

## Revenge of the Anomaly

(An adaption of Hephaestus and Aphrodite by Lily Bruce)

The heat of his blazing rage consumed him, making it impossible to understand the icy misery he could cause. The anger was inside him, and it burned. It controlled Rory like a puppeteer, forcing his limbs to throw things with a strength he surely could not possess without it. The flaming fury sought pain because the hurt he felt was too great for just one person.

His emotions were conflicted as he stared down at her, love fighting with hurt fighting with uncontrollable anger. The cloud of red began to clear from his mind, and he became hyper-aware of his situation. The shaking wine glass in his hand felt heavy as if it were resisting its violent fate. The sound from the tv and his girlfriend's sobs were ringing in his ears, barely audible over the sound of pulsating blood. Breathing heavily, he watched Astra's crouched figure convulsing with fearful gasps. She looked so fragile, so innocent, so incapable of the horror she had just admitted to. He had thought- no, he had believed- she was loyal. The engagement ring hidden in his sock drawer proved that. In a matter of seconds, she had gone from being his love to someone else's muse. The girl he'd given everything to had not deemed him good enough.

As he lowered the wine glass, his emotions were fighting again. He took a painful swallow, his throat still hoarse from the yelling. Shame, guilt, anger, hurt, and embarrassment were all tugging at his heart, leaving him at a loss for words. She was looking at him now. Her face was like a doll, though streaked with mascara and blotchy. Her patient brown-eyed gaze had always been able to calm his fits of anger, but now the

pain was too strong. As he glared at her he could almost see the reflection of the other guy in her eyes.

He hung his head and joined her in her cries.

“Get out,” he breathed. A few long seconds passed and Astra was still crouched below him. The sight of her sent a million emotions coursing through his brain. The anger took control again, hurting him.

“GET OUT!”.

He watched her leave in slow motion. The sound of the door slamming alleviated his pain, leaving him numb in its absence. Heartbroken, he fell to the ground. How was it possible that mere moments ago he had been laughing at the tv with the love of his life, blissfully unaware of the confession she was about to make? The world began spinning as Rory became the victim of his self-inflicted torture. It was painful to look around at the home they had made together, every item hiding a memory. It was painful to close his eyes as his mind forcefully played a montage of his favourite moments with her. His heart felt like it no longer belonged in his chest, as though it was too damaged to ever be of use again.

He began to tremble as he frantically tried to escape the hell his mind was putting him through, and eventually, his eyes rested on a photo. Astra’s face smiled innocently at him in a blue uniform. It had been her first day at her dream job Denegeers, the world’s leading financial firm. *She fooled them too*, he thought. Behind that smile was a girl who would go on to steal thousands of dollars from that company, and they would forever be none the wiser. He had always been impressed by her disregard for the law, and had taken pride in being her partner in crime. Now that the rose-coloured glasses had been forced off his eyes, he felt as though he had been used and forgotten by a ruthless thief.

She had stolen more than just money; she had robbed his power. Rory felt shame creep into his already overflowing mind as he watched himself sit alone in this house meant for two, his face cold as the wind dried his tears. This was not how it was supposed to be. He had always been in control since the day he met Astra. *He* made the first move, *he* bought this house, and *he* had got her that damn job in the first place! Whether it was buying their car or choosing dinner, he had always been confident in knowing he had the last call. She had taken that from him, and now he would never feel that confidence again.

He gripped his phone tightly, then paused. This tiny device could give him what he sought. A few taps and his power over Astra would be back. Why did she think she could exploit and escape? There was no choice but to turn her in. He had nothing to lose, and she deserved it.

Consumed in the moment, he got to work searching for any evidence that may cause his former lover to stumble. Not a shadow of doubt crossed his mind as he went about finding all signs of embezzlement – Astra had abandoned all morals when she had chosen to betray him in that way, and any further stretch of his conscience was justified.

In a matter of hours, Rory had collected an impressive amount of destructive data. He took a few moments to revel in his findings, admiring the collection of text messages, bills, receipts, screenshots, photos, and piles of hidden money. Everything was here. Everything he needed to knock Astra off her pedestal and inflict the same pain he felt upon her was right in front of him. As he raised the phone to his ear, he caught the framed photo of Astra out of the corner of his eye. He really loved her. *That is why I have to do this*, he told himself. He had been so vulnerable as to give her his love, and what she had done with it was cruel and humiliating. It was only right that he did the same for her.

“Capalaba police station, what is your emergency?”

“Embezzlement.”

He swallowed the painful feeling in his throat and tried to unsee the image of Astra waking up to the missed calls from Denegeers, confused and concerned. He focused on clearing his mind of the thought of her being called into the boss’s office, only to leave with a cardboard box of her things and mascara-streaked cheeks minutes later. Though part of him felt satisfied by the idea, his shoulders felt heavy with the weight of what he had just done. *She deserves this, she deserves this, she deserves this.*

He could not sleep that night. So much had happened and the day was too short for his mind to process it all. As he tossed and turned in his double bed, leaving a spot for Astra out of habit, he realised how many things she had left behind. Her slippers were by the bedroom door, her robe slumped over the chair. Her glasses rested beside him on the nightstand and her hat was carelessly hung on the door. His skin began to crawl as he felt consumed by the room and her things, like he wasn’t supposed to be there. This was her home as much as it was his. His eyes finally found stability staring straight ahead at the dark ceiling, and as his heartbeat slowed the night became eerily quiet. He closed his eyes and succumbed to the numb solace of sleep that his heart so desperately yearned for.

The next morning brought a fresh wave of heartache as Rory awoke to the crushing loneliness that had become a permanency in the quiet house. Without eating, he began to gather all her things into a bag. With every item he collected another memory was ignored, years of sentiment going to waste before his watering eyes. After multiple rounds of aggressive ‘de-Astra-ing’ the house, he took the bag of her belongings to his car.

He turned the keys and paused, the rumble of the engine humming softly in his ears. He remembered that he didn't know where she was. He did not know the address of her new interest, and the thought of seeing him made his blood boil. He decided to head to her parent's house, knowing that was where she had fled in previous times when their arguments had become too much for her. The drive was smooth, with few cars on the road. Rory quickly realised this was because it was a weekday, therefore Astra would be at work. He breathed a sigh of relief at the understanding that he would not have to face her, and soon he had arrived.

He strolled up to the door in his best attempt at maintaining normalcy in what felt like a world turned upside down and performed the most confident knock he could muster. He waited in suspense for Astra's mother when the door suddenly opened to reveal the face of the very girl who had left him heartbroken yesterday. Her eyes were watery, wide and bloodshot, and her face was tense with shock. For a moment Rory's heart skipped a beat in an assumption that her tears were for him, though his moment of hope was short-lived as he noticed the cardboard box sitting behind her. It didn't take long for her to begin swearing at him, blaming him for her layoff and declaring bad fortune upon him. Rory stood stoic, trying hard to ignore the hurtful claims she was attacking him with. Overwhelmed, he dropped her stuff at her feet and forced himself to walk not run back to his car.

When he arrived home, he could not shake the sound of Astra's distraught cries. He blasted the tv and tried distracting himself, but nothing worked. In a pained attempt to stop the agonising sound he called the police once again, claiming that the report was framed and false. His power had been relinquished, and shame once again worked its way through his mind. The screaming stopped, however, and his

shoulders felt lighter. He let out a breath he didn't know he was holding and shut his eyes, his vision finally unplagued by flashes of Astra.