

## THE MYTH

Besides the traditional myths and fairy tale, Alida knew other unusual stories. These stories brought to life her menagerie. They expressed the noble emotions which were essential for her world. The gods were envious of man. They would do what they could to entrap people in dilemmas of their own doing. Humans were placed on this earth, but they were not given enough tools to explore the hidden secrets. When humans gained too much knowledge, the gods feared that they would be overthrown. They used whatever was in their arsenal to destroy man. They would return him to a primitive, as rock or tree. The punished humans had lost their mobility.

Encased in rock, the human spirit could not express its emotions. The gods lived on praise. They were a restless sort. Human beings craved love. The gods would never understand this distinction.

The sun god loved the goddess of spring. His warm light would give her the power that she needed to bless the earth. There was a unique perfection in their friendship. With each year, they grew closer. The god of the underworld was jealous of the sun god. How could he partake in such pleasures? The sun god and the goddess of spring would walk hand in hand. And the god of the underworld would grow angrier. As spring was about to make her entrance for the year, he kidnapped her and brought her down to his fiery underworld.

“The sun god will never have you again.”

The earth suffered a long winter. Spring did not arrive to soften its blows. Would there even be a spring this year?

The goddess of spring tried to escape.

“There is no way out of here. You are trapped here forever.”

“It's one thing to take me away from my lover. But you are taking spring away from all of mankind. The other gods will stand for this. You are destroying the natural order. Farmers will not be able to plant.”

“I am establishing my own order. It is superior.”

“What will people eat? How will they survive?”

“I am not concerned about people. I have my own world. I survive just fine here. I will do even better with you around. You can give a woman's touch to my world.”

“It is going to take a lot more than my efforts. I don't even think that anything can be done to help this world.”

The god of the underworld became extra angry.

“You are going to stay here. And I am going to love you. And you will love me in return.”

“You do not know how to love.”

“You will teach me.”

The goddess of spring thought about the challenges of trying to reform the god of the underworld. He was a lout. He was uncouth. He had no concern for the feelings of others. Did she have no choice?

The goddess of spring mulled over her options. She would rather live in her head than give in to this monster. She did what she could do create a place protect herself.

Meanwhile, things were quite desperate on earth. The season needed to follow their natural order.

They besought the god of the sun, "Aren't you going to do something? She is your love."  
"I can hardly enter the underworld."

He really had little choice. He would have to make his descent. In order to do this, the sun god disguised himself as a human. He learned those rituals which appealed to the god of the underworld. It wasn't enough to have stolen the goddess of the spring. He wanted followers.

"Demetrius, I want you to visit me in the underworld. You are such a perfect follower."  
The god of the underworld wined and dined Demetrius.

"I brought a fine wine from earth. This will put you in a wonderful place."

The god of the underworld felt flattered. Demetrius was blessing him with the fruits of the earth. He wanted to sample his fare. He found the wine so delicious. He kept drinking it up until he had emptied the jug.

"This is wonderful. You have to bring me some more."

The wine took effect. It put the evil prince in a deep sleep. For the time being, nothing could wake him.

The sun god found the goddess of the spring. He embraced her. He kissed her on the lips. He lost himself in her charms.

"We need to get out of here."

"I am not sure if I want to come with you."

He could not believe his ears."

"You are a prisoner here."

"But he does not take me for granted. You know that I will show up each year, and that gives you an advantage. Here, I am queen all the time."

"If you want to stay, stay. I cannot do any more for you."

"I want you to plead for me. I need you to show me that you are more romantic."

"My emotions are classic. I do not get carried away."

"That is all that goes on down here. We enjoy ourselves all the time. What can you give me to make me want to return."

The goddess of the spring was really striking a hard bargain.

The god of the underworld tossed and turned. He made noises in his sleep.

"We have to leave. I have no idea how long this wine will last."

"You can leave. I am not coming with you. When I want to leave, I will leave of my own volition."

The goddess of spring was holding tough. How could the world survive without spring?

"Let one of my sisters do the duty."

"I want you to come back with me."

"I am not your obedient servant. Go, and leave me alone."

She was being impetuous. She hardly liked the god of the underworld. Maybe, she could subdue him with more of Demetrius's wine.

The sun god felt defeated. He had tried to work his magic to no avail. He only wished that he had a wine to influence the goddess of spring.

The sun god went back to his place in the sky, and he wondered where he had gone

wrong. This was not like him to accept defeat. Even as hard as he shone, he could not defeat the cold of winter. He needed the gentle effect of spring. He longed for his lost love.

The goddess of spring did not feel any better about the god of the underworld. She would not love him. She simply anesthetized herself with his food and his wine. When he tried to make love to her, she would already be passed out. He realized the other gods would punish him if he took liberties with her. So he waited for his moment that still did not arrive.

He started to think that his friend Demetrius might offer him some kind of concoction that might affect the princess. He got a message to him. The sun god realized that Demetrius was being contacted. He again assumed his human disguise.

“What are you doing here?”

“He asked me to come.”

“You can just leave.”

“I have work to do.”

He had brought another wine with him. He needed to make sure that the goddess of spring drank it.

“This is the most delightful thing that I have ever tasted in my life.”

“My friend Demetrius brought it.”

“When you drink this wine, the first person who see, you fall in love with.”

“Was I supposed to fall in love with you? It is not working.”

The goddess of spring seemed to be taunting the god of the sun.

“I didn't do this for me. This is to make you fall in love with the prince of the underworld.”

“Demetrius, why did you do this to me?”

“You were acting so impetuously towards me.”

“But I gazed at you first. Your potion did not do the job.”

“I got it from a sorceress in the deep forest. She always does what she promises.”

“My will is too strong. I have been drinking too much wine since I came here.”at

“If this was just for me, I would leave now. I need the spring. We all do.”

“That is my true nature. I do not belong here. I will go with you, but I cannot love you.”

“What are you planning to do? Come back here for your lover's holiday.”

“I will if that is my prerogative.”

“You are the worst.”

The god of the underworld was flailing around after he had drunk all his wine.

“Let's get out of here!”

The goddess of spring and the sun god made the perilous journey out the underworld. They crossed a treacherous river. They made the uphill climb. They escaped this dark place. They returned home. The sun god shone in the sky. And the goddess of spring blessed the farmers with plenty.

“I was a princess in the underworld. I was revered. You take me for granted.”

“What about my love potion?”

“What about it? It tasted lovely but it had little effect.”

“I don't believe it.”

“Ask your sorceress.”

“I did. She said that you did something to counteract it.”

“I knew that you were going to try something. And I have been living in the underworld all this time. There were all kinds of potions down there. You should have thought about that.”

“You came back.”

“I wanted to come back. I am free.”

“You sound like a human.”

“Humans are free. The gods are influenced by their whims.”

“What does freedom mean?”

”I make my own decisions. I am not going to bow down to the sun god.”

“I thought that you loved me.”

“You may want my love to be unconditional. But if you do not respect me, I cannot love you.”

“What does that mean?”

’Freedom is a powerful influence. You cannot drug it away.’

“You drank quite a lot of wine in the underworld.”

“I was protecting myself.”

“Do you still need to protect yourself?”

“I need to live my life whether you understand that or not.”

“Are you becoming human?”

“Hardly, I am just learning what powers I really have.”

“Wow!”

’It is better to love someone who is free than someone who is affected by a love potion.’

“Agreed. But if I didn't give you a love potion, he probably would have.”

“That would not have made him right.

The sun god did not know how to reply. He was learning about the nature of freedom.

Stories taught us how to live with our grief. They exposed us to the sadness of our being.

The brilliant sun god needed to consider his darker nature.

Chantal hated English class. She would do anything that she could to distract her from what was going on in class. She opened the desk, and she noticed a story in there. It was about a boy who had to go away to college and leave the girl that he loved. He was all broken up about it. Through the school year, they wrote each other. When they met again something deep had changed. He was still enamored with the girl. But she seemed to have other interests.

Years later the grown woman was reading the letters, and she realized how rude she had been. The letters were absolutely brilliant. He would have to find her old flame. He had graduated from college never returned to live in the same place.

“I think that you can find him in New York.”

New York was a big place. She could not pick up a telephone book and start calling all the Frank Prestons. Why not?

Her detective work paid off and she found the Frank that she was looking for. Frank agreed to meet her for coffee.

“It's great seeing you after all these years. I still keep your letters. I wanted to be a writer. Instead, I sell insurance.”

“A wife. You're married.”

“And we have two kids.”

Where had her life gone?

When she got back home, she pulled out the box of letters and read them. They still were brilliant as if they had been written yesterday. And she wanted that love, but it was to be.

Chantal loved the story. She wanted to learn more about the writer. She slipped it back I the desk and pretended to be interested in her English class.

The next time, she looked for a story. Amy was the most popular girl in class. She was a little devious. She would say mean things about other students. Amy was in an automobile crash, and she was cut on her face. She healed wonderfully, and there were no scars. But she felt self-conscious. She felt that the other girls were mocking her. All the people who she had put down were getting their revenge.

Nick had always wanted to go out with Amy. But she had made it clear that he was not in her league. Now she seemed approachable. They became good friends. He was intelligent, and he could help guide her through her trauma. All her insecurities were on the surface.

“You are more beautiful than ever.”

It took her a long time to get her confidence back. Nick was a great friend. She needed his support.

They were out one time, and Nick tried to kiss her.

“I could never like you in that way. We are friends, Nick.”

At home, she wondered what she had said. This was the old Amy talking. A full-blown romance developed. And she lived for his sweet kisses.

They would be together in a restaurant, and they were holding hands. She finally believed that she loved him with all her heart.

It was a special weekend, and Nick took Amy to the Lido for ice cream. And there were mirrors everywhere in the Lido. Amy took one look at herself and felt overcome. What had happened to the old Amy? She was a real star. She got up to go to the bathroom, and she stared at Nick at the other side of the room.

“Why am I going out with this guy? He's a nobody.”

Just like that, she left. She called for a friend to come and get her.

“I don't know what got into me.”

When Nick called, her mother would make some excuse. She would make sure that she never had to talk with him again.

At school, her friends ran interference.

Finally, she decided to take his call.

“Nick, I want nothing to do with you. I don't even know why we went out. I am sure that I was feeling sorry for you.”

Nick couldn't say anything back to her. She just seemed to be so mean. If this was how she really was, he wanted nothing to do with her.

Years later, Nick was about to graduate from college. He saw Amy in the hallway. He turned and walked the other way. She ran after him.

“Nick, I know that I was so mean to you. I feel terrible about what I did.”

“You were just being yourself. I could hardly hold it against you.”

“I really did like you. You were the only guy who ever liked me for me.”

“I am glad that you appreciated that.”

“I miss you!”

She had been part of his life which now seemed remote to him. He liked who he was. He enjoyed what he was doing.

He didn't really mean it, but he said, “I miss you too!”

Amy went back to her apartment and felt as if something deep had been taken from her.

Chantal loved that story. After reading it, she put it back in the desk. She started to make some notes. Then she escaped from her class.

Brenda had just enrolled at her new school. From the beginning, she realized that this was not her scene. She had no idea how she would get along in this place. She tried to keep up with her school work, but she was not the best student. She simply needed to make sure that she didn't fail a class.

Will was the star running back. Brenda was in his math class. Brenda didn't understand the math that well, but she seemed to be doing better than Will. He saw her in the cafeteria and had her explain a couple of ideas to him.

“You're cute. Do you want to go out?”

She felt excited. What was going on? They agreed to meet on Saturday for a movie. At first, Will seemed like a nice guy. He would open the door for her. He was polite. But he appeared to change. Brenda thought that he might be drinking. He would go to the bathroom for a while and come back a little agitated.

Later, he started to get forward with her. She was hardly going along with actions. He was scaring her.

The next day at school, Will started to spread rumors about Brenda. His friends would look at her and point. The girls were the most vicious.

“I went to a movie with him. He got a little rude. And that was that.”

She realized how this kind of behavior could only get worse. She did what she could to ignore it. But she knew that she needed to confront Will.

“You were a real jerk to me. This isn't how you're supposed to treat women.”

“You're a girl. You needed to treat me better.”

“I don't know what you're talking about. I just don't want to put up with any more of your nonsense.”

He laughed off what she said to him. She didn't know what to do. He was going to continue to say nasty things about her. She would live with it. And that was that.

She was in the bathroom stall, and she heard the girls talking.

“I don't know where she's from. But she is way experienced. Will told me some nasty things.”

All the other girls buzzed like bees. Brenda could feel the stings.

Brenda was clever. And she was quick. She was able to get a hold of Will's math exam. And she changed some of his answers. That meant that he failed the class. And he would no longer be able to play football. He had no idea what had happened. He knew that he wasn't very good at math. He never thought to review the exam.

On Friday, Will was not among the starting lineup. He was no longer with the team. Brenda smiled.

Chantal liked how Brenda got back at Will. She wanted that kind of power. Maybe, she could slip a poison apple to her English teacher.

Sally Weston was the best student in the class. She prided herself on getting her work done. She asked questions. She sat in the first row.

Ben Geiger made his own rules. He found Sally to be a complete bore. They got in an argument in class about China. Ben thought Sally had no idea what she was talking about. She was perturbed by what had happened. She was going to get back at him.

All of her attempts were getting nowhere. Sally understood the book, but she had no imagination. He wanted to tell her to calm down, but he didn't want to give her more credit than she deserved.

"Ben, do you hate me?"

"Sally, we don't even know each other."

He agreed to meet her for coffee.

"Why are you so rude?"

"You say these things in class that have no basis in fact."

"The book say that they're correct."

"The book is written by someone with an opinion. Usually not a very accurate one."

"Do you have contempt for people who are different than you?"

"Not at all. I get along in the world. Do you really know any people who are that different than you. I've traveled around the world. I've lived in different places. You've lived in South Carolina all your life. There's a bigger world."

"What are you talking about?"

"Everything that we learn doesn't come from books."

"All the important stuff does!"

"People have to live a life before it ends up in a book."

"That makes no sense."

"Think about it, Sally."

Sally found Ben weird. She told her friends about him. She puzzled at all the things that he said to her.

"You were saying all these things about China. You've never even been to China. Things are a lot more complex than you read about in your textbook."

"You've been to China."

"I've been to a lot of places."

Even if he was strange, listening to him was like reading a book. She wanted to learn more. But she also had her own vision of life that she needed to protect. How could she deal with the contradiction.

"You're hanging around that Ben kid. He is a freak."

"What are you talking about?"

"He's not a normal kid."

"Who is normal?"

"Sally, don't go all psychological on me. There is something seriously wrong with him."

"I heard that he killed one of his brothers."

"In China!"

Sally had heard all the stories.

“Did you kill one of your brothers?”

“What are you talking about?”

“In some province of China, it's okay to kill your brother if he poses a danger to you.”

“That is nonsense.”

Ben denied ever killing anyone. Sally wasn't sure if the rumors made him seem more interesting.

“Sally, you and your friends all take themselves too seriously. There is a big world out there.”

“You have been telling me that. I want you to show it to me.”

“How can I do that?”

“You figure it out.”

Ben had loads of souvenirs of his journeys. His home was a treasure trove. He let Sally tour the museum.

“This is wild.”

They would watch movies together. Serious movies. He was turning Sally Weston into a different person.

“Ben, do you like me?”

“You're a friend.”

“Do you really like me?”

“You are a good friend of mine.”

“Are you interested in me romantically?”

“I like you Sally. But we are friends for now.”

This made no sense to Sally. She felt frustrated. Ben Geiger was a complex sort.

Chantal really loved that story. She wanted to read more. She wanted to be a writer just like the person who created these stories.

Bill Harrison had worked for the same firm all his life. He was a conscientious office worker. His fellow employees loved him.

One day he was called in by his supervisor, “Bill, we are going to have to let you go. We have automated some of our operations. We are not going to keep as large a staff here. And it is time for you to move on.”

Bill just stared back at him. He was devastated. He had nowhere to go. He didn't have a family to console him. He went back to his dark, damp apartment and wondered what had just occurred.

He had given his life to his company. How could they get rid of him so easily? They weren't going to give him any answers. No one was. Bill was close to retirement, but he still wanted to work. He had no idea what to do. He felt as if his job had gone the way of the new machines.

He sat in a diner and lost himself in a daydream.

“You've seen me here before.”

“Yeah, Bill, we know you here.”

“What happened?”

“That is life. We need to move on.”



"That is what I did well."

"You need to figure out something else to do well."

He started to work part-time as a cook in the diner. He had done this job when he put himself through college. He couldn't very well sulk.

"I love the fact that you gave me this job. But this is not me. I need to find something that is really me."

"Like what?"

"I always thought about being a bartender in a fishing resort."

"Have you ever been a bartender?"

"I could learn. I've made drinks at parties."

Bill landed at his resort in Florida. He would pour the drinks all night long.

"You should have come down here a long time ago."

He met a woman who started to take an interest in him. She was a real looker. And he wondered what was really going on. He told himself that they were two lonely people living in a small town.

"I just separated from my husband. He was a really jealous man. He would beat me up for no reason. He threatened to kill me."

"He sounds like a real monster."

"He sure is!"

This freaked Bill out.

"Has the Black Widow got her clutches in you?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Did she tell you all about her abusive husband. I think that she is looking for someone to do him in."

"She really expects someone to kill her husband for her."

"I hear that there is a lot of insurance money in it."

"I thought that she was just being nice to me."

"She's a wild woman. I should have said something to you."

"That wouldn't have stopped me."

Bill found that he was becoming more attracted to his Black Widow. He would probably do anything for her.

"Do you really love me?"

"Love you. I am crazy over you."

"Would you do whatever I need?"

"What are you talking about?"

"I need you to prove it."

Bill tried to kiss her. She pushed him off.

"There's going to be plenty of time for that when we have the money. I need you to kill my husband for me."

"You're kidding me."

"If he's not dead, I can't collect the insurance money."

"Why should I do?"

"I'm the first person that they're going to suspect."

“I am the second. Do you have any better ideas?”

Bill was hardly thinking clearly.

“How are we going to do it?”

It seemed so automatic for him. One day he was a simple man doing a normal job. Now he was becoming a cold-blooded killer.”

He looked at the Black Widow. She turned him on. Her smooth legs looked great in those dark gray pumps.

“You are a sexy woman!”

Bill was babbling on.

The husband was always playing with his radios in the basement. It would be so easy to set up an electrical accident. Bill called on his experience in the service. He crossed a few wires, and he set the trap. The police wouldn't question anything. They would figure that he husband had become overconfident. He had played with too many wires.

The Black Widow discovered her husband dead. This had been too good. No one would suspect. Bill would get away with the deed, and she would have her money.

Of course, Bill was only her patsy. He was too much of a liability to have around.

“I am sure that my lover killed my husband.”

She confessed it all to the police.

“I am such a bad woman. I don't know what he was thinking. I told him that I was going to leave my husband. But I couldn't. I guess I lied. That was my worst crime.”

What kind of evidence did Bill have? He had been warned by his fellow workers. He followed through on his plan. He tried to call her, but she would not take his calls. Then she finally confessed.

She had beat him to the punch. Could he go to the station and try to set them straight?

“It was all her doing.”

No one would believe him.

This was a different kind of story. Chantal found it suspenseful. She wanted to find the writer. She put the story back in the desk and wondered what she was supposed to do.

The next few day, she came early. She watched who was in the classroom before her. There were no new stories in the desk. Chantal couldn't figure out who was putting the stories in the desk.

Trevor was a writer. He deeply admired a girl. But he was too shy to say anything to her. He would see her go to class with her friends. She even had a guy who she seemed to be into. But Trevor wanted to meet Marianne. He wanted to share his dreams with her.

Marianne started to read Trevor's stories. They were all so wonderful. They got her to see in the mind's of his characters. Marianne wanted to know what made Trevor think the way that he did. She wanted to find out more.

“Marianne, you seem distracted.”

“Kevin, a lot is going on my life.”

‘I want me to be going on in your life.’”

“You are. But I have a lot to think about!”

Marianne was more distracted by the stories. She wanted Trevor to write more. She wanted to meet him. It wasn't enough to read his stories.

Would Marianne turn her back on her life to hang out with Trevor? How could he be the way that he was?

“Marianne, you can never trust a writer.”

“What do you mean?”

“He'll set you up emotionally. Then he'll leave you for another girl.”

“He will do it in style. I am hating my ordinary life.”

“Marianne, you are going to come crying to me.”

Marianne wanted nothing more to do with Kevin. She had surrendered herself to her imagination. She had truly found the love of her life.

Trevor kept writing his stories but never attempted to meet her.

Chantal felt all weird about this. Her writer knew what was going on. And he was messing with her. She talked to her teacher.

“Do you have any idea who would be leaving short stories in the desk?”

Mr. Matthews smiled.

“Do you know what is going on?”

“No I don't. But I never took you for much of a reader. Now, you are asking me about short stories.”

“Are you playing a trick on me?”

“I wish that I was. If I had have realized that was what it took to get my students interested, I might have tried that a long time ago.”

What would he have tried? Mr. Matthews really did creep her out. And Chantal was still no closer to solving the mystery of the stories.

“Are you sure that you're not writing the stories to yourself?”

“Do I look like a short story writer?”

“What does a short story writer look like?”

“Someone dark and scary. All caught up in herself.”

“You are sounding strange.”

Chantal was sounding strange. She wanted to know who was writing her stories. Indeed, she thought about writing her own story back.

She wondered if the stories were not meant for her. She had come to expect the stories. But this other student could simply be writing stories for class. Whoever was this?

Alida thought about the poor writer. He had spent all his time trying to find an audience. And Chantal identified completely with this story.

This was the essence of great poetry. A mythic quest. And there was such irony. Chantal could never attain her writer. He refused to come out of the shadows.

“All that he had to do was say hello.”

“He never did. He could never get up his nerve to say anything.”

“She lived for his stories.”

“All fantasies. Shared fantasies.”

Alida lived for these shared fantasies. She needed to keep this circuit going. There were others who would benefit from these tales.

There was a man in the mountain. There was a people in the stars. There were voices coming out of the trees. Even the shadows lived a separate existence. What was this world

where it all came alive?

“You know all these fantastic stories. You need to tell them all to me.”

Was there time to hear all the wonder? I wanted to be part of what was happening around me.

“The stories are about promises unkept. People rely on the future to bless the dreams of the present. But there is so much which is denied.”

I needed to learn how to string these amazing stories together. I recognized that deep promise.

“Steven, you are a writer. What do you know special about stories? What is that magical thread that holds it all together?”

“Curiosity!”

Was I taking the easy way out. There was a deep mystery, and we wanted to understand what was behind it. Who could ever solve the secret?

“Stories encourage us to be dreamers. We find satisfaction in our dreams, and that becomes enough for us.”

“Am I deluded to be a writer?”

“You are doing an essential task. You take dreams to the next level. You make them possible.”

Alida was blessing my vocation.

“It is a shipwreck which holds these aspirations of everyone who went down in the storm. No treasure will rescue them from a burial at sea.”

Was I trawling the depths for one of those wrecks? I did not want to take pleasure in the misery of others. I needed to explore.

I was getting my education. Alida was giving me a real rest.

I looked up at the sky. What did these lonely clouds realize? How could they bless the greater magnificence of the day?

I needed to look deeper within. There was a radiant sun burning, and it was filling me with its power.

“What happens when the wheels run down?”

“What are you talking about?”

“What makes the radiant sun shine?”

“A constant belief.”

“At night we look forward to glorious sunrise.”