

HEART OF A SIREN

Written by

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PREFACE

Myths and the supernatural are deeply embedded in stories and beliefs around the world. But they also change over time to resonate with our current culture and fears. The original vampires of folklore were bloated, reanimated corpses that feasted on flesh or organs. Now, they are aristocratic, brooding romantics who have mostly lost their initial terrifying personas.

I've always been fascinated by mythology. Give me faeries, werewolves, dragons, vampires, phoenix, mermaids and banshees any day! I've also been enthralled by anything to do with witches, whether real or fictional. What has particularly struck me is the way many female figures have remained evil, whereas male characters seem to have developed a more heroic side. Is this simply historic gender discrimination? Think Medusa, Sirens, Harpies, Bellatrix (Harry Potter), Lilith, and the Grand High Witch (The Witches).

I remember a Siren being introduced as a villain in my favourite program, *Supernatural*. True to form, she was manipulative, seductive and narcissistic. But, to me, she was one of my least favourite villains of the show. She even seemed a bit whiny if I'm honest. Yet it got me wondering -what more could I find out about these enigmatic creatures? As it turns out, the answer was a lot. What emerged from my research was a winged symbol of forbidden knowledge and temptation. I began to wonder; what was the story behind the Siren? Why were they feared so much? And how did they feel about their own lives?

Many supernatural creatures have continued to evolve over the years, but Sirens seemed to have stalled since the Middle Ages, when they merged with the figure of a mermaid. The idea for the Heart of a Siren came swiftly and with a passion to allow these beings to adapt to the modern world while reviving their original story. Before I began writing, I delved into ancient Greek poems and stories such as Homer's *The Odyssey* and *Metamorphoses* by Ovid, to dig out the real origin of the Sirens. The more I read, the more I wanted to challenge the myth of them as evil mermaids. What resulted was a novel of heritage, determination and the struggle of perception; both how we view ourselves and how others see us – ideals we can all relate to on some level.

I really hope you enjoy it!

CHAPTER ONE



I revelled in the warmth of my favourite unicorn duvet and hugged Mr. Bear tightly. His once soft, fluffy fur was now rough and frayed from repeated spills and washes. But none of this mattered to me; he was my best friend. I kissed him gently on his forehead as my mum's soothing voice washed over me.

"Our story begins with the most powerful of emotions; love." She began. Her voice wobbled slightly as she spoke, but her emerald eyes took on a faraway quality. "Yet, this is no ordinary love story. It's one filled with deceit, betrayal, and heartache. However, it's one that we must tell to retain our heritage and remind ourselves of who we truly are. Hades was the most feared entity on earth. He ruled the underworld with a smile on his face and found great joy in the torture of others."

I could almost feel a chill run down my spine as I imagined his sinister grin—the kind that mirrored the constant nightmares I had never confessed to. My mum continued, unaware of my sudden trembling.

"That is, until his gaze landed on the enchanting beauty of one young woman, Persephone. He had never felt the pull of love, yet it was so strong that he immediately went to his brother, the all-powerful Zeus, to ask for help. Between the two of them, they concocted a plan to trap her.

"Persephone regularly joined her mother, Demeter, to tend

to her bountiful crops. You see, Demeter was the Goddess of Harvest and Fertility, so her role was to blanket the earth with life. One day, Persephone was out frolicking in the field that her mother was tending to, surrounded by her three beloved handmaidens: Peisinoe, Aglaope, and Thelxiepeia. These are your ancestors, Andorea, the original Sirens from which we all descend.

“Anyway, so the girls were playing among the fresh spring flowers when Persephone’s attention was suddenly drawn to one specific flower. Can you guess what that flower was?”

I knew exactly what flower she was talking about; all Sirens had to because we feared it. The bright yellow narcissus, known by mortals as a daffodil, was our kryptonite. Just one touch could scorch our skin like a raging fire. “The nacissisusus mummy!” I announced proudly.

A delicate giggle escaped her perfectly shaped lips. “Yes, darling, the narcissus. Its pure, untainted beauty captivated Persephone. She drifted closer, overwhelmed by the compelling desire to hold it in her slender hands. But all was not as it seemed. The narcissus had been planted there by the Earth Goddess Gaia, who was following the orders of Zeus. Unaware of this, Persephone knelt down in the freshly sprung grass and pulled at the stem of the narcissus. Yet, it wouldn’t budge. Confused but determined, she continued to tug at the flower until eventually she had the slender stem in her hand. However, her energies had all been drained from the effort. As she admired the shimmering beauty of every bright yellow petal and traced the subtle veins with her fingers, she was suddenly distracted by a horrifying sight. The tiny hole from which she had drawn out the flower shaft began to rapidly grow in size until it resembled an enormous chasm. From this black void came the terrifying sounds of the black horses of Hades, which froze poor Persephone to the spot. Her handmaidens tried to

save their beloved master, but to no avail. They were no match for Hades as he grabbed the frail beauty and dragged her to his underworld kingdom.”

She stopped talking and gazed at me with a cloud of concern. I smiled through my tears, silently encouraging her to continue. She hesitated a moment before diving back into the harrowing tale as I clutched my duvet with clammy palms.

“When Demeter returned from her duties, she was shocked to see three weeping handmaidens, with her beloved daughter nowhere to be found. Instantly, she granted each young woman a pair of magnificent golden wings so they could search for her daughter. They searched and searched, Andorea, across sky and sea, but of course Persephone was nowhere to be found. As you can imagine, Demeter did not take this well. Out of anger, she cursed the three girls and banished them to the remote Greek island of Anthemoessa.

“Doomed to live their lives alone and ashamed of their failure, the girls began to sing with every ounce of pain that flooded their veins. The longer they lay on that island, the angrier and more despondent they became. Their songs became powerful forces that no one could resist. Ship after ship landed on that island, which elated the girls because they were no longer alone. But the curse was too strong, and they were doomed to kill every man they were intimate with. Until Thelxiepeia fell ill. She vomited night and day, becoming weaker with each wretch. Peisinoe and Aglaope begged the Gods to save their sister, but their calls were never answered. They fed her every morsel of food they could find, yet Thelxiepeia continued to weaken.

“Then the fateful day came when Thelxiepeia gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. The sisters were overjoyed. They became convinced that their curse had been broken. How could they now be cursed when they had been handed such a miracle?

Their joyous calls pulled ships to them from every corner of the globe. They rejoiced in the scent of Thelxiepeias' newborn baby, named Iris, and revelled in every movement she made, no matter how small. However, their joy was not to last. Despite their attempts to remain distant from the men who courted them, the girls gave in to temptation time and time again. Every time they did, another man died. Desperate and broken, Thelxieperia begged one of the sailors to take her daughter away from the forbidden island, even though she knew it would break her heart into a thousand pieces.

"So, Iris was taken to the mainland, where she grew into an exceptionally beautiful and intelligent young woman who bore many more children over the years. Yet not one of those children had a father; the curse had passed down to her from her mother, and that same curse follows us, Andorea." She delicately brushed a wavering strand of hair behind my ear.

"It's a harsh lesson we must all live by. We are cursed women. You will grow into an exquisite young lady who will turn heads wherever you go, but you must never give in to desire. Love is the trigger for our curse. Once you join as one with a man, he is doomed to die, and you will be plagued with the full powers of a Siren." Her words hung in the air like thunder, and I shifted uncomfortably on the bed, my fingers involuntarily clutching the fabric of my duvet. An instinctive retreat bubbled in my chest, urging me to inch away from this legacy I had never asked for, yet I remained still, nodding in silent acknowledgment.

"You are so young, Andorea." She whispered. "I don't mean to scare you. Yes, we are cursed, but we strive every day to live our lives as Thelxieperia would have wanted. I want only the best for you." Her lips brushed my forehead as her arms wrapped around me.

"I love you, Andorea."

“I love you, too, Mummy.”

She pulled away and lowered her head, but not before I saw a single tear slide down her porcelain cheek.

“What happened to them, Mummy?”

She smiled weakly as she pulled the duvet up around my shoulders. “That’s a story for another day, my darling. It’s late, and a certain young lady needs her beauty sleep. Goodnight, Angel.”

I lay awake for hours that night, pondering on the story that tugged violently at my heartstrings. What happened to the handmaidens? What happened to Persephone? How would I live with this curse hanging over me? Would I ever truly be happy?

When I finally fell asleep, I was plagued with confusing nightmares and intrusive thoughts that would cause a human child to wake up screaming for comfort from their parents. But I was a Siren, part of a proud lineage that dates back to Ancient Greece. I had to be strong, no matter what the future held for me.