

Pandora's Wood: A Story of Hope

"Twenty One and never been kissed, because you'd rather be in Pandora's Wood scribbling." Eric's mother said, shaking her head at breakfast one morning. "There's no hope for you. And that wood's dangerous."

"Why?"

"Well....." she paused momentarily, "It just is."

"Actually, nobody ever goes there but me. I'm going now." Eric replied, standing up, snatching his notebook and pencil. Then he opened the front door and stepped out into a July heat wave. "I'll see you later mum, if I survive." He said, striding purposefully down the garden path.

"Well, I never!" Exclaimed his mother.

Sighing wistfully, Eric gazed up at the unattainable space in the boughs of his favourite Beech tree. Then he removed his Hawaiian shirt, folded and placed it on the ground with his notebook and pencil, sat with his back against the mighty trunk and dozed fitfully.

A shadow awoke Eric. A barefoot girl of about nineteen wearing a translucent, apple green chemise and figure hugging jeans, stood astride him, her waist length auburn hair shimmered with light, while her dark green emerald eyes mesmerised him.

"Nice bod." She said with no hint of irony. Taking his hands she pulled him easily to his feet, his nose brushed her cleavage briefly and the fragrance of jasmine and another more subtle essence, unleashed a virtual smorgasbord of raw emotions. He turned away, embarrassed and confused.

"Come on Eric. You know you want to." He turned again. She was in his space, leaning down, offering him her nut brown arms and inadvertently exposing her cleavage to his horrified gaze.

"You'll never write balanced prose if you avoid women." She said with a beguiling smile, "Tell you what, I'll take off my top. Equals?" She started to unbutton her chemise. Eric watched, inchoate with rage.

"NO!" He yelled, before turning and running non-stop to his house.

"Where's your new shirt?" asked his mother, "You've been attacked, haven't you? I warned you."

"I don't want to discuss it mum, I'll get it tomorrow." He said, turning swiftly and going upstairs to his bedroom where he locked the door, threw himself on the bed and wept many tears of self-pity into his pillow. That girl had defiled his space and criticised his aspiring literary talents. "Bloody girl." He said vehemently, although, however much he denied it, that girl had, in an instant, changed him irrevocably.

Bereft of his precious notebook, he took up his latest purchase, a small volume of Greek myths and started to read, yet the day's events still played over and over in his mind. Bah, girls. Who needs them?

Upon his return, neither the girl nor the shirt were there. His notebook however, was lodged in the space. "Bloody girl!" He whispered, lest she be nearby waiting to laugh at him.

"I'll show her!" he said launching himself again and again at the tree until his feet found a purchase on the bark. Then he was up and over, crowing and brandishing the precious notebook triumphantly.

Riffling through his notebook to the last entry, he saw written in a neat hand; Dear Eric, read by moonlight.

So, she had read his notes? His tears fell copiously as he walked home that morning. His notebook had been sullied and he resolved not to open it anytime soon, if ever again.

His sister, Hera, was preparing breakfast when he arrived.

"A very nice young lady brought your shirt, all nice and clean." She said, handing it to Eric.

"We had a girls talk."

He sniffed the shirt. "Yuk! It smells of her."

"You've blown it you know."

"I'll be in town if she wants me."

Hera laughed. "You won't find her in town. She's a wood nymph. A child of nature. We're sisters."

"Wood nymph. No such thing!" Eric snapped.

"Only my autistic bro could reject a gift from the Gods. You'll have a Herculean task to win her now. Your one hope is to discover her name."

"I don't care!" he lied, feeling a knot in his stomach, like that Prometheus felt every morning chained to his rock. "Sisters? Harpies more like." He said under his breath.

Hera was right. All through the dog days of that summer the girl never returned. Sometimes though, he heard, or thought he heard, her joyful singing from afar and he pursued her ephemeral form through his dreams, never quite catching up with her.

It was the night of the Harvest Moon, wind whipped through Pandora's Wood turning fallen leaves into dust devils as Eric sat in his space, bathed in moonlight. Deep in reverie a thought came to him; had the girl read his notes by moonlight or.....?

Brushing aside a tear, he opened the notebook after a long absence. By the moon's wan light he saw new words appearing;

Out of the box they came

She, the last to depart;

First you must know a nymphs name

Ere you can win her heart.

Who am I?

His book of Greek myths lay nearby, unopened.

"I know." He said, "And I'm sorry."

A hush fell over the wood, instinctively Eric looked up as an apple green garment floated down covering his face and overwhelming him with a familiar fragrance. Something landed lightly behind him and he felt a gentle pressure on each of his shoulder blades.

Small hands pressed his forehead downwards until his head nestled in her bosom. She removed the chemise, shaking her glorious auburn tresses over his shoulders. He lost himself in his enchantress's dark green eyes.

"I forgive you." She sang. "Who am I, Eric?"

"Hope." He answered before her cherry red lips silenced him.

The faint echo of reed pipes danced through Pandora's Wood while Eric learnt of hope and love. Pan was mightily pleased, or so the nymphs tell me.

969 words.