

CHARACTERIZATION IN SATIRE: THE THREE DEGREES OF ROUNDNESS; PURPOSE,
CREDIBILITY, AND COMPLEXITY

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ABSTRACT

The project will attempt to explore how courtship, marriage, family, and divorce would be perceived by characters of the Greek mythos as they attempt to assimilate to a fictional Western culture through the use of satirical conventions. How would modern cultural normalities be accepted or rejected by these mythological figures? Would humanity welcome their assimilation or retaliate with prejudice? What roles do the many variations of love play in the Olympian lives as they navigate civil coexistence?

DEDICATION

For my family who have always believed in me and pushed me to get an education, because of you, I was confident enough to turn a general educational development diploma into a graduate degree. For my friends who have supported me in this endeavor, you are my village. For Keelin whose patience over the years I will always cherish, you have been my shelter in many storms. For myself, for doing the work.

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PART 1

Characterization in Satire: The Three Degrees of Roundness; Purpose, Credibility, and Complexity

In his article on the subject, Raj Singh, Assistant Professor of English at Tribhuvan University of Nepal, defines satire as: “a genre of literature, and sometimes graphic and performing arts, in which vices, follies, abuses, and shortcomings are held up to ridicule, ideally with the intent of shaming individuals, and society itself, into improvement” (Singh 68). In short, people can examine and criticize society by sitting comfortably behind the veil of ridiculousness thus protecting authors from criticism or backlash from audience interpretation. While satire depends heavily upon themes like plot and setting, character is also important. Janet Burroway, the author of *Writing Fiction*, explains that characters can be either flat or round. She writes, “A flat character is one who has only one distinctive characteristic, exists only to exhibit that characteristic, and is incapable of varying from that characteristic. A round character is many-faceted and is capable of change” (78). So, stories contain round characters, characters that are well developed, and complimentary flat characters who are not. People tend to think of satirical characters such as Voltaire’s titular character, Candide, as two-dimensional or flat.

I would argue, however, that while two-dimensional, flat characters frequently figure prominently in satire and comedy, the highest forms of satire make use of round characters. That being said, I believe there is a spectrum of roundness in satirical characters rather than simply one or the other. Janet Burroway argues that there are three aspects of character in

fiction: complexity, purpose, and credibility. She explains that complexity is when a character is capable of change; purpose is what drives a character into action, and credibility is the authenticity of the character in appearance and behavior. I would add to this that the more complex, purposeful, and credible a character becomes, the more round they become and vice versa.

A closer look at some examples can show how authors use these tools in varying degrees to humanize seemingly ridiculous characters in satire. Woody Allen is an author who holds a high place on satirist reading lists. His short story “The Whore of Mensa,” for example, is a classic mashup in which he creates comedy by weaving together unlikely situations, in that case, sex work and literary appreciation. The story is about a private investigator named Kaiser Lupowitz who is investigating a brothel blackmailing a client named Word Babcock. Instead of offering sexual favors, the young women of the establishment cater to intellectual desires such as conversations regarding literary theory.

At first glance, the putative victim in the story is a simple, flat, two-dimensional character. Even his name, Babcock, with its juvenile double entendre, is ridiculous and cartoonish. But Allen crafts purpose, the desire that impels a character, into this short story to humanize him. It can be seen in full display in the following excerpt between Babcock and Detective Lupowitz:

“You . . . you won’t tell my wife?”

“Level with me, Word. I can’t make any promises.”

He tried pouring a drink, but you could hear the clicking sound across the street, and most of the stuff wound up in his shoes.

“I’m a working guy,” he said. “Mechanical maintenance. I build and service joy buzzers You know—those little fun gimmicks that give people a shock when they shake hands?”

“So?”

“A lot of your executives like ’em. Particularly down on Wall Street.”

“Get to the point.”

“I’m on the road a lot. You know how it is—lonely. Oh, not what you’re thinking. See, Kaiser, I’m basically an intellectual. Sure, a guy can meet all the bimbos he wants. But the really brainy women—they’re not so easy to find on short notice.” (51-52)

Babcock is a traveling blue-collar worker who intellectually cheats on his wife. Allen humanizes the flawed character of Babcock by way of purpose. He wants to either relieve himself of the guilt he feels for being unfaithful to his wife, and he is trying to avoid being caught. Both desires are understandable and make Babcock a unique and relatable character. While Babcock has purpose, Allen doesn’t develop the character’s other degrees of roundness: complexity and credibility. Therefore, Babcock has only one of three degrees of roundness, and so is more flat than round.

It is hard to argue that any of the characters in “The Whore of Mensa” have credibility or complexity since so much of the story’s humor is driven by Allen’s send-up of noir clichés for complexity, none of the characters really change. Babcock and the Detective remain very similar at the end of the story as they do when it begins. None of the events of the plot change their character by the story’s conclusion. This would suggest that out of the three degrees of roundness, Allen crafts only one: purpose.

Since Allen doesn’t add credibility or complexity to his characters, one can argue that they are basically flat in the way of a different order of satire, a kind of satire that is less interested in humanizing its characters than in evoking laughs or making a point, so Allen’s story is an example of a low degree of roundness. While the story is funny, interesting, and satirical, the characters are two-dimensional.

Voltaire’s *Candide* is a satire that moves its protagonist toward a greater degree of roundness. This story follows the eponymous Candide and his travels across nations in search of

the love of his life, Cunégonde after she is taken prisoner and sold into sex slavery. Voltaire uses Candide as a satirical conduit to reflect the follies of humankind of his time through Candide's directionless wandering fueled by his combination of innocence, naivete, and the desire to hold onto his mentor, Pangloss's ridiculous optimistic worldview despite all the evidence to the contrary that Voltaire puts in Candide's path. By the end of the story, Candide does get to marry Cunégonde. Yet, he still feels unfulfilled:

It was altogether natural to imagine, that after undergoing so many disasters, Candide, married to his mistress and living with the philosopher Pangloss, the philosopher Martin, the prudent Cacambo, and the old woman, having besides brought home so many diamonds from the country of the ancient Incas, would lead the most agreeable life in the world. But he had been so robbed by the Jews, that he had nothing left but his little farm; his wife, every day growing more and more ugly, became headstrong and insupportable; the old woman was infirm, and more ill-natured yet than Cunegund. (94)

This is an ironic resolution of Candide's purpose as a character, to seek out the truth, and Cunégonde. Ultimately, he gets both, but neither as he anticipated. Candide, in his pursuit of Cunegund and attempts to square the circle of Pangloss's philosophy, has an even more purposeful character than Babcock. But Candide is far more round than Babcock. Why? Because he is also complex. He is capable of change. For example, eventually, he drops Pangloss's blind optimism in favor of a kind of stoic practicality as seen in the final passage of the novel:

“Neither need you tell me,” said Candide, “that we must take care of our garden.” “You are in the right,” said Pangloss; “for when man was put into the garden of Eden, it was with an intent to dress it; and this proves that man was not born to be idle.” “Work then without disputing,” said Martin; “it is the only way to render life supportable.” The little society, one and all, entered into this laudable design and set themselves to exert their different talents. The little piece of ground yielded them a plentiful crop. Cunegund indeed was very ugly, but she became an excellent hand at pastrywork: Pacquette embroidered; the old woman had the care of the linen. There was none, down to Brother Giroflee, but did some service; he was a very good carpenter, and became an honest man. Pangloss used now and then to say to Candide: “There is a concatenation of all

events in the best of possible worlds; for, in short, had you not been kicked out of a fine castle for the love of Miss Cunegund; had you not been put into the Inquisition; had you not traveled over America on foot; had you not run the Baron through the body; and had you not lost all your sheep, which you brought from the good country of El Dorado, you would not have been here to eat preserved citrons and pistachio nuts.” “Excellently observed,” answered Candide; “but let us cultivate our garden.” (97)

While Candide doesn’t explicitly reject Pangloss, his polite redirection suggests he is no longer his blind pupil, and so his character ultimately has two degrees of roundness: purpose and complexity. This makes it easier for us to empathize with Voltaire’s target of satire than Allen’s.

The third satirist I will explore is the contemporary writer Simon Rich. In the short story “The Baby,” Rich tells the tale of Ben, a young author who is finishing his creative historical fiction novel of General Custer, while his pregnant wife prepares for the birth of their first child. This unborn son is also finishing a book about the same topic from the womb, and it is already much better than Ben’s. Despite the hilarious premise, Ben is a character who exhibits all three character traits, purpose, complexity, and credibility.

Throughout the story, Ben becomes increasingly jealous of the baby as the story unfolds. He spends most of the story avoiding his wife and the family as he rushes to release his book before his baby has the opportunity to beat him to the press. However, as the day of delivery approaches, Ben is able to put his jealousy aside, and be present for his wife, Sue while she delivers the baby, and while the baby delivers his highly anticipated novel. Consider the following scene between Ben and Sue:

She gripped his hand. Her eyes were soft and glossy from the drugs, and her forehead was beaded with sweat. “I’ve missed you,” she said, her voice breaking. “Where’d you go?”

Ben felt his throat dry. He started to apologize, but before he could get the words out, Sue’s body was wracked by a violent contraction. He winced as his wife grunted through it, breathing bravely through the spasm of white-hot pain.

“Here it comes!” said Dr. Kowalski. “It’s a big one!”

The nurses guided the manuscript out of Sue's vagina, making sure the title page was facing up. The book was called *Last Stand* and somehow featured an advanced blurb from George Saunders.

The baby popped out a second later, looking smart but understated in a slim tweed blazer and a pair of Warby Parker glasses. The doctor laid him on his mother's chest. He seemed calm at first, but within moments he began to scream. Sue tried to calm the newborn with a kiss, but the infant kept howling, a wail that built steadily in pitch, like a fast-approaching siren.

"Is this normal?" Ben asked. "What's happening?" (12-13)

Even if someone hasn't read this story in its entirety to fully understand Ben or even Sue, this moment is a great example of how to show the ridiculousness of satire through the hilarious premise. Rich uses misdirection to lead readers to believe the baby is being birthed due to the doctor's comment about "it's size." It turns out to be the thickness of the baby's novel with the blurb by George Saunders. Through the lens of satire, this dry humor is crafted exceptionally.

During The Baby's birth, Rich redeems Ben as a character as he demonstrates guilt for mistreating his wife during her pregnancy through the simple line of his apology and dry throat. His complexity as a character also evolves as he begins to show concern for the baby as the wailing alarms him. Having a child for the first time may be a stressful experience, but when cloaked in satire, authors can make that relatable experience unique and funny without compromising the subtext and seriousness of the moment. The character is also credible because he is believable, relatable, and familiar to a reader based on the information that Rich gives us. Ben's anxiety over his publication is authentic to the career Rich bestowed upon him in turn, making Ben believable. Additionally, his straining relationship with Sue builds naturally adding to the relatability of the character and situation. This completes the third degree of roundness: a combination of purpose, complexity, and credibility. Humanizing this target of satire is done effectively and is empathized with audiences due to its complete roundness.

George Saunders, who is so renowned, the satirist earns a comic allusion in “The Baby,” offers an even more subtle approach to character in “Pastoralia.” In this story, the unnamed narrator known only by his work title, Caveman, struggles to help keep his friend Janet from being fired and replaced with a younger actress to fill the role of Cavewoman in their live performance at a theme park. Caveman’s job description is simple: sit in the cave exhibit at the theme park dressed like a caveman and do as a caveman would, constantly. Janet’s job is identical. However, Janet starts neglecting her duties at work, and the narrator finds it increasingly difficult to cover for her. Caveman has a family to provide for and, therefore, does not break character, speaking primarily in primitive grunts. Janet disregards company policy on language and often speaks English at work, putting Caveman in an uncomfortable position professionally: help a friend, or save himself.

In this story, Saunders employs all three degrees of roundness (purpose, complexity, and credibility) in both Caveman and Janet. They both work the same job, but take their seriousness to different degrees. They both have families they love and are trying to support but emote differently. While the human zoo scenario is ridiculous and cartoonish, the situation is familiar but unique because readers can relate to working a job that makes them unhappy to support themselves and their families, but it is unique because of the setting of a human sideshow exhibit. In the following passage of “Pastoralia,” Saunders characterizes them both by writing,

Around noon the door to her Separate Area flies open. She looks weird. Her hair is sticking up and she’s wearing an I’m With Stupid sweatshirt over her cavewoman robe and her breath smells like whiskey.

Janet is wasted? Wasted in the cave?

“What I have here in this album? She says. “Baby pictures of that fucking rat Bradley. Back when I loved him so much. Back before he was a druggie. See how cute? See how smart he looked?”

She shows me the album. He actually does not look cute or smart. He looks the same as he looked the other day only smaller. In one picture he's sitting on a tricycle looking like he's planning a heist. In another, he's got a sour look on his face and his hand down some smaller kid's diaper. (44)

Burroway writes, "The trick is to find telling details that convey the information indirectly while our attention remains on the desire or emotions of the character" (Burroway 99.) During this passage, Caveman never speaks. He remains a diligent employee but through his thoughts, readers can relate to the character. Janet's troublesome relationship with her son is what ultimately ends with her firing, and being replaced by the end of the story. Though, in this passage, she is credible as a single, working mother who, troubled by her son, loves him deeply. Her ultimately being condemned by her employer creates a deep level of empathy in the reader as they develop a relationship of familiarity with her character. Caveman earns credibility because of his authentic response to his friend/coworker in distress. The authenticity of the character adds credibility to Caveman as he struggles with doing right by his friend at work, or doing right by his boss who asked for her review, all while keeping in mind that Caveman has a family of his own to provide for.

By building upon the insights I've gained both from the writings on craft and examples of great satire such as I've discussed, I hope to create fiction that is as entertaining as eavesdropping on a fascinating conversation between characters who are interesting and believable in situations that reflect the shortcomings, follies, and vices of society. As these writers have shown, I can create meaningful satire while simultaneously, entertaining my readers.

In conclusion, it's important to have round characters because it's easier to humanize them. Humanizing the target of satire is paramount to the effectiveness of the story. I hope to emulate what Burroway proposes as fundamental in storytelling. She argues,

Your fiction can be only as successful as the characters who move it and move within it. Whether they are drawn from life or are pure fantasy—and all fictional characters lie somewhere between the two--- we must find them interesting, we must find them believable, and we must care what happens to them. (44)

Burroway points out we have to create believable characters we can empathize with, but this is a special challenge for the satirist whose job is to poke fun at human follies. That is the goal of my thesis.

Part 2

The Golden Apple and The Sea

The waiting room was full, but Zeus found a loveseat big enough to support his vast girth and sat down next to his brother.

“You here with Persephone?” he asked.

“Yep,” Hades said. He spit tar into an empty Pepsi bottle. “Dr. Cupid is seeing her now. We’re starting with separate sessions.”

They sat silently for eons. The only sounds were the clicking of the receptionists’ fingers against the keyboard, and the metronome-like ticking of the second hand lapping the minute hand of a clock. Zeus rolled back the sleeve of his robe to look at his Rolex. He didn’t know how to tell time. One of the perks of immortality was not having to keep track of it. But he liked the aesthetic of checking his wristwatch. It was a power move.

Down the well-lit hallway, a door cracked open. Persephone walked out in a sleeveless black dress and pomegranate-colored shoes. She wiped away some tears and shook the therapist’s hand. Hades stood up, lifting his jeans by the belt loops.

“Zeus,” Persephone said after hugging her husband, who, with his arms wrapped around her, spit into his bottle again. “I’m glad you finally came. Hera has been wanting this for a long time.”

Zeus’s eyebrows wrinkled and the room softly rumbled.

“See you in Hell, big guy,” Hades said with a chuckle as he and his wife locked arms and walked out of the facility with matching toothy grins.

The king of the gods remembered when he and Hera were happy: Athena’s first brain freeze, Hercules tossing the doctor across the room when he tried to give him a shot, Ares martialing toy army men on the kitchen floor. Those were good times.

He and Hera split up occasionally, and there wasn’t anything more to it. Zeus would work late. He had a busy schedule of smiting the disobedient and procreating. She would say they weren’t spending enough time together, and they would separate for a while. It was a dance both knew well. Therapy was for mortals, Zeus thought. When Hera decided the Olympians would assimilate to the rest of the modern world, Zeus thought it wouldn't be long before Hera found a new hobby. Mortals needed help, not Gods. But things were changing. Olympus had a Starbucks now. The mighty Zeus just wanted his world to stay the same.

A small creature walked out into the waiting room. He stood around three feet tall, wearing a khaki-colored diaper and a pink tie with an arrow-shaped gold clip. He was as hairless as a newborn. Pigeon-toed feet. Protruding tummy. Rosey blushed cheeks.

He locked eyes with Zeus and waved him into his office. “Please. Have a seat,” the creature suggested, his tiny feet shuffling on the stock office carpet. He climbed into his seat behind a large wooden desk. “It’s nice to finally meet you, Zeus.”

Zeus noticed a tattoo on the back of the cherub. One on each shoulder. Two tiny wings.

“Yeah,” Zeus whispered under his breath. “I don’t believe in this kind of thing.”

“What kind of thing?”

“Therapy.”

“Well, then what are you doing here?”

Zeus sighed, and the room shook. “My wife.”

“Yes,” Cupid shook his head approvingly. “Your wife. That’s what we’re both here for, Zeus. Hera loves you. You know that. But I must ask ... Do you love her?”

“Of course!” Zeus snapped, fingertips exuding electrical currents.

“Well then,” Dr. Cupid said. He slid a heart-tipped arrow from his quiver behind the chair and used it to scratch his ass crack through the khaki diaper before pointing it at Zeus. “What are you going to do about it?”

“What do you mean?”

“She thinks you don’t love her.”

“She’s not perfect either, you know,” Zeus said. “She’s made mistakes too, but I forgave her.”

“Why don’t you tell her how you feel?” the doctor asked while pushing a heart-shaped button on the arm of his chair. “Are you afraid of being vulnerable?”

The room suddenly went dark. “I am the God of Gods,” Zeus thundered, “King of the immortals. I am afraid of nothing.”

The doctor scratched his cheek with the same arrow he had used to scratch his ass. Zeus cringed.

“Being vulnerable doesn’t mean you’re weak,” Cupid said.

“You must not be married, doctor.”

“You may come in now,” Cupid said loudly before releasing his finger from the button.

Zeus's brow tightened. His wife Hera entered wearing a robe of the finest silk, looking to the floor.

Zeus's eyes widened. He had forgotten just how beautiful she was. He reached into his robe and revealed a golden apple.

"I brought you this," Zeus said. "You said you wanted one."

"That was four thousand years ago," she said, burying her face in her hands and sobbing. "And that muscle-bound bastard of yours already got me one."

"What?" Zeus asked as he disintegrated the apple and wiped the dust of its remains from his hands. "Did I do something wrong?"

Hera looked up at him with tears pooling in her eyes. "Do you even remember why I wanted that apple?"

An eternity passed.

"Something about being pretty?" Zeus guessed.

"It doesn't matter," Hera said after letting out a defeated sigh and rolling her eyes. Cupid scribbled a note with his pen and scratched his head with the golden arrow. "Do you have anything you want to say to Hera, Zeus?" Cupid asked.

"Yeah. I'm not getting you anymore fucking fruit."

Hera stared at him blankly.

"Try again, Zeus. Try being vulnerable."

Zeus let out a long exhale and tried again.

"I'm sorry."

"For what?" Hera asked.

“For whatever I did.”

“Whatever you did?” Hera said. “You cheated on me every weekend for thousands of years. You went out, got drunk, had sex with anything with two or more legs, or wings.”

Zeus’s eyes darted to the floor. “Oh, myself, will you ever let that go?”

“I birthed each of our wonderful children,” she said. “And this is the thanks I get.”

“Each? What about Athena? Talk about a headache. That was all me, Hera. Where were you?”

A tense pause filled the room.

“...The pain I felt knowing the monstrous things you’ve done to the mortal women on Earth,” Hera continued.

“First off, they wanted me to turn into a bull, or swan, or cloud. Do you think that was my idea? I was coerced if anything.”

“And Echo?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“I followed you to her cave and caught you slipping out the back carrying your robe in one arm and your sandals in the other. And don’t get me started on ‘golden showers.’”

“Is that what Danae told you? I *turned into* a golden shower. I didn’t pee on anyone. Whatever. What about Ixion, Hera? Remember you were going to cheat on me with him? You’re not innocent.”

“Who is Ixion?” Cupid asked while fussing with the height adjustment on his chair.

“A friend of mine,” Hera said. “Zeus thought he was trying to sleep with me, so he tied him to a wheel of fire and hid him in the stars like a petulant, insecure child. Ixion. Pandora. Porphyryon. Anyone who showed me attention.” Her eyes began to water.

Cupid rolled his chair over to Hera and gently patted her on the back and extended his chubby, cherub arms to hand her a box of tissues.

Zeus looked at his wife crying and realized his wrongdoing. “Hera ... I”

“Just don’t,” Hera said. “I’m done.”

“Baby, I’m sorry.”

“It’s too late,” Hera said. “I love you, but Dr. Cupid has taught me that I need to learn to love myself. I’m leaving you.” She stood up proudly to her feet. “My chariot is outside.”

Zeus peered out the window and noticed a yellow chariot with the word *taxi* written in black letters parked outside. The waiting driver was smoking a cigarette.

“Where will you go?” he asked.

“The Sea,” she said.

“The Sea?”

“Yes. The Sea. I’m leaving you for Poseidon.”

Zeus threw a thunderbolt in the direction of Hera but it hit the wall. The taxi driver made eye contact with the enraged god through the smoking hole in the building. He flicked the cigarette quickly and ducked down to hide in the front seat of the car.

“Take care,” Hera said to her husband before walking out of the thunderbolt-sized hole in the wall.

Zeus wanted to stop her. He didn't. He knew there was nothing to do. He sat back down on the couch. His head lay heavy in his hand.

"If I had just known sooner," he said. "I could have done something. I could have changed."

Cupid slung the strap of his quiver over his shoulder and handed him the box of tissues. "Zeus, we can't change the past."

"What can we do?"

"What can *you* do?" Dr. Cupid said while doing some final scribbles on a piece of paper. "*You* can learn from this. Embrace the change. Just take it one step at a time, big guy."

During a long, quiet pause, the only sound that filled the room was the coarse scratching of Zeus slowly stroking his beard and the therapist ripping out the page of scribbled notes.

Zeus stood up and thanked Cupid for his time. They shook hands and Cupid slid the piece of paper into Zeus's massive palm.

"When you're ready to forgive yourself," Cupid said, "I want you to read that message. Forever is a long time to live without love."

As Zeus left, he approached the front desk. The receptionist looked confused.

"I suppose I have to sign something," he asked.

"Why would you think that?"

"I don't know. I always see the mortals do it."

"We don't do that here. I just tap the keys on this computer because I like the way it sounds," she said, mindlessly tapping at her keyboard.

"How does he get paid?"

“Who?”

“Dr. Cupid?”

She laughed. “Cupid? a doctor?”

“He's not a doctor?”

“No,” she said. “But he’s so darn cute we all let him play pretend. But if you’ll excuse me, I have to take this call.” She held her index finger to the face of the mighty Zeus and picked up a phone that was not plugged in. “Thank you for calling Dr. Cupid. Press one to schedule an appointment. Press two to send a valentine. Press three for English.”

The Olympian walked out and pulled out his phone to use the ride-sharing app, Pegasus. The folded notebook page from the faux doctor also sat in his grip.

On his journey home, he opened the note.

At the top it read, “Dr. Cupid: Full-Time Pretend Couple’s Therapist. Part-Time Actual Matchmaker. Come to my party next month. It’s going to be a very classy affair. And by that, I mean, a masquerade-themed orgy with a well-catered seafood buffet. P.S. Ganymede has been asking about you for years.”

Zeus smiled, blushed, and tucked the note into his back pocket.

“I knew this was some mortal bullshit.”

Soon after, a chariot arrived.

“Where to, Boss?” the driver said.

“Mt. Olympus, mortal, the Starbucks by the Temple.”

The End

A Hero's Quest

“Zip ties, rubber gloves, a black ski mask, two bottles of baby aspirin, a squeaky dog toy, and a bottle of wine. Your total is \$69.00,” the cashier said.

Dionysus swung his robe to the side like a cape. “Yes,” he said, “These are the tools necessary to save my twin brother, Zagreus.” Dionysus stood proudly with his hands on his hips, before reaching forward to grab the thin plastic bags in front of him.

The cashier pulled the bags in close. “Dude, you have to pay for these.”

Dionysus scratched his head, “Pay? You mean barter? Would you like some wine?” He reached into a bag and cracked open a bottle and took a swig before shaking it in the cashier’s face.

“No, dude. Like money. No wines. Plus, now you super have to pay for that because you opened it.”

Dionysus paused briefly before poking around in his robe. “It appears I’ve left my billfold in my other robe. I could give you a hand-job. I am the god of ecstasy after all,” he said with a wink.

“Cash is fine, or you can leave.”

“Fine. Fine. I just need to make a quick phone call,” Dionysus said walking away from the checkout lane. “Don’t put my stuff away, please. My brother needs saving.”

He dialed his mother.

“Hello? Who is this?”

“It’s me, Mom. Dionysus. God of all the fun stuff. He sighed. “Could you lend me a few bucks? I left my money in my other robe.”

“Why didn’t you bring your billfold with you?”

“I was caught up in a heroic act, mom. It wasn’t the first thing on my mind.”

“That’s your problem. You never think about the future. When are you going to stop partying, and settle down? Maybe give mama some grandbabies?”

“Mom, we talked about this. I don’t want to have kids. I want to reign as God of the good times. Kids will fuck all that up for me.”

“Language.”

“Right,” he said, “Sorry. Look, have you still not heard back from Zag yet? I’m thinking I should check on him.”

“Oh, he’s down here somewhere.”

“The south?”

The cashier loudly coughed into his hand and gestured to the line of people waiting to pay for their groceries. Dionysus shook his index finger at the man and lipped the words, “one second.”

“Look ma, are you going to give me this money or not?”

“You won’t get another dollar from me or your father.”

“Stepfather.”

“You won’t get a dime from either of us until we see some grandbabies, and that is final,” Persephone said before hanging the phone up.

Dionysus shook in anger before screaming, “Fuck!!”

“Look man,” the cashier said, “I’ve got to move forward. Come back when you get some money.”

Dionysus puffed in frustration and walked over to him, “Do you like drugs?”

“Do I like drugs?”

“Yeah, you don’t like wine or release. You must like something. I’ll trade you this bag of mushrooms for you to shut the hell up for a few minutes.”

“Yeah, I’ll take those. You’ve got two minutes,” the cashier said, snatching the Ziplock bag from the god’s grip.

Dionysus called his grandmother.

“Why don’t you call me anymore?” Rhea said as she picked up.

“I mean to, I just got wrapped up in work lately.”

“You don’t work. Your mother tells me all the time. You wouldn’t believe the things she says. You know she’s been wanting grandbabies. We’d all like to see—”

“I’m not having any Zeus damn children.”

“Don’t you mention that deadbeat one more time,” Rhea said.

“Okay. Well, look. I need some money. \$69 to be exact.”

“Is that a lot?”

“I’m unsure.”

“Did you offer him a hand job?”

“I did.”

“And?”

“He didn’t want it. I don’t know, grandma. Humans are weird.”

“Odd.”

“Can you send it directly to the merchant here?” he asked. “He’s a little annoyed with how long this is taking.” He glanced at the endless line of waiting customers.

“Have them put the charge on my tab. I get my coffee there every morning on my way to the dog park with Cerberus.”

“Cool. Okay. Love you.” He hung up the phone and ran back to the cashier, who was still chewing the mushrooms. “She said for you to put it on her tab. Her name is Rhea.”

The cashier let out a long sigh and shook his head, “Fuck it. Just take the stuff. I’ll be tripping soon anyway.” He handed the bags to Dionysus and waved the next customer forward.

Dionysus grabbed the bags popped a baby aspirin in his mouth and took a swig from the wine bottle, then pulled the ride-sharing app, Chariot, and called for a ride.

To where? Dionysus thought. He scratched his chin as he stared at the text box for a destination. *Where else? The deep south. The Underworld.*”

He was dropped off at the entrance to the River Styx. The green water seemed endless as a speedboat approached. A man in a black hood with a scruffy beard tilted his bucket hat upwards and laid eyes on Dionysus.

“Dion?” Charon said. “What are you doing here?”

“I’m on a quest to save my brother,” Dionysus said, posing dramatically with a clenched fist.

“And he’s here? In the Underworld? Where at?” Charon said, biting the end of his cigar and lighting the other with a match.

“I believe he’s in the prison.”

“Ah,” Charon said, “The monogamy prison. I wouldn’t doubt it.” He scratched his beard and his eyes opened wide. “You know what? I did give him and his lady friend a ride down here a few months ago. Haven’t seen them since.”

“Is that so?” Dionysus said, gripping the thin plastic grocery store bag underneath his robe. “Take me to him.”

Dionysus boarded the motorboat and sat back as Charon navigated the soul-infested waters with ease.

“You’ve cleaned up quite a bit,” Dionysus said, “What happened?” He watched as the green, slimy hands of the souls in the water failed to grip onto the ship as Charon sped through the river.

“Met a woman. Mortal,” Charon said, “She said my fingers were giving her UTIs. So, one thing lead to another, and now I’ve gone clean.” He noticed a few souls were climbing onto the boat from the rear, so he turned the wheel sharp to knock them back into the river.

“So, no more drugs?”

“Oh, no. I’m still doing drugs. PCP mostly. On some right now. But I started to shower. I got a haircut, I bathe regularly, and got this dope boat to replace the old one.” Charon laughed as he took a sharp turn down one of the eerie canals of the river.

“I miss the old Charon,” Dionysus said. “The seaman in red. The guide of the gods.”

“I’m still all that stuff, but now I’m in love. I’m still Charon, but now someone else holds my pole.” Charon winked as he approached the barracks of the Underworld’s prison.

“And here we are.”

“Thank you, wise guide. I’ll be seeing you upon my return.” Dionysus got up to leave the boat.

“Uh.. the fee?” Charon asked with his hand extended.

“I don’t have any money.” Dionysus hung his head in shame. “Mom cut me off..”

“That’s okay. I’ll just take the usual,” Charon said, leaning back and untying his robe.

After a few minutes, Dionysus climbed out of the boat and leaned over to wash his hands in the river.

As Charon tied his robe shut, he drove off into the abyss.

You still got it, Dion, Dionysus thought. He smirked, opened the plastic bag, and took another baby aspirin, and descended into the shadows of the Underworld.

The entrance to the prison stood in front of him: tall, dark walls built to contain Titans. The only light to guide him was a pale, green hue that illuminated from the souls in the River Styx. As they aimlessly floated at the surface, their dim glow lit his path. As he approached quietly, six, massive, glowing red eyes appeared from the shadows. Three, thick, black jaws raised forty feet high. Cerberus, the guard dog of the Underworld had awakened.

He snarled and growled showing rows of sharp, flesh-piercing teeth.

“Shhh...” he whispered, “Cerberus, It’s me. Dion. See?”

Cerberus leaned in close.

Dionysus smiled and pointed to his face.

Cerberus's faces changed from hostile to happy as the dog's three tongues slobbered over him. His violently wagging tail nearly knocked down the pillars that held up the entrance to the prison.

"Calm down, boy." Dionysus laughed. He pulled the toy from the plastic bag and gave it a few quick squeaks. Cerberus's six ears stood up. He sat down obediently – his tail still wagging.

"Go get it, boy," he said, throwing the toy deep down the tunnels of the River Styx.

Cerberus's feet kicked up dust and debris as they clumsily darted.

Now, for my disguise, Dionysus thought. He pulled out the black ski mask from the bag, put it on his head, and adjusted it so he could see and breathe properly. *Now, no one will suspect a thing.*

He opened the door carefully and snuck in. A female guard was asleep at her desk, her hair covering her face. Dionysus pulled the open bottle of wine from his bag and placed it gently next to her. He pried her fingers open carefully and placed them around the base of the bottle before carefully stepping away. *She'll think she blacked out and be too panicked to look for intruders,* he thought. *Dion, you son of a bitch. You're good.*

He gingerly walked away and entered a long hallway full of bay windows. Each window showed a monogamous couple. He glanced inside and observed one. A balding, bearded man and his tired wife were chasing a few kids around a dining room table. Two young boys and an infant girl were covered in permanent marker, crying, and throwing toys at each other.

"Can I have this, daddy?"

"No."

“Mom! Look what she did!” the youngest boy screamed. He held up a broken Officer Olympus toy.

“Sit down and eat your supper.”

He watched as the kids dropped spaghetti, and spilled milk on the carpeted floor.

I'd rather die than have kids. Dionysus shook his head and left to look at another cell. *My brother must be here somewhere.* He walked to the next cell and looked in. This couple was younger and had no kids. There were plenty of cats though. He watched as one fed the pets, while the other played “God of War” on PlayStation.

“Are you even listening to me?”

“I’m on the game!”

“We don’t talk anymore. You just play your game every hour of the night.”

Dionysus quickly grew bored of observing that couple and continued the search for his brother. In the next cell, he saw him. Zagreus was sitting on a leather couch with a mortal woman’s sleeping face on his shoulder. The flicking light from the TV lit the dark room, and the sounds of *The Great Gatsby* filled the air. His brother looked down at the woman, brushed her hair from her face, and smiled.

“It’s not all bad,” a voice echoed down the corridor.

Dionysus turned around and saw the guard carrying the open bottle of wine. She took a large swig of it and walked toward him.

“Keep your distance, witch,” he commanded as he braced himself for battle.

“I’m not a witch. I’m mortal. My name is Aria. Well, Ariadne, but my friends call me Aria.” She took another drink.

“You are no friend of mine, witch,” Dionysus said. He slid the rubber gloves onto his hands and unraveled the zip ties.

Aria looked at him and cringed, “What exactly are you going to do with those?”

“Defeat you.”

“You couldn’t afford a sword?”

“They didn’t have any of that stuff. This is the best I could do,” Dionysus said adjusting his mask.

She walked closer to the god taking another swig as she sized him up. “Who are you exactly? Orpheus?” She squinted. “I told you that woman has moved on.”

“No. I’m Dion..” He could feel his heart pound. “Uh. Honey Dion.” *Almost let this witch know too much*, he thought.

“Honey Dion?”

“Yes. Of the mustard dynasty.”

“Well, what are you doing here, Honey?” Aria chuckled before polishing off the bottle.

“I’m here to save my brother!” he shouted raising his zip ties into the air with heroic grace.

“Your brother? Who’s he? French Yellow?”

“No. The mighty Zagreus.”

Silence.

“Are you sure your name is *Honey Dion* and not God of wine, *Dionysus*?” she asked shaking the empty bottle of wine upside down at him.

“Oh, Zeus damn it,” Dionysus said ripping the mask from his face. “Tis I. Dionysus. Are you certain you’re not a witch?”

“Yeah. Plus, this must have fallen out from your robe when you put the bottle on my desk.” Aria held up a black billfold wallet.

“Oh. There it is. Thank you.” Dionysus took the wallet from the woman and placed it back into his robe’s pocket. “If you’re no witch, what are you doing in hell?”

Aria’s face changed from tipsy happy to sullen discomfort. “It’s a job. You go where the work is.”

“Work? What for?”

“For money?”

“You could just ask your parents for some. That’s what I do. That and give release,” he said gesturing with his hand. “I’m really good at it.”

“I’m sure you are,” Aria laughed. “Follow me. I’ll get the keys to your brother’s cell.”

The two walked down the labyrinth, peeking into different cells.

“So, why do you think Zagreus needs saving?”

“Well, this is literally a hellish prison.”

“This may be your Hell, but for many, this is Elysium.”

“Chained to one person for all of eternity. Forced to feed children. How can this be anything other than Hell?”

“Personally, I’d rather get wine drunk and fall asleep at an orgy but the inmates seem happy here,” Aria said.

“Does your coven allow for such good times?”

“Not a witch.”

Dionysus and Aria stopped walking in front of a big bay window. Behind it, a couple of college students picnicked in an open, grassy field under the warm sun. They were smiling and laughing as they tasted each other’s snacks.

“Sharing food? Is there a famine?”

“Shh. Just watch.”

The sky went dark, and clouds grew heavy as rain began to downpour from the sky. The couple rushed to pack their things into the bed of an old, black truck. They packed tightly into the cab soaked.

“Now, a tempest? These are plagues.”

The couple erupted into laughter. As they calmed, they locked eyes and kissed passionately.

“They would rather be in the cold rain and share wet food with one special person than dine alone in a palace.”

“That’s foolish. Why *one* person when you can have *hundreds*? Sometimes, in an evening.” Dionysus made the hand gesture again.

Aria rolled her eyes. “You’re really into giving hand jobs, huh?”

“What? This isn’t a hand job. I’m rolling imaginary dice. You can’t play a proper game of craps with only two. That’s ridiculous.” He shook his head. “But yeah, the winner usually gets a hand job. It would be at an orgy after all.”

“Of course,” she said. “Anyways.”

As the couple disrobed, they stopped watching and continued to walk toward her office.

“Aren’t you tired of giving hand? Don’t you want to be the one getting it?”

“Well, I suppose that would be nice,” he said looking down at his hands.

“That’s what we do here. You spend all of eternity getting the love you gave away to the wrong people. This time, you get to share those moments with the right one.”

“Right one?” he said switching his attention from his left hand to the right.

Aria blinked a few times and sighed. “So, your brother got the brains, didn’t he?”

Dionysus shrugged and said, “If so, why am I the one rescuing him?” He slipped the rubber gloves from his hands and threw them onto her desk. “No more disguises. Let’s go save Zagreus.” He yanked the ring of keys from her desk and held them up triumphantly. “It’s time! I’m coming, brother!” He ran full speed down the labyrinth back to his brother’s cell.

Aria chased after him and yelled, “Dion, be careful! The doors only unlock from the outside!”

He ignored her warning and ran until he saw his brother’s cell. “Your freedom has been restored!” He fumbled with the key ring but none of them would work on Zagerus’s door.

“What the hell?” Dionysus shook the keys in frustration. “Witch, why aren’t they working?”

Aria arrived hunched over unable to breathe. “Hold. On. I’m. Outtabreath,” she said gasping between words.

“Some witch you are.” He extended his hand with three baby aspirin in his palm. “Here. Take these.”

She looked down at his hand, then back up at him before catching her breath, “Baby aspirins? Why?”

“It helps with heart attack.”

“If you’re sixty.” She finally caught her breath.

“I wish I had the libido I had when I was sixty. Sheesh.” He took the pills himself.

“When you’re a few thousand years old, you really have to get creative. That’s why we shapeshift so much.”

“Use this key.” She held up a key with a skeleton head at its base. “It works on all doors, inside and out.”

He reached for it but the loud slam of the prison’s front door distracted him. He pushed Aria behind him and wielded his zip ties.

“Stay behind me. I’ll protect you.”

“It’s my boss. The warden.” Her voice trembled.

“I fear no man,” he said before shouting, “Show yourself, coward!”

“Quick. Hide.” She took the keys from Dionysus, unlocked Zagreus’s cell door, and pushed him inside.

He stumbled to the floor, as the door shut and disappeared behind him.

“Brother?” Zagreus said quietly while his lover’s head laid asleep in his lap. He carefully moved her sleeping body off of his and tiptoed to Dionysus. “Thank you for visiting,” he said before embracing his brother with a hug.

“I’m not visiting. I’m here to rescue you!” Dionysus said whipping his robe around like a cape.

“Shhh. She’s asleep.”

“Who cares? Let’s go raise some hell,” he said excitedly scuffing up his twin brother’s hair.

Zagreus fixed his hair and said, “I’m not going anywhere. I like it here.”

“You want to stay here? With her?”

“Her name’s Debra. I like her.”

“How long have you been here? Charon said it’s been months.”

Zagreus tilted his head and stared off in the distance. “Wow. It feels like it’s only been a few weeks. I guess time works differently here.”

“You’re giving up the whole world for one mortal pussy?”

“Actually, she prefers butt fucking.”

Just then, Zagerus’s cell door swung open. Their mother, Persephone walked forward from the shadows in a pomegranate dress.

“Hello, boys.”

“Mom? You’re the warden?” Dionysus asked.

“Yes. This is the Underworld, and I am the queen. You never were the smart one.” She crossed the threshold into Zagreus’s home. She walked past the sleeping woman and said, “She was supposed to do my bidding, but she failed.” Persephone shook her head in disappointment.

“Your bidding?” Zagreus asked.

“How many times do I have to repeat myself? I want grandbabies. This woman was the perfect candidate, but she had one flaw: she only likes anal. How am I to get a grandbaby that way?”

Dionysus bit his lip, “you monster.”

“I’m no monster. I’m a mother. A mother who knew you would never settle down, so I played my best hand with my *good* son.” Persephone laughed maniacally at Dionysus. “And as for my little employee who helped hide you, she’s been locked away in a cell of her own.” She grinned.

“Aria?” Dionysus gasped. “Where is she?”

“I’m not saying a word.”

“Tell me or else.”

“Or else what?”

“Or else... I’m calling Grandma.”

Persephone hissed. “You wouldn’t dare.”

Dionysus pulled his phone from his robe. “I already have.”

“She’s in the center of the labyrinth. Go save her, hero. That is if she hasn’t already met her new mate.” Persephone faded into the shadows and slithered out of Zagreus’s cell into the hallway.

Zagreus hugged Dionysus firmly, “Thank you brother for all you have done. But now there is someone who really needs your saving. Also, you dropped your wallet.”

Dionysus nodded, picked up his wallet, and ran out of the door. He peeked into every cell window, but none seemed to have Aria in them. *There’s no way I’m going to find her.* He collapsed to his knees. *I need a miracle.*

The stampede of four gigantic feet stomped down the corridors. Cerberus came running toward Dionysus before spitting a small chewed-up toy at his feet. He picked it up and gave it a quick squeeze as Cerberus sat patiently for him to throw it once more.

“Can you pick up on scents?” Dionysus asked the three-headed K9.

“Woof.”

“Awesome. You think you could pick up a smell from this wallet?”

“Woof.” Cerberus sat down wagging his tail.

“Yes!” Dionysus shouted pumping his fist in the air. “Can you smell a woman? Or wine?” He held the wallet out to the dog’s three noses.

Cerberus gave the wallet a few sniffs. One with each nose. “Woof. Woof! Woof!”

“Let’s ride.” He hopped on Cerberus’s back and the two galloped heroically down the hallway.

Cerberus barreled down the labyrinth hallways, cutting corners sharply before stopping at a cell on the south end of the prison.

“Is this her?”

“Woof.”

Dionysus climbed down off of his behemoth steed. He noticed this cell door was not only unlocked but slightly open. Without hesitation, he walked in. Aria sat muzzled, tied to a chair. He yanked the muzzle from her mouth. “Are you okay?”

“I like her. She seems nice,” Persephone’s voice echoed through the shadows of the room. “Maybe you can give me some grandchildren.”

“What? No!” Both Aria and Dionysus said in unison.

“Yes!” Persephone laughed maniacally.

“Grandma Rhea will be here any minute and free us from this prison!”

“Is that what you think?” Persephone asked. She slithered out from the shadows. “Why do you think she lent you the money?”

Dionysus’s eyes wandered. “What do you mean?”

A second body slid out from the shadows. Grandma Rhea. “You left us no choice.”

“Grandma..” Dionysus said softly. He could feel his heart thud loudly against his chest.

“Yes, baby. I helped your mother, but not because I wanted grandchildren. I want something much greater from you. Great. Grand. Babies.”

“Why?” Dionysus gasped.

Persephone and Rhea smiled at each other.

“Little shoes,” Rhea said.

“Tiny little feet,” Persephone said.

“Little, cute pajamas.”

“Chubby, little cheeks.”

The pair seemed to grow more eager and excited with each answer.

“This is what a mother wants more than anything, baby,” Rhea said. She and Persephone exited the room. “More babies.” They slammed the door shut, disappeared, and left Dionysus to rot in the cell as they did Zagreus.

“I tried to save you,” Dionysus said untying Aria.

As her limbs were freed, she looked back at Dionysus and said, “You did.”

“What do you mean? We’re trapped together in hell.”

She reached into her pocket and pulled out the skeleton key. “We’re not trapped.” He grabbed Aria by the waist, pulled her close, and kissed her passionately.

“Wow. Where’d you learn to do that?” Aria said fanning herself.

“The couple from the picnic.”

They laughed, leaning closely into each other’s bodies.

As Aria wiped the tears of joy from her eyes, she said, “So, uh.. what do you want to do now?”

Dionysus looked at her. He smiled. He looked around at the room they shared. A couch and TV just like Zagerus had.

“We could stay here for a little while. Try it out.” He smiled.

She smiled. “I was thinking more of a hand job, but yeah, I’d like that.”

The End.

Gods' Country

The Democratic-Republican National Convention was packed shoulder to shoulder and the air filled with thunderous applause as Tennessee Senator Ron Donald walked onto the stage in a well-tailored suit, a small American Flag pinned on his collar.

“Fellow Americans,” he said. “I am so proud to see us working together to take down a common enemy.”

The crowd erupted into jeers and boos. Senator Donald held his hand up for them to silence.

“That’s right,” he said, “ever since the gods climbed down from Mount Olympus and joined the rest of us, our world has been in chaos. These are not good people. Hell, they aren’t people at all! These gods came here *undocumented* and brought all their problems with them. I’m proud to say, “your stay here will be short. This isn’t the gods’ country. *This is God’s country.*” The Senator pointed to the sky and lipped the word, “Amen.”

A sea of waving hands, and applause fueled Senator Donald to continue.

“The Olympian Party wants to challenge our way of thinking,” he said. “Change our minds. Change our Constitution so that they can run for office. Do you know what I say?”

He paused. The crowd sat quietly.

“The Constitution *cannot* and *will not* be amended,” he said, “I will not change my mind. It is my God-given right *as an American* to believe what I want. If I had children, I would be frightened for their futures.”

The audience roared in agreement.

“America, we have a choice to make in November,” Senator Donald said. “Will we stand idly by while the Greek gods rape our great nation, kill our babies, mate with our women, and destroy our democracy?”

“No!” the crowd shouted.

“Or are we going to pull up our pant legs and take our country back!” Donald said, raising both fists in the air. He waited for the applause to settle. “My opponent in November, Hera will do everything in her power to demonize us, ostracize us, and frankly, shit all over the American way.”

The building shook with jeers from the passionate crowd.

“We don’t need her magic,” he said, “We don’t need her power. She thinks you all are second-rate citizens. A room full of silver medals- number twos. I see a room full of winners. I see the sons of Thomas Jefferson. The daughters of Andrew Jackson. The descendants of the only god welcomed on this side of the Atlantic. *I see Americans* and I see America winning in November and finally kicking these criminals, these false idols out of here!” Senator Ron Donald said, making an umpire gesture with his hand. “See you in November, America. God Bless!”

Senator Donald raised a peace sign with both hands as he made his way backstage. Chants of “God Bless, America” echoed from the arena to the parking lot as he quickly left through the backdoor.

Donald turned to a campaign volunteer and asked, “Where can I find some food around here?”

A young woman with short, red hair moved her microphone down away from her lips and said, “My aunt works at the diner just down the street. If you head out now, you can beat the crowd. We still have Kid Rock and Ariana Grande’s unity concert to end the show.”

“Fantastic,” Donald said as he stuffed a five-dollar bill into her sports coat pocket. “Be a doll and bring my car around, won’t you?”

She stared blankly at him, her eyebrows scrunched in confusion.

He stared back before snapping his fingers twice.

The staffer exhaled before leaving to bring his car around. She rolled her eyes and tossed him his keys.

“Thank you, sweet cheeks,” he said, climbing into the warm, leather seat of the Ford Fusion.

“My name is Medea, by the way,” she said as he slammed his door shut.

Ten minutes later, Ron Donald pulled into a small-town diner named “Demeter’s Meats.” He removed his suit coat and left it in the front seat before walking in. The restaurant was empty, so he sat at the nearest table. His security sat at the table adjacent.

A young waitress with her brown hair tied tightly into a ponytail walked up to him and said, “Hello, my name is Circe. Welcome to Demeter’s Meats. Would you like a menu?”

“Yes, I would.”

She handed him a paper menu and waited patiently for him to select his meal.

He scanned the menu briefly before asking, “Is this Greek? No American food?”

“American food? Like French fries?” she asked.

“Freedom Fries, young lady,” Donald said, “And yes, you know, American foods: spaghetti, tacos, kung pao chicken. All I see on here is lamb and dried-up bread.”

“Sir, those meals aren’t Amer –” she began to say but was interrupted.

“Just go on to the back and tell your cook to do his best interpretation of a burrito.”

The waitress Circe paused to breathe deeply before picking up the paper menu. “Yes, sir. I’ll get right on that,” she said. She walked to the back of the kitchen and approached the cook, her great-grandmother, Demeter.

“He’s here,” Circe said. “I know you wanted to talk some sense into him, but he’s kind of a piece of shit.”

Demeter took her gloves off and said, “Circe, he will listen to reason, or he will listen to his gut. The two often don’t coincide.”

“Grandma, I think you underestimate how shitty this particular man is.”

“Baby, he can always get shittier,” Demeter said patting Circe on the shoulder with a smile.

Ron Donald sat at the lone table talking quietly on his cellphone, “She wants the boat? That’s just not going to happen. I don’t care what Debra’s lawyer said. You take that woman for all she’s worth. Yes.. uh-huh... Look, it’s been three years since she ran off to one of those Greek orgies- a traitor to her kind. She’s that bum Zagerus’s problem now. He can buy her a fucking boat.”

Demeter approached his table with a hot burrito on a square glass plate and said, “Hello, sir. My name is Demeter and I own this establishment. I’d like to speak with you for a moment.”

Senator Donald looked up, rolled his eyes, and said, “No. No. I don’t care that she bought it. I bought those implants. We’ll call it even... Look, I have to go. Someone is being *very rude*.” He hung up the phone, looked at the old woman, and said, “You have sixty seconds.”

Demeter smiled gently and placed the burrito in front of him, and said, “Sir, I believe you are making it difficult for mortals and gods to live harmoniously. We didn’t leave Olympus because we wanted to take your country from you. Most of us want to be more like you, not take from you. Can’t you see that?”

“All I see is a poor imitation of a burrito that I’m being forced to eat,” Donald said, “You have a lot of nerve thinking you can just swim across the Atlantic and take our land.”

“Sir,” she said.

“I’m not finished,” he said, “I will not sit around and let your kind corrupt with spells and sorcery.” He stuck his fork into the burrito.

“Sir. We want unity and peace, not-“

“Your sixty seconds are up,” he said, “Now, fetch me some salsa. *American salsa*.”

Demeter’s eyes lowered in frustration. “Yes, sir,” she said.

She got up from the table and walked to the back of the kitchen where Circe was waiting.

“So, is he going to chill out, or stay a massive turd?” Circe asked.

“Massive turd,” Demeter said, she grabbed a container of salsa from the walk-in refrigerator.

“Give him the salsa and leave him be,” Demeter said.

“Yes, Grandma,” Circe said.

She walked back to the kitchen, opened the cabinet labeled “Forbidden Fruits” and looked around through her grandmother Demeter’s magical spices. She eventually found one labeled, “Fertility Seasoning.”

“If Grandma won’t teach this sack of shit a lesson, I will.” She sprinkled the spice generously into the salsa.

Circe walked over with a wide grin and kindly smeared the salsa all over the half-eaten burrito in front of Senator Donald.

“Wonderful,” he said, “Now, begone.” He waved her away.

She smiled and shook her head and walked away.

Twenty minutes later, he arose from the booth, unbuttoned his pants and patted his stomach. “Mhm. That’s good food,” he said, “Good *American* food.” He made sure everyone in the diner could hear him.

The next morning, Ron Donald sat on the toilet, pondering his race against Hera. He thought how he would cleanse the world of the gods and their creatures. He could feel the burrito from the previous night trying to free itself but to no avail. After a few strenuous pushes, he decided to get up and try again later. After all, Ron Donald was a busy man.

He continued the campaign trail for the next couple of days. He championed the rights of the unborn and signed legislation into law protecting anything with a heartbeat. Meanwhile, he had the worst case of constipation in his life. He hadn’t had a bowel movement in more than a week. He figured he’d better see a gastroenterologist.

A few days later, the senator sat patiently on the white, crinkly paper of an examination table with Tennessee's top gastroenterologist, Dr. Andrea Pinch. She walked into the room holding a clipboard.

"Ron Donald?"

"*Senator* Ron Donald."

She rolled her eyes. "*Senator* Donald," she said, "The MRI shows a large blockage in your lower intestine."

"Speak to me in English, sweet cheeks."

"Doctor Pinch."

"Huh?"

"My name is *Doctor* Andrea Pinch," she said. "Do not call me, "sweet cheeks."

He rolled his eyes and crossed his arms across his chest. "Dr. Pinch, what do you mean by "large blockage?"

"Whatever you've eaten in the past week seems to be reluctant to pass, causing your bowels to compact."

"So, I'm full of shit?"

"Yes," she said, "but you're also very backed up with fecal matter. I would like to take a listen." She readied the stethoscope from around her neck.

Ron Donald reluctantly laid back onto the crinkly paper and lifted his shirt exposing his protruding stomach.

She put the cold end of the tool against his stomach and listened closely for any abnormality. After a few minutes, she removed the stethoscope and sat down.

“Doc, what’s going on?”

She remained quiet.

“Dr. Pinch, tell me what’s going on right this instant!”

She exhaled and scooted closer, “Sir, are you sexually active?”

A long pause quieted the room.

“Why, yes. I am,” he said, “Why do you ask?” He uncomfortably lifted himself to a sitting position.

“Well,” she said, “We’re going to need to do an ultrasound. I believe you may be pregnant.”

“I’m what?” he said, “Pregnant? Preposterous!” He shouted and failed to pull his shirt down over his hard, round stomach.

“Yes. I didn’t think it was possible,” she said, “but there is a heartbeat in your lower intestine.”

“You’re out of your mind, *sweet cheeks*,” he snarled as he got up from the bench. A sharp pain in his lower abdomen caused him to almost fall over.

Dr. Pinch braced him. “If you don’t believe me, you should at least seek a second opinion. We can refer you to an obstetrician.”

The next day in the obstetrician’s office, heard a loud thumping as the doctor rubbed a greased wand over his belly. “You see, Senator. That is the heartbeat right there. Congratulations!”

Ron Donald yanked his shirt over his stomach. “Congratulations?!” he shouted, “You put on some rubber gloves and cut this abomination out from me right this minute!”

“I can’t,” the doctor said, “It’s got a heartbeat.”

“And?”

“And,” the doctor said, “you helped pass a law this week outlawing the removal of anything with a heartbeat. Remember?”

Senator Ron Donald’s face went pale. He tapped his fingers rapidly and looked around the room. “Dr. Pinch can do it?” he asked, “It is a bowel blockage after all.”

“No, sir,” the doctor said, “you didn’t leave any wiggle room in the bill. A heartbeat is a heartbeat.” He removed his gloves. “Congratulations on the magic of childbirth.”

His legs still propped up in metal stirrups, the senator pondered his options.

I’ll just go to Mexico and dump this thing off. I’ll cut this little shit out of me if it’s the last thing I do.

In Tijuana, he wore a large hat and sunglasses to hide his identity. His stomach had grown so incredibly that no pair of pants he owned would fit. So, he wore a red maternity gown. He walked into a brick building without a sign in search of a specialist in the area named, Dr. Machaon. He found a young man with a short-sleeved white lab coat cleaning supplies in a sink.

“Are you Dr. Machaon?” Donald asked.

“I am,” Dr. Machaon said, “Senator Donald, I presume?”

Ron Donald put his finger over his lips feverously and shushed him. “Yes. Keep it down. If word gets out about this, I’ll lose the election.”

“Well, we can’t have that,” Machaon said. He scooted his chair closer to Donald. “So, what are we dealing with here?”

The senator shamefully assisted by lifting his maternity gown to expose his now solid, basketball-sized lower abdomen.

Dr. Machaon smiled and nodded. “I’ve seen this before.”

“You’ve seen this before?”

Dr. Machaon sat back in his chair and smiled. “Back on Olympus.”

Silence sat between them.

“Olympus?” Donald said, “You’re *one of them*.”

“Yep,” Dr. Machaon said, “I’m the god of surgery. This is Demeter’s work. Back in her youth, she’d do this to men all the time. Had to teach them empathy one way or the other. I’m surprised she brought this classic back. Kudos to her.” He full-bellied laughed.

“Enough of this,” Ron Donald said, “Now, are you going to cut this piece of shit out of me or not?”

“Well,” the doctor said, “have you tried being more careful? You should wear protection before going to diners all willy-nilly.”

“You know what? I don’t need this.” Ron Donald growled as he braced his lower back with one hand and waddled out of the office.

On the flight back to Tennessee, Donald sat and wondered how he could hide this until the election. All the while, caressing his round stomach. He felt a kick in his lower gut, and to his surprise, he smiled.

A month later, Ron Donald arrived at the nationally televised Presidential debate. He had a formal three-piece suit tailored to fit around his now-shapely figure. He and Hera took the stage. Hera extended a handshake, but he refused.

The two had a back-and-forth discussion over human rights, mythical rights, immigration, abortion, and other hot-button issues. The moderators maintained control, and the debate went relatively smoothly until Ron Donald commented on Hera's failed marriage.

"My opponent believes she can save the nation, but she couldn't even save her marriage," Donald said.

Hera cleared her throat, "My husband and I are separated. After thousands of years of being unhappy, I gathered the strength to leave and find meaningful love. Zeus is here tonight with his new partner, Ganymede. Of course, my supportive and handsome partner, Poseidon is here as well."

Zeus, Ganymede, and Poseidon all waved from the crowd with supportive smiles.

"Sometimes, keeping a family together means evolving and finding peace rather than maintaining relationships that have grown sour," Hera said. "And what is our nation, but one big family."

The audience applauded loudly. Hera smiled.

"But where are your kids?" Senator Donald said, "Children are the future of this country and-" He squirmed in pain and discomfort. "Children are-" He continued but held his side in agony. "God damn it."

Hera, the moderators, and the audience watched in shock as her political rival fell to one knee. He ripped open his suit to expose his stomach which was visibly shifting with each groan.

“Help! It’s coming!” he shouted.

Hera rushed to his aid. “Is this?” she said, “... Are you going into labor?”

Senator Donald rolled onto his back and a warm, brown liquid ran down his legs puddling on the stage beneath his body.

“Did your water just break?” Hera asked.

“I’m not fucking pregnant!” Ron Donald screamed, “I’m shitting myself!”

In the audience, Circe sat by her mother, laughing manically.

“Oh, Christ,” Hera said. She grabbed Donald’s hand and looked him kindly in the eye, “Just breathe. We’ll deliver this shit baby together. You’re going to make it.”

Ron Donald squeezed her hand tightly, gazed into her eyes, and gently smiled before a wave of contractions brought him to wail in agony. “I can’t- I can’t do this!”

“Yes, you can,” she said, “Push, Senator. Push!” She ripped his suit pants to relieve pressure from his stomach.

The Senator screamed and took quick, short breaths.

“Yes. He’s crowning, everyone,” Hera said. She continued to coach the Senator, while she held his knees in support.

Democratic-Republican candidate, Senator Ron Donald continued to push and scream until an eight-pound humanoid turd tore its way out from Donald’s body, one painful push at a time.

The cries of the new life filled the stadium as Hera cut the cord that connected the Senator to his new child.

Ron Donald laid under the hot, white lights as Hera propped him up with pillows that a stagehand had handed her. The sweat from his body glistened as he was handed his new child. The baby cried loudly until it laid eyes on its father. Two small eyes revealed themselves from the flaps of digested food, followed by what appeared to be a smile.

The young woman with short red hair, came out carrying a golden fleece. She leaned down and wrapped the screaming shit up and swaddled it.

“Madea, right?” Donald said.

“You heard me?” she said.

“Of course,” he said, writhing in pain. “I’m sorry I was an asshole. For what it’s worth, mine is shredded, I think.”

Madea laughed. “Well... Did you learn a lesson, Senator?”

Donald sat on the stage, covered in his feces, sitting in a puddle of brown juice. “I did,” he said.

He turned to Hera, who was using the tail end of her robe to help clean her opponent, “I’m sorry. I was wrong about all of you. Thank you for your help, Hera.”

Hera smiled. “That’s okay,” she said, “Congratulations, senator. You’re a father now,” she said.

Madea helped Ron Donald to his feet and handed him his newly born, brown-eyed baby.

She stood up and wiped the brown gunk from her hands onto her golden, silk robe. The audience sat in shock as she approached the podium, tilted the microphone down to her lips, and

said, “You want to know what my final statement is? This is what happens when politicians are full of shit for too long. It’s time for a change.”

The crowd erupted into applause as Madam Hera stood proudly. An American flag banner descended behind her.

“Senator Donald,” the moderator said, “Is there anything you’d like to add? A final statement, if you’re feeling up for it?”

Ron Donald stared deeply into the eyes of his newborn. His heart was as swollen as his small intestine. Madea handed him a cordless microphone, smiling. He leaned in after a few short breaths. “Yes, I do..” he said, “Debra, you’re not getting that fucking boat.”

The crowd gasped.

“Not until..” he said, “I can take this little shit out to sea. Then, it’s yours.”

The End

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VITA

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