

All the Stars in Heaven

Once upon a time, there was a lovely yet proud maiden living in a village outside a vast rainforest. The villagers spoke of her beauty everywhere she went, saying that it rivaled that of the gods. The maiden, though knowing she should quell such conversations, couldn't help but agree.

She had been plagued by constant winds since childhood, though the village never received the slightest gust. Where everything was still as night, breezes and gusts of wind followed the maiden wherever she went, either indoors or out. Sometimes they carried the scent of roses. For the longest time the maiden thought she was plagued by restless spirits.

One day she decided enough was enough. She gathered every candle in her cottage, placed them around her on the floor, and began to pray. Before she could finish her prayer a fierce draft blew through the room, extinguishing all the candles. The smoke collected in front of the door, swirling around and around until the maiden could no longer see through it. When it finally died down, the most beautiful woman the maiden had ever seen stood in front of the door.

"Who are you?" the maiden gasped.

"I am Aeola, god of the cardinal winds," said the woman.

"Are you the one sending those awful winds to overwhelm me?" the maiden asked. "I haven't had a reprieve from them my whole life!"

Aeola frowned. "I sent those winds to show my affection. Would you reject such an honor from a god?"

The maiden scoffed. "I already have the affections of the whole village. What use have I for something as grand as the true affections of a god? Besides, everyone already says my beauty rivals yours and the rest of the gods'. And that, I see, may be true."

Overcome with anger, the god began to shake, the movement creating a gale around the cottage. The maiden's belongings blew all around her; even her bed and the table and chairs shifted from the force.

"You dare?" said Aeola. "You dare compare yourself to the likes of a god like me? You lowly mortal, you shall pay."

The maiden, realizing her mistake, fell to her knees and apologized profusely. The god looked on unsympathetically.

“Don’t think I have not heard your boasting before this moment. I had foolishly hoped you would not repeat such things to my face. But it seems I was wrong.

“You have three days to make your peace,” Aeola continued. “The moment the sun disappears under the horizon on that third day, I will give you your reckoning.”

And with that, she disappeared into smoke once more.

Panicked, the maiden rushed to the edge of the village, where the village fortune teller lived. It was said that the woman often dealt with the supernatural, and the maiden believed she could help.

When she arrived, the fortune teller took the maiden’s hands in her own and guided her to take a seat.

After examining her palm, the fortune teller said, “I can see a fight in your future. In order to succeed, you must journey through the dense rainforest past our village, cross the deepest ocean, and climb the tallest mountain. There, you will find the point where the earth meets the heavens. You must collect some of the stars and take them with you to this fight, for there is no wind in the heavens and the god will be powerless.”

“How can I collect stars?” the maiden cried.

The fortune teller picked up a vase from the floor. “Take this. When you reach the point, remove the lid from this jar. The stars will fill it, and when you have enough, put the lid back on.”

Next, the woman pulled a pair of shimmering boots from a corner and handed them to the maiden too. “These are Boots of Farstep. They will allow you to cross any terrain. So long as they are firm on your feet, they will work.”

The maiden thanked the fortune teller and left. She stopped by her cottage to put the vase in a backpack and put the boots on, then began her journey.

All too soon the maiden came to the dense rainforest. It had rained the night prior, and the ground was muddy. Through the dense growth the maiden could see exposed bodies. Some looked fresher than others. The maiden swallowed, hoping her new boots would work. She stepped onto the mud, and was overjoyed to see that her feet didn’t sink. So she began to walk.

Without noticing she was doing so, she began to walk faster and faster. The boots didn’t quite fit her right, and one of them began sliding off her foot. On her next step, the maiden noticed her foot didn’t come out of the mud. She pulled with all her might, but to her horror, the

boot kept sliding off. She jammed her foot back into the boot, which was now almost covered by the mud, and instead began to wiggle her foot out with more patience. With a squelching sound, her foot came free, boot and all, and the maiden vowed to be more cautious.

She made it out of the rainforest without another hitch. The journey lasted the rest of the day and into the next: the first day Aeola gave her. Something sparkled in the corner of her eye, and she went to investigate. One of the bodies from before, almost all bones now, held a sword that shimmered with similar magic to her boots. Thinking she might need it later, the maiden took the sword with her.

Next she came to the deepest ocean. It was so deep that even at the water's edge, the maiden couldn't see the bottom. Remembering her first mistake, she stepped out onto the water, which rippled under her boots but held her weight, so on she went. When she got halfway across, she felt something grab her ankle and begin to pull her down.

Looking down in a panic, the maiden saw a slimy tentacle had wrapped itself around her leg. She hefted her sword and swung down, severing the tentacle from whatever it was attached to.

And on she went.

The journey across the deepest ocean took the remainder of the first day and most of the second day, so when the maiden reached dry land once more, she knew she had to hurry.

"Hold on, miss!" sighed a voice from above her head.

The maiden looked up and was amazed to see a glowing blue spirit dancing in the air. It was weighed down by a small pouch, so the maiden held out her hand for the spirit to rest on.

"I'm journeying to the tallest mountain," the maiden said. "I don't have much time left."

"I know of your journey," said the spirit. "The wind god's minions frequent that mountain, so take this pouch. If they trouble you, throw the contents at them and they will leave you alone."

The maiden took the pouch and thanked the spirit, and on she went.

By the time she reached the mountain, the sun was beginning to set. So she put the spirit's pouch in her pocket and began to climb. She got halfway up the mountain before hearing the beating sound of wings.

Aeola's minion! thought the maiden in panic. She looked behind her to see a giant bird swooping in for the kill. Struggling to maintain her hold on the rocks, the maiden opened the

pouch and threw some of its contents at the bird. A handful of birdseed flew out, clattering on the ground below, and the minion swooped to follow. The maiden put the pouch away and continued to climb.

When she reached the top, the sun was just barely touching the horizon. Only one more day. She quickly dropped her backpack and took out the vase, then, removing the lid and holding it up to the sky, watched in awe as stars and darkness poured in.

“Stop what you’re doing,” a voice from behind her commanded. Aeola. The maiden spun around, remembering to put the lid on the vase.

“I still have one more day,” she protested.

“I saw what you were doing and came to stop you,” said the god.

“Well, you came too late,” said the maiden. She removed the lid from the vase, and with a great whoosh of air, the wind god was sucked into the small vacuum of space. Triumphant, the maiden put the lid back on and began her journey home, no longer plagued by winds.

The jar with the god inside sits on her dresser as a reminder not to be too proud, and sometimes it emits the smell of roses when the maiden walks past: Aeola’s affections living on. Years later she marries a fine young man, and they live happily ever after.