't seem to focus on anything but the image before me. Gritting my teeth, I let out a thunderous roar that shakes the foundation of my home.

In a split second I punch the near-shattering glass with my battered hand. The shards are sharper than the plaster when they stab me, but I pay it no mind. The glass from the impacted area shatters completely, but the outskirts of the frame leave deep, intricate cracks that stare right back at me.

I'm still breathing heavily with my hand immersed in the wall behind, the ichor dripping down the length of my arm to create a small puddle between the broken plaster of the sink and glass fibers.

Damn, that mirror was expensive.

Δύο

"Poor, troubled follower of Artemis. Begging and screaming for help that took a lifetime to reach, and even then, it still didn't suffice. It's okay because it's all you've ever known. My condolences for the fucked-up world you were brought into. The world that cares nothing for its inhabitants."

ARTEMIS

"Is everyone in position?" Arethusa speaks through our mics in her usual calm and collected voice. A series of acknowledgements can be heard before I finally check in myself.

My girls and I picked up a job through the Olympus Underground, a place where gods, goddesses, demigods, and other Olympic heroes can post contracts with reprised rewards. Currently my team, the Followers of Artemis, are the number one sought out preference for getting things done. What can I say? I trained my girls well. This job in particular is offering a large sum of Olympian Coins to the one who can deliver.

An anonymous benefactor came directly to me this time, a bit odd, but I guess they didn't want anyone else doing the mission. All I know is that we are to collect a package from the building listed on the address.

"The package is very valuable and fragile. Treat it delicately and protect it at all costs. It can be located at the highest point in the building." The mystery man had said when we met. And now, here I am with my team of warriors, stationed out in the forests that encompass the mansion. The house is beautifully modern, no doubt, but very suspicious looking, seeing as there are at least 50 armed men surrounding its perimeter. Nothing we can't handle.

"Alright, go in slow. Swing fast, ready to strike, intent to kill. I don't want to trip the alarm until after I've secured the package," I say sternly looking right at Circe, our newest recruit and bit of a wildcard. We had bad blood in the past, but she came to me wanting to join the team because of her love for humans. Those easily breakable creatures. How we made them so weak.

A reply isn't heard as the girls have already begun to move. Dorceus and Theron, my trusted wolf companions, growl lowly ready to bite into flesh. I haven't fed them yet today, so I know they're hungry. My girls clear a path for me, taking out targets swiftly one by one. I make it to the back entrance of the house with Dorceus on my right and Theron to my left flank.

Slipping through the door that the guards carelessly left open, I face the kitchen. A man is here, making a sandwich. He hasn't spotted me yet. So I use that to my advantage and stab his spine with my hunters' knife in the nape of his neck. He tries to scream but I clamp his mouth shut and push harder. His

eyes roll back, clear liquid seeping from the wound. Spinal fluid. I lower him to the ground wordlessly before moving towards the living room.

The stairs are located on the opposite side and lucky for me, there are about 10 guards watching some football game on the couch. This package must be really valuable to have this many guards here...

I see my girls creeping up on all sides, peeking over the wall. I release Dorceus and Theron while giving my girls the go ahead. The men didn't even have time to unsheathe their weapons before they were all slaughtered. One tried to attack me from behind, but I easily dismembered him before making a swift exit to the stairs.

The hallway is narrow and leads to a door that can be locked from the outside. What the hell? Are they trying to keep something in? I slowly walk up to the door and listen. I can hear whimpers and heavy footsteps along with softer ones. Two people. This "package" we were to retrieve is obviously a person. I've taken on a couple jobs like this before.

Without hesitation I kick the door down and aim my bow to a man's head. He freezes where he stands and quickly turns around. "Who the fuck are you?" He spits.

"Someone you should show some respect to," I say before lowering my aim and shooting my arrow into his family jewels. He screams in agony before crashing to his knees, shielding his junk. I walk up to him and roughly caress his bearded chin. "This position seems more fitting for you, don't you think?" I say in a voice that drains all color from his face.

Before he can reply, I put an arrow right between his eyes, feeling no remorse for a kidnapper and possible rapist. I hear small cries coming from underneath the bed. Bending down, I lift the entire bed frame with one arm to see a girl curled into a ball, trying to make herself seem as small as possible.

"He cannot hurt you anymore. Come, take my hand child. I will take you away from here. We must go now," my tone a bit harsh, but I can't help it. Dorceus and Theron come rushing up the stairs and into the room with blood covering their jowls. The girl looks up then and I can sense that she is human, the package. She looks at my wolves before speaking and I lower my hand.

"Are they dead?" She whispers, her voice so pure and quiet.

"Yes, they are gone. No one will hurt you anymore," I tell her in the kindest tone I can muster. She is small when she stands, barely reaching above my midriff, but I have always been a tall goddess. Dorceus and Theron easily reach her head.

She gets atop Theron when he bends down, and we exit the vile building. When we reach outside I turn back to Arethusa. "Bombs set?" I ask. She nods enthusiastically and hands me the detonator. I look to the package and give it to her. "Would you like to do the honors?" I say with cheek in my voice. The building has been cleared. All that are left are souls that will meet Charon in Hades' domain, the Fields of Asphodel would be too good for them.

The package looks wearily at the detonator before taking it and looking to my team of elite women. They encourage her with smiles and within a minute, the house explodes.

ARTEMIS

I am to meet this mysterious benefactor and deliver his package. Right now I'm at a coffee shop with the girl sitting next to me. She feasts on a muffin and some hot chocolate that I bought her. I feel a divine presence in that moment and look towards the door of the shop. A tall handsome man walks in, with a smile as bright as the sun.

Apollo. I should have known.

"Long time sister. I can see that your mission was a success," he says as he takes a chair from another table and sits across from us. I feel the anger boil within me. I guess he sees the look on my face and puts his hands up in a surrender motion. "Hey! Come now. It's been so long. When are you going to let that go?" He says quickly with nervous eyes. I never forgave him for Orion.

"Here is your package. I am leaving now," I say while going to stand up.

"Actually... she's for you. I was there when she was kidnapped in that alley and immediately sent one of my men to find you personally. I'm sorry for what happened all that time ago. Truly, I am. It was selfish of me. Back then I was arrogant and entitled. I didn't want to share you with anyone. And in the end, I took the only man you ever cared for. Forgive me sister?" He looks down with guilt ridden eyes. Can't even hold a stare while you apologize? I look to the girl, then back at him.

"Let me get this straight. You were there when she was taken and yet did nothing?" My anger is laced through my voice as the room becomes cooler. I can see the humans looking in confusion at the sudden temperature difference. The girl clutches my arms in worry and I feel my anger dissipate some.

"I'm sorry. The Fates declared it, you had to find her. You needed this. In the later years, you've become closed off, only seeking your followers. The gods were getting worried and thought that maybe..." he trails off. I silently curse those three old hags.

"Maybe what?" My voice a bit calmer than before.

"Maybe you needed to focus your attention on caring for something other than yourself and your people," he states with a sheepish smile, his hand scratching the back of his neck guiltily. I look to the girl again as she stares at Apollo shyly. I can tell she is weary of men, even if they ooze divinity, something that calms mortals.

I never had children, as I am a sworn maiden. But that doesn't mean I never entertained the thought. Maybe I did need this? I look into her round doe eyes. They hold the universe within, so curious and wild. "What is your name, girl?" I ask softly.

"Ortygia," says her voice smooth as water.

How irrevocably ironic?

Τρεις

"Vile. Despicable. Unruly creatures. For what did you wish to accomplish? Defile my body. Crush my spirit. Lessen my godliness. You deserved what you got a thousand times over in a thousand more painful ways. And I would have gladly exercised that right. My condolences, for shattering the absurd notion that you would have any power over me."

ARTEMIS

"You know there's a large sum of Olympian Coins to the one who brings you in alive, right?" Atalanta says callously while taking a sip of her bourbon. Currently sitting next to her at the bar, I look over with whimsical and mischievous eyes. I notice the slight shudder that runs through her at my fleeting glance.

"You and your Amazon whores gonna take that risk?" I say with a slight giggle. I may have saved her once as a newborn, but that doesn't mean I can't kick her ass, tipsy or not. She lets out a dry laugh and downs the contents of her drink.

"You kidding me? I value my females lives just as much as you value yours. The only reason that I'm here is to warn you. That job... got picked up by some twin brothers, Poseidon's bastard kids, I think. Just wanted you to know." She heaves a sigh as if this conversation bores her. *Well you're not the only one.*

"Thanks for the concern, but I can take care of myself." I slur before leaving an Olympian Coin for my tab and getting up, departing from Atalanta.

The night is still young as I stare at Selene hanging proudly in the sky. I continue down the pathway that leads to the main streets of my birthplace, the island of Delos. It feels good to be here, it doesn't match the forested island of Chios, where my hunters await me, but this is still home. I just needed some time to assess a certain contract and I don't want the girls involved.

Making my way through the excited crowds, my targets finally appear behind me. *It's about time.* These brothers are either very gullible or very stupid, not smart in the slightest.

I effortlessly glide across the stones until I come upon more suitable grounds. Blending into the darkness so my prey cannot see me, I await their impending arrival.

"Did you see all those zeros? That's a lot of Olympian Coins! Wonder why no one took the job..." One of the men states in an exciting tone. His brother seems to be the more levelheaded one.

"Maybe because she's a goddess, idiot. People pay big bucks for those, especially virginal ones. Who's to say we can't play with our food once it's already presented on a plate?" Both brothers laugh at the comment before making their way closer to me.

Wordlessly, I limb the tree that I was previously perched beside and look down at the imbeciles before swiftly following them through the thick canopy. *They won't stand a chance.* I laugh morbidly and let my voice carry through the dense forest to catch their attention, a huntress trick.

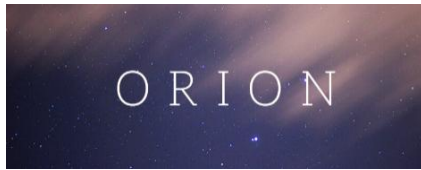
Both men unsheathe their weapons before looking at each other, silent words passing through their eyes that I can hear loud and clear. *You go that way; I'll take this way.*

I chuckle again and silently drop down from the tree to land in between the two brothers who have traveled a good distance from each other now. I wait on bated breath for them to notice me. When they finally do, they fire their guns unquestioningly and rather carelessly.

Easily side tracking, in a move that a human wouldn't be able to comprehend, I wait for their bullets to hit my intended target. The breeze carries the scent of demigod blood to my awaiting nose, so succulent. Two, rather large, thumps are heard as their bodies crash to the ground.

I check over the first man's body, happy that the bullet went straight through his eyes. *He won't be getting up anytime soon.* I take his body and easily carry it over to his brothers before dropping him like a log. Surprisingly, this one still lives, with a bullet hole in his chest.

"Who says I can't play with my food..." I repeat his vile words, secretly happy that one of them lives so that I may torture him a bit before giving him an agonizing death that will surely make the Fates blush. *Home sweet home.*

Τέσσερις

"My one love. My hunter. Taken from this world by the one who claimed to adore you, as a price of Apollo's trickery. And as a result of knowing a goddess, you were plucked from this plane, as if you never existed. But I gave you remembrance amongst the stars, made sure people would know of the man who stole a warrior's heart. My condolences, for a life taken too soon."

ARTEMIS

It's a beautiful day for a heist.

"Artemis! Focus, we can't let Mr. Romano leave with that briefcase. What is up with you today?" Circe speaks worriedly into the coms.

"I'm fine. Worry about disabling the cameras and securing the building," I hiss rather harshly. I don't mean it, but she's right, I have been a little off my game today. And that's saying something considering I'm the best in this business. There is just something in the air. I can't describe it, but it's an odd feeling.

The com goes silent and I focus on my target. Mr. Romano, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist, and did I forget to mention head of a major underground mafia ring that dares to rival Olympus? Humans, I swear. They get their hands on a little power, and all of a sudden it goes to their head. Right now, the team and I are trailing him as he walks on the streets of Italy's capital city. *When in Rome...*

He's taking the steps into the country's most prestigious privately owned bank, Banca Euromobiliare. Ortygia and I are sitting at the quaint coffee shop across the street, watching him from a distance. Half of the team has discreetly blended in with the general populace while Circe and the others are stationed in our getaway vehicles around the building.

Once Ortygia was of age, she eagerly insisted on being initiated into the Followers of Artemis. And of course being her mother, I let her, with thorough warning that if any mission she was to partake in goes sideways, she is to evacuate immediately and meet at the rendezvous point. Humans have short lives. They're here one second and gone the next, so I thought I could at least offer her this solace.

Once Mr. Romano enters the building, the team strategically makes their way towards the doors. As I trail behind them I notice a man in a finely pressed white button up with black slacks. His aura is almost suffocating, but it feels familiar? *Strange*. Before I get too caught up in the feeling, I turn to make my way in the building where my ladies are scattered about the lobby making conversation with each other, the guards, and some workers to blend in.

As I walk up to get in line behind Mr. Romano, the man that I saw from outside side-steps in front of me. I'm taken aback for a second when he looks behind him and gives me a flirtatious wink. Before I can react, the power in the building shuts off and we are submerged in complete darkness. *Fuck*.

Being a huntress, my girls and I can see perfectly in pitch black, and what I see shocks me to my core. The man from earlier grabs Mr. Romano, taking him down in a move I've only seen one other being do in my entire lifetime as a goddess. *Orion?*

It can't be. But maybe? He looks like him (why am I just noticing that), has the same attributes, even smells like him when I was close enough. A descendant maybe? A very distant cousin perhaps? Or possibly, reincarnation? The latter seems like the more probable solution. The goddesses of life probably ran out of facial ideas for the humans and decided to use an old template. Wow, are we really that lazy?

Before I have time to ponder on it more, he takes the suitcase from the lifeless Mr. Romano and makes a dash for the back exit of the lobby. *Oh no you don't.*

"Arethusa make sure Romano is dead. Ortygia, me, and the rest are going after the man! Catch up when you're finished here." I say into the frenzied crowd, knowing they all can hear me, before I take off in the same direction as the man. He's quick, I'll give him that, but not quick enough. Millennia of hunting wild prey have allowed me to detect scattered patterns with ease.

I catch up to him before the rest of the girls and tackle him to the ground in the surprisingly wide alley behind the bank. We roll and I land on top of him, straddling his hips and pinning his hands to the floor. The briefcase slides away from us and my hair creates a curtain around his face, our breaths intermingling. *He smells of my forest.*

"Why don't you take me out to dinner first, sweetness?" He says fluidly, referencing our compromising position. *Fucking Americans*, I inwardly curse, regarding his accent. Their government is known for not being able to mind their own business. I can't even do my mission correctly.

Gripping his wrists tighter, I snarl, "You wouldn't last a night with me, *sweetness*." He looks surprised as I throw his words back at him.

"Why don't we find out?" He says before catching me off guard and flipping our position to where he's on top. No man, and I mean no man, has ever been above me. The small rumble that leaves my throat shakes the very ground we lay on. "So, is that a no then? Too bad, it would've been really fun." He remarks before a sports car streaks through the dingy alleyway. "Well, it looks like my ride is here. Be seeing you, sweetness." He smiles and jumps off me with speed that rivals Achilles or Odysseus.

He grabs the briefcase and hops into the car. My girls have finally caught up to us and I watch in astonishment as the man makes a getaway. Ortygia looks down at me, stunned that I let him retreat, knowing I could have easily dismembered him as I have done to others in the past.

"What now?" She says, a little out of breath. I feel a rush of adrenaline course through my veins as I hop up and whistle for my chariot, something I haven't done in a while. I haven't felt this excited in a long time, the thrill of the hunt, the chase.

"After him. Formation structure, Orion!" I yell with the biggest smile on my face. The girls gasp and I can understand why. We haven't used that formation in centuries. *Not since...*

Πέντε

"An intervention. A means to make you see the error of your ways. Because even as great gods, you are great for disappointment, fear, and failure."

ARTEMIS

I'm not a good person, a good Goddess, and I'm not claiming to be. I don't know who put me on that pedestal, take me off, let me down. I'm not worthy to be seen in that light. What I don't understand is why am I the only one being judged? Why am I the only one being questioned? None of you are any better.

I can tolerate it from the humans. Being some great warrior who can rise to any occasion. Their minds are weak, their lives, too short. They won't remember. But what I won't tolerate, is hearing it from you. All of you. Sitting here acting as if you're no different than me, most of you, even worse. It's disgusting. Truly.

I can see the judgmental stares. I can hear the snide remarks. I'm neither blind nor deaf. You're all hypocrites and fools. What? Is it because I'm a woman? One would think that we would be past something so simple as gender reparation by now, but I guess not. Grow up, it's the 21st century.

You think I'm weak. "She needs a husband." "She hasn't organically sired any children." That's what taking the vow of eternal maidenhood means, idiots. Athena understands, Hestia gets it. Yet you say nothing to them because they are some of the eldest female Olympians, but what of the next generation? Sister and offspring to the great Zeus himself. And gods be with you if you ever piss him off. He might send a storm to demolish your ships, maybe curse your liver to an eternal death by the pecking of a crow. Or better yet, rape you and leave your tattered body for the vultures. Dear old daddy.

Don't gasp. Like any of you haven't done something similar.

I'm not saying that I am better than anyone. Hell, even I have killed innocents. Actaeon, Orion, even poor Ariadne. I'm sorry for that, Circe, I knew she was your niece, yet I did it anyway. For what, I cannot even remember. Just add her to the long list of lives that gods have taken.

It's a funny thing really, being a god. What does that even mean? Because if I'm being completely honest, I don't think we are any different from the mounds of clay we shaped all those eons ago. I mean look at them, they walk around as if Gaia does not control their world. She is their world, and yet they treat her as collateral damage. And we Olympians do the same to each other. "She stole my husband." "He took my lyre." "There's not enough wine in my cup."

So what do we do? We lash out, like a child would, like a human would. You all are so blinded by your own ego; you can't see that you are not stronger than anyone. We claim to be great gods and goddesses yet fail to address our own morality every day. And that makes us weak.

Look around you. It's the modern age. Mankind doesn't need us anymore. They have turned to science, not sacrifice. They have accomplished reaching Selene herself, and far past that, into Chaos. Exploring the vast outreaches of our creator. Maybe that angers you and that's why you're so bitter because you know that your rule ends there. And I know that you know. Face it, we're a dying breed, not needed anymore.

So I'm sorry if that hurts your pride or your feelings, to know that you are becoming completely useless. It hurts, doesn't it. It should hurt, we deserve it. And it hurts more to acknowledge that.

I'm sorry if I wasn't up to your expectations as a goddess. I'm sorry that I didn't have to whore myself around to enjoy and witness the finer things in this endless hell that we call life. I'm sorry if I've ever upstaged you or proved that I am just as capable. I'm sorry if I've ever disappointed you.

For that, I send my condolences to your altered apparitions. For that, I send my condolences to your misshaped mistakes. For that, I send my condolences to your sadistic sadness.