

The Trouble with Love
By Sophia Kunkel

The key glowed with energy, its metallic exterior shining with orbs of revolving yellow and white stars. It sat atop a great, gray rock that was situated at the highest point in the low-hanging cave, which was damp and dirty from ocean water.

A few feet away stood a woman veiled in white. She tucked a strand of her golden, bronze-like hair behind her ear, venturing closer to the key, eyes transfixed and sparkling with hope. Maybe there was a way out of her life after all.

But before she could swipe the key off of its pedestal, a cloud of dust erupted around her, swirling like the ocean tides. Her heart dropped to her stomach.

A man stepped out of the shadows, wearing a grim expression. He stroked his white beard, keeping his gaze of stone on her.

“Don’t do this, Aphrodite.”

The goddess seethed, her fists clenched into fists. “I’ll do what I like, Zeus. You have no power over me anymore. None of you do, sitting up there in your palaces of clouds.”

The god sighed, bored. “You always did have a flair for the dramatic, but now is not the time. Come home. To Hephaestus, to your adoring worshippers. They love you, you know.”

“My forced marriage? My devotees who have never met me? That’s not the same thing as love. And... my gods, can’t you see how tired I am of that? Love is so... twisted. I mean, I preside over it, and I still can’t stand it. People falling for each other, then falling apart... repeat. My heart breaks each and every time. I want out. Can you blame me?” Her voice was paper thin, tears sliding down her cheeks.

Zeus huffed. “Says the goddess who has had how many lovers in the past eons? Since when did you start caring about those petty--”

“Petty humans? Really, Zeus?” Aphrodite glared at him. “They have more character than all of us on Mount Olympus combined.”

“In other words, you’ve met another one, haven’t you?”

Aphrodite stayed silent.

Zeus smiled coyly. “You’re in love, yet again. And you think he’ll stay this time. You think that this sacrifice is worth his affection. Wait until he discovers who you really are. He’ll walk away just like--”

“Don’t you dare,” Aphrodite exclaimed and she pushed past Zeus. She understood the danger of what she was about to do but she didn’t care. It was her life, after all.

“You leave me no choice,” Zeus said. He waved his hand, and immediately, all of the gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus appeared behind her, each armed to the teeth. Hades and Poseidon each took a spot by Zeus, while the others hung back. Athena stood at the entrance to the cave, as if deciding whether this fight was worth her time. Even so, her expression was stormy.

Only Hephaestus seemed sorrowful, though he dared not make eye contact with her.

“You do not get to decide our futures, Aphrodite. You have always been selfish, but this time, it has gone too far. Surrender or die,” Artemis growled in typical warrior style. Her bow was pointed at Aphrodite’s heart, and the goddess of love knew that she never missed her target.

Aphrodite tilted her head. She’d been thinking about this confrontation for many weeks, terrified of its outcome. But she trembled no more. “Artemis, my friend. Don’t do this. All I want is to leave. Is that so hard to understand?”

“With that key, you’ll be pulling all of us down with you. I, for one, would not like to be mortal. From what I’ve witnessed, it only brings death. And death is final.”

Aphrodite shook her head. “Death is freedom. So is mortality, really. Imagine living the life you want. No more of this god nonsense. No more responsibility. You meet someone--” at

this, she cast a glance toward Hephaestus, “who really, truly loves you, and you spend years together. Imagine that.”

No one responded. And with that, Aphrodite knew that they would never support her decision, but she didn't care. She was done.

Before anyone could stop her, before the arrow flew, Aphrodite grabbed the key, and there was a flash of bright light. When she opened her eyes again, a man stood over her, offering her a hand to stand up with a smile so kind that she melted into it.

“Is it done?” he asked. His voice was quiet.

“Yes, my love.”

“Then let us celebrate.”

And they did.

As for the others...

They were thrown into history. Apollo, for example, lived his days as the composer Mozart, content with making music for others to enjoy. Artemis was born as a nobody, but she was the best hunter that her town had ever seen, and she eventually became a professor at an all-women's college. Hephaestus met the love of his life at his blacksmith shop in the 1800s and they lived a beautiful life together. Athena became a librarian; Aries ended up in Germany during World War II, killing Nazis. Poseidon was captain of the Titanic, and still thinking he could control the seas, he died with his ship under the same waters that once obeyed him. Hades was born as the pirate Francis Drake, raiding boats for Queen Elizabeth, while Zeus...

Zeus could not stand his loss of power, or being among the petty humans, or anything about mortal life. The one thing he did enjoy was booze, and he drank himself out of existence

So in other words...

Aphrodite finally lived happily ever after.

So did most of her family.

Because as it turns out, fate has a way of intervening.

And love has a way of overcoming trials.