

## Betrayal Requires A Vulnerable Soul

### *The Incident*

I was just minding my own business, walking hastily to the temple as I was going to be late for the 8am prayer. Then *he* arrived. Built with pounds of flesh on his bones, immense strength in his fists and a mammoth stride, Poseidon, the mighty god of the sea. He crept up on me, young, delicate, vulnerable, in the perfect position to stab me right in the back. I ended up sprinting back to the temple, and stood in front of Athena's statue, looking her in the eye and praying for comfort...

### *Aftermath*

Pain, *pain*, seeping through my bones, my veins, covering every inch of my body like the staggering surge of coldness caused by swimming in a freezing ocean, unaided. When I open my mouth to yell for help, even just mumble a few words of prayer, I'm submerged underwater, unable to scream without swallowing mouthfuls of gushing water.

I try to regain the warmth of feeling in my body. I feel a lot: my nails digging strongly into my palms, my eyes streaming oceans of saltwater, perspiration flowing freely down my face, my head throbbing like a flickering lamp, my body screaming its heart out in dissonant music. And for the first time in my life, I feel a great fire-ant tribe marching forward in my veins. Because I've never been more wrathful. Yet, I'm caught, like a fish in a net, by the horrible pain of my body being ravished without my consent.

I see my flushed face in Athena's polished-to-perfection statue, vivid as the scarlet rubies upon her neck. The ground starts shaking beneath my feet, is that my mind playing tricks on me? My brain feels like it'll collapse into a pile of dust with the most fragile touch, the objects around me blur until all I see is a roundabout of colours dancing around my field of vision. *Round and round the world goes, like those games we played when we were young.* My knees succumb to the ground's menacing invitation. The floor of the temple feels cold, soothing, calming, a safe, protective place to hide away from *him*. Darkness envelops the world around me.

Vivid images begin to form in my head, and I'm stuck in a memory from my past, with no idea why it came to me - especially now.

### *Medusa's sisters*

"Medusa, wake up!" my sisters scream with their high pitched voices. My eyes instantly clap open. They stare at me with their dishevelled scarlet hair, milk white lips and wonky teeth, however their cheeks are bursting with blood red excitement. Beautiful in their own way. "You've been asleep so long," Euryale sighs. "We're doing another roleplay, you want to be Athena, right?" I quickly nod. While my eager sisters always chose the villains when we acted out our favourite stories, I was always the star-eyed dreamer. I always chose to be Athena. My role model, the Goddess of Wisdom. "Well, you already have her beauty, Stheno can do your makeup though."

Stheno runs over to get the olive oil and charcoal, and mixes the two meticulously, in the perfect ratio. "I want to act as Poseidon. Let's do The Olive Tree!"

Euryale instantly replies, 'Okay, but I want to be Ares next!' In, from my perspective, a blink of an eye, my make-up is done, and a few hours after that, our play is coming to an end. "Poseidon, I, Athena have won over these villagers with my Olive Tree, and now I will protect them from any horrible plans concocted by villains like you! The End!" "Why do you always want to be Athena?" Stheno questions. "Because, ever since I read about her in a children's book, I've worshipped her."

The memory is exhausted and sleep comes easily to me, the pain in my body, immense, and the energy in my eyes, miniscule.

It's the type of sleep where I dream and dream, and where the past frequently takes the main stage...

### *The Small Temple*

...The Book is right there on the top-most shelf, however the distance seems as long as that between heaven and hell. A direct thud to the shuddering bookshelf sends the book and a thundercloud of dust plummeting to the floor and I protect the treatise before it is ripped apart. It is the most fragile, yet heaviest book I've held, and I shiver at the weathered leather, each wrinkle seeming like it has its own story to tell, the ancient, rusting letters spelling out a simple name. 'ATHENA'. I carefully flip through, taking in the enchanting smell of old books. 'To Become A Priestess.' I scrutinise the page, all rules I dutifully have followed my whole life, all due to my devotion to Athena, 'Never boast', 'Never lose your dedication', 'Never lose your virginity', 'Always be kind', until I find what I am seeking. An oath that I must take for my dedication to Athena to become official. For me to become a priestess! My fierce excitement leads me to take it then and there, solemn as one in meditation.

I awake with a jerk.

### *Athena arrives*

Where?..What?.. Blinding lights prise open my fastened shut eyes. My heart does multiple flips as I arrive to my senses. Bile is clogging up in my throat, leading me to cough, cough out all my innocence. Because now it'll be gone forever. The deafening silence is broken by a piercing thud and my neck viciously turns toward it, leaving me reeling in agony. Still in pain. I don't understand what the thud was. More heavy thumps hit the ground, and I realise whatever, or whoever it is, is moving around to where I can see them. 3. 2. 1. Athena?

The Goddess stands in front of me, glaring. I bow my head. Athena, protective, wise, my idol. Her golden skin glistens more than the sun itself, her ability to instantly become the most dangerous opponent is mightier than the wind, she is stronger than the most impenetrable fortress. She knows that I took the oath years ago. Her face is scarlet red, hands clenched into balls of solid rock, and she's breathing as fast as if the oxygen in the atmosphere has suddenly disappeared. What?.. Why is she so full of ire? I did nothing wrong... I was trapped, I was forced, I didn't...

"How could you..?" She whispers quietly, with immense fury packed into her voice. "HOW COULD YOU?" Athena's sudden roar pierces through the settled smoke of tranquillity in the temple, like an arrow soaring through the air, ready to finish its opponent's life. "You disgust me, you awful mortal." Does she not know I could never betray her? Does she not know I dedicated my life to her? Does she not know...? "Athena, it's you. I swear, I swear on my life, it wasn't my fault."

“Shut up! Medusa.. you should’ve said no.” Athena mutters a few words under her breath, not moving her eyes from me, following me like how a hunter follows a deer.

“I couldn’t,” I squeak.

### *The Changing*

The now subsided pain suddenly alights again. I feel as though all my hair is being yanked off my head. I quickly look at Athena. She has the twinkle of vengeance in her eyes. I start screaming, my muscles tightening in ways I didn’t know possible. Athena... Skin starts peeling off my body, leaving big scratches and blood gushing from cuts on my face, arms, legs. She cheated me. I rush over to the mirror. The skin is rejuvenating, and now...and now, it’s coming back a scorched black colour. I sprint to Athena’s feet, hopping from the boils pinned to my feet, screaming from the agony all over my body. Eventually, a trip leads me to my final destination. I look at myself in the polished floor and my heart takes a flying leap. Snakes. Hissing, slimy snakes, slithering all over my head. “You betrayed me,” I shout, “I’m absolutely hideous!”

The only answer I get is a lopsided smirk as Athena disappears again. The mirror is still in front of me, but I’m terrified to look.

How could she deceive me?

I spent my whole life praying to her, using her as a role model, and... I peer at the mirror. My pearly white maiden’s dress has transitioned into scarlet stained rags. My smooth, soft pink skin is now a horrid musty black, and cracked like the lips of a witch. My gorgeous wavy hair has been replaced by horrible snakes that jeer at me, mocking the way that I look with their spotted, scaly bodies on my head. Athena conned me. I had imagined, many, many times, the warmth, the affection, the love, that I would feel the first time I met Athena. But she completely ruined me, ruined my looks, ruined my life. I was vulnerable, “and you betrayed me!” I yell out at Athena’s sickly smiling marble face.