

PROMPT #1: Write about a god desperately trying to get their chosen hero to follow the path they set out for them.

[untitled]

by **Anonymous**

The first signs of revolt were quiet. Quiet, but deadly. A whispered conversation about how Athena was getting too plump- those rascals- and slight reductions in their daily offering.

Athena, being a forgiving goddess, initially overlooked their wrongs. Humans were busy after all. They were always running around, chasing something or another, or sitting completely still for hours looking at their personal metal boxes. Even her chosen hero, Lily, had flaws.

While as a child, Lily had been boisterous and lively, her recent pastimes as a 8-year-old had been lying in bed and shuffling around. Athena knew that gods weren't supposed to care too much about their heroes, but she couldn't help but feel a pang when she heard the whispered voices of the other humans near Lily.

Just today, she had heard the two largest ones talk about her hero. As she munched on the sweet offering that one had given her, she heard their voices in the living room.

Athena caught some words. "Lily... new school... hasn't had a smooth transition... lonely...your fault..." they said, while cleaning up dinner together. Athena, being the wise goddess she was, stopped listening when they started raising their voices at another. She had noticed early on that mortals seemed to waste a lot of time arguing, even more time worrying, and even greater time than that unhappy. To her, these things seemed like utter wastes of time, given humans' short lives, but that was simply her opinion.

Slowly, her sacred place began to change. Loud voices became the constant thrum, even in silence; tension snaked around the household like a poison slowly escaping. Athena saw her offering portions decrease daily, little by little, as her worshippers became preoccupied with the monster of life. And Lily stayed in bed longer and longer, picking at her food and begging her parents to let her stay home from school.

It wasn't long, however, before she realized that she needed to take things into her own hands. One day, as she examined her offering basket, she found, to her disbelief, that her mortals had forgotten her! Her altar remained barren the majority of the day, until the largest human shuffled in, guiltily, and brought his contribution.

"Sorry, Athena. I know you've been waiting for this," he said, as he laid down his offering.

Athena thought this was completely unacceptable. She made her displeasure known to the mortals the rest of the week, not showing affection to them and even bringing on "natural" disasters that left their house in a wreck. Even then the poison seeped its way into the walls of the house, squeezing and squishing the humans who remained completely oblivious.

Athena knew that she would have to take more drastic action. And she knew that it had to start with her hero. Athena, with her infinite wisdom, knew that her hero could battle the poison. She started revealing her presence to her hero more, letting her close. She blessed her hero in small ways, bringing her small gifts in times of need.

The poison stopped spreading, instead sticking to the walls like a stubborn stain that refused to lift. Athena looked at this with pleasure. Surely if she kept this up, her hero would be able to rid the stain for good.

A few days later, however, she woke to an itch in her body. She looked down to realize that the poison had grown exponentially and had latched itself onto the goddess's body. Athena knew she had to leave then. She had an attachment to these humans—the humans that had cared for her and brought her due offerings, but she knew she needed to leave before the poison affected her, too.

She waited until one of the humans entered the house, then in a whirl she slipped out. Unfortunately for her, her movement was caught by her hero.

"Athy," she cried. "Come back!"

Athena looked back for half a second. She saw her hero, distressed. She also saw the poison in the walls. She turned and left.

The outside world was an unfamiliar place. Noises and flashes and shadows everywhere. But Athena was a goddess, and goddesses did not feel fear. When Athena got tired of walking around, she sat in a quiet corner and studied the humans.

Every long street seemed to be filled with them, rushing around with utmost importance. Was everyone always busy? Did they never get tired from always scurrying from one place to another?

The only people who had seemed to escape this pattern were the kids. Their faces were lit up with joy or scrunched up in frustration. They were jumping or running or shaking or dancing. They felt their emotions so vibrantly.

As the day dawned and it became nighttime, she found herself missing her hero. Lily was not much older than these kids, yet her vibrancy had been muted these last few weeks. As she laid down and closed her eyes, invisible to the world, she wondered if she could ever find another hero, another house of followers, and another warm place to call home.

In the morning, she woke to the sound of Lily.

“Athena!!” she cried, as she picked Athena up from the wall where she had been lying. She had been in front of a small house, one that was just a couple of blocks away from her home.

Athena opened her eyes and couldn’t control the happiness she felt from being found. She had left, trying to find another place to escape from the poison, but the whole world seemed full of it. No place was completely free from its grasp. She looked down at the poison on herself; it had faded but was still there.

She had been scared of this poison. She was not afraid to admit it now. But her love for Lily was greater than any fear. If the poison kept spreading, she would keep fighting it. With every last bit of power inside her, she would keep fighting it.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you!” Lily exclaimed, looking away from Athena to another girl her age, hidden behind her mom. “Thank you for finding her!”

The other girl, Natalie, smiled, a shy smile that reminded Athena of the smiles of other children, bright and warm. “You’re welcome!”

Athena realized, as she looked down at Lily and the arms of her parents encircling her. She was just a cat; she had always been just a cat. But, today, she had become more than just a self-centered feline: she had become a hero. Lily and her parents had finally been reunited; they had become a team again.

At that moment, nobody there knew. Not Lily, nor her parents, nor Natalie, nor her mother. But Athena was a greater hero than she realized. You see, in the coming months, the poison would recede.

Lily and Natalie would become “the bestest friends ever” and Lily’s parents would stop fighting. Well, stop fighting as much. Lily would skip to school and Natalie would jump. Lily would find friends and grow up and find more friends. And one day, Athena, in her self-satisfied cat mindset would close her eyes for the last time, a happy hero.