

Mnemosyne

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Characters: Mnemosyne, Titan goddess of memory
Lars, shepherd
Rhea, queen of the universe and mother of Zeus

Place: Tartarus, in the Underworld

Time: The past

Cronos, Titan ruler of the heavens, has been informed by his parents Uranus and Gaia that his son will overthrow him. To prevent the coup, Cronos devours his offspring when they are born. Rhea, his wife, feels for her children and saves their son Zeus by tricking Cronos into eating a rock bundled in clothing. She hides Zeus in Crete, where he is raised by nymphs. Soon Cronos learns of the deception though, and Rhea must resort to changing Zeus into a mortal being and hiding him in the mortal realm. Until the time is right, Rhea waits...

Scene 1

Lars, a shepherd, approaches a wooden door leading to a cave. A black sheep follows beside him. All areas are dark, save a spotlight on Lars. He knocks on the door, and Mnemosyne, Titan goddess of memory, cracks it open and peeks out warily.

MNEMOSYNE

Are you lost?

LARS

I'm looking for the woman who lives here.

MNEMOSYNE

I don't know you. You must have the wrong place.

(Mnemosyne shuts door.)

LARS

(yelling through door)

Please, miss, please—I beg you—I have heard things about you, I know you can help me! At least give us some food! My companion is nearly dead from exhaustion.

MNEMOSYNE

I don't like sheep!

(Pause)

LARS

Well, what do you like?

(Pause)

MNEMOSYNE

Bluebirds.

Scene 2

Same set as Scene 1, but without the sheep. Lars knocks on the door again.

LARS

Miss, I've brought you a bluebird.

(Mnemosyne cracks open door and peeks out.)

MNEMOSYNE

Where is your friend?

LARS

He passed away yesterday.

(Mnemosyne opens door fully and motions for Lars to enter.)

MNEMOSYNE

I'm sorry for that.

LARS

Don't give it another thought, miss. He was old; I should not have led him on such a long journey. But I have brought you a bluebird, a pretty little bold one.

MNEMOSYNE

I see that! Where did you find such a thing in this barren land?

LARS

I have a gift for calling animals. And this one was hardy enough to survive these ruins.

MNEMOSYNE

It won't for long. They never last long down here. Something about the air...it kills the soul.

(Mnemosyne places bluebird in cage.)

LARS

Why do you like bluebirds particularly? Why not some other pretty creature...why not a...dolphin?

(Mnemosyne laughs.)

MNEMOSYNE

A *dolphin*? Well, I suppose I could love a dolphin, even though they're silly...but I love bluebirds because of their beautiful song. So what is your request of me, that you would catch me a bluebird here in the Underworld?

LARS

I have no roots, no past...and I was told that you could help me find it. The people in the nearby village said to look for a wretched hag who lives in the cave deep under a hill. They say you have great knowledge about the past.

MNEMOSYNE

And you believed them? The gossip of the poor and bored?

LARS

I had no reason not to. Though I admit, at first laying eyes upon you, their credibility wavered. You are not the wretched hag they described.

MNEMOSYNE

Flattery won't get you anywhere in this hellhole, shepherd.

LARS

Your locks remind me of red wine.

MNEMOSYNE

I do not have great *knowledge*, per se, about the past, and I certainly know nothing about your specific past. But I do have...abilities. And my locks are fairer than red wine; the light is dim here.

LARS

A wild sunset, then. What kind of abilities?

MNEMOSYNE

I call it...*memory*. The ability to...relive what has happened a long time ago, but only in your mind. It is much more complicated than that, but it is not something you can understand without experiencing it.

LARS

This *memory*...how do I learn it?

MNEMOSYNE

You cannot. It is unique to myself and those who I wish to bestow it upon, and I cannot bestow it upon you. A mere mortal.

LARS

Ah, the lady's face changes. You are a god.

MNEMOSYNE

Does it surprise you?

LARS

Why could a *mere mortal* not possess such a gift? Because we are beneath you?

MNEMOSYNE

Why would I impart something of such infinite preciousness and rarity to you, a shepherd? Because you compliment my beauty, stroke my vanity? Do not be foolish; I am a god, not a woman.

LARS

Even gods desire companionship. I refuse to leave until you help me; I have traveled too far and endured too much to be turned away by an arrogant *woman*.

MNEMOSYNE

Stay if you must, but you will not suffer less here than you have in the wilderness.

Scene 3

Lars stumbles into a barren room from outside, carrying two large pails of water on his back. Mnemosyne is feeding the bluebird in its cage.

MNEMOSYNE

Put them down over there.

(Lars sets the pails down.)

LARS

Your bluebird...it does not sing. I have not yet once heard its music this past month.

MNEMOSYNE

It is dying a slow death. It has lost the inspiration to create song.

LARS

You believe its song is inspired? Not a habit by birth?

MNEMOSYNE

It is not the *song* that is habit by birth, but the inspiration and creativity...that is their birthright. That is why they fascinate me...to be born as a pure form of inspiration... could I capture that gift, I would gladly trade in my own.

LARS

Don't be ridiculous; your powers are enviable enough.

MNEMOSYNE

And what would you know about having powers?

LARS

And what would *you* know about having nothing? What would you know about seeing your life pass by in a blur, no more eventful than the sheep's that you care for? About having all the ambition, but none of the potential? About being mortal, having only one chance to live your dream? I am more the bluebird than you, trapped in a slow death.

(Pause)

MNEMOSYNE

Is that why you covet memory? For your ambitions?

LARS

I covet your gift because I wish to discover *my* birthright. What is my inspiration, my creativity? My parentage? What salt am I made of?

MNEMOSYNE

And what would you do with this knowledge?

LARS

Change the world.

MNEMOSYNE

You mean *rule* the world. You want power, dictatorship. I know more than I'd like to about the male craving for power.

LARS

No, I only aspire to make a difference. To leave my mark, to have a presence in the world even when I am gone. To...what do you call it...to be *remembered*.

MNEMOSYNE

Possessing memory will not achieve your ambitions. Your desire is irrational—I do not understand it.

LARS

When you are mortal, your greatest fear is entering and leaving this world without anyone so much as passing a glance. Without being noticed. I am a shepherd, living a life of seclusion with no one to survive me when I die but my sheep. Were I to immortalize myself in some way, to create something, to change something...

MNEMOSYNE

Bear children.

LARS

What woman would love a man with no past and no future?

MNEMOSYNE

One who is as desperate as he to be immortalized.

LARS

You are already immortal, my lady.

MNEMOSYNE

Living forever is not the same as being immortal, Lars. People—*gods*—can forget about you just as easily while you are alive as when you are dead.

(Lars kisses Mnemosyne.)

LARS

If I ever left, I could never forget about you.

MNEMOSYNE

You cannot keep that promise. It is not in your power; it is not your choice.

LARS

Then I shall never leave.

(They kiss again.)

Scene 4

Lars and Mnemosyne lie in bed naked together, in each other's arms.

LARS

I have confessed my deepest desire, tell me yours.

MNEMOSYNE

Mine? It is embarrassing; it will sound paltry and inconsequential next to yours.

LARS

I promise not to tease you.

MNEMOSYNE

My deepest desire...is a castle in the sky. Surrounded by clouds the color of my hair during sunset, floating high above this bleak desert.

LARS

To live among the other gods?

MNEMOSYNE

To live among the bluebirds.

LARS

What's it like to remember something? To relive the past? Does it take as long as living it?

MNEMOSYNE

No, it's different...it's very quick. Like a lightning bolt. Images that just...flash across your mind for a moment, bright as day.

LARS

A lightning bolt...I like that.

(Pause)

Mnem, do you love me?

MNEMOSYNE

You know, bad things happen to mortals who make gods blush.

LARS

Then please, I beg of you, grant me my wish! Bestow your gift upon my mind!

MNEMOSYNE

It isn't that simple, darling. It is not so much a *gift*, as you call it, but a burden.

Possessing memory is difficult and dangerous. You begin to live in the past; it hinders you from moving forward. You are constrained; you become afraid and wary of the unknown, of what you know you have never experienced. I would not wish it upon anyone.

LARS

Can it not be used for good? For learning from mistakes you have already committed? For reveling in extinguished happiness?

MNEMOSYNE

And for dwelling in a long-ago pain? Of course, but why? Why, when you could experience happiness anew every day, as if it were the first time you felt that way? To love anew? Without memory, you mortals never grow bored of your spouses, and never recall your spouses' infidelities. Is that not a utopia?

LARS

I suppose, but—

MNEMOSYNE

And you! You reason that, if you could recall memories of your parents, that you could discover yourself! All you will find are your predispositions; your parents are not who you are now. But your confidence will be inhibited by knowledge of these predispositions; they will prevent you from becoming a great man.

LARS

Or they could lead me to greater triumphs than I could have ever imagined.

(Mnemosyne sighs.)

MNEMOSYNE

Even if I did transfer the power of memory to you, I don't know if your mind could withstand it. It's risky...a lifetime of memories is a great deal for the mind to absorb all at once.

LARS

I am not afraid.

MNEMOSYNE

But I am. And there's more...I cannot give you the power of memory without bestowing it upon *all* mortals. This is a fundamental law of the gods—we must keep equality among the mortals; we cannot provide one with any advantage or disadvantage over another. And the gods would be exceedingly unhappy if I gave up my powers to the mortals.

LARS

Or maybe you fear, then you will be no better than the mortals. We would be equal.

MNEMOSYNE

No, I would be content with my castle in the sky. But you are right, perhaps the other gods fear losing control over the mortals. I simply cannot do it, my love. It is supremely forbidden.

LARS

I suppose I will have to relinquish my dreams then. I will never be immortalized.

MNEMOSYNE

You already are, beloved.

(They hear a knock on door.)

MNEMOSYNE

Go back to sleep, darling. I will attend to the visitor.

(Mnemosyne walks into the front room and opens the door. Rhea stands outside it.)

MNEMOSYNE

Rhea! This is an unexpected pleasure. What brings you to these parts?

RHEA

Save the drivel, Mnemosyne. Where is he?

MNEMOSYNE

Where is who?

RHEA

Zeus, you silly girl. I have been keeping track of him, and I know he dwells here. The time has come.

MNEMOSYNE

Zeus is certainly *not* here, your Highness. I have never even seen—oh...oh my. Lars...Lars is Zeus? Your Zeus?

RHEA

Is that what he calls himself? Laaaars? What a pathetic mortal name. Yes, I suppose; I need to see Lars. The time has come.

MNEMOSYNE

The time for what?

RHEA

For reclaiming the throne, you daft cow! You know the prophecy. Uranus and Gaia foretold Zeus would overthrow his father and rule the universe. He is of proper age now, and the timing couldn't be better.

MNEMOSYNE

He cannot leave! I won't allow it!

RHEA

What has come over you, child? This is our chance at freedom! Freedom from the caves, the dungeons, the Underworld! And Cronos is getting worse by the day; he has begun killing off the servants in his paranoia. The war is brewing...we need a leader! I have come to render Zeus immortal again so he can claim his rightful place on the throne.

MNEMOSYNE

Lars is not the meant to be the ruler of the universe.

RHEA

Zeus! Zeus! Stop calling him Laaaars, and who are you to deny me my son? You, the black sheep of all gods. Even the villagers call you a wretched hag, you know. I don't understand why you're fighting me on this...

(Mnemosyne blushes and Rhea gasps.)

Why, my stars...you're in love with him!

(Rhea laughs)

You're in love with a...a-a...a mortal! Truly Mnemosyne, you've outdone yourself this time. Consorting with a *mortal*, why, it's preposterous!

MNEMOSYNE

He is not REALLY a mortal, he's YOUR son, and frankly, he is plenty wiser than half the gods I've met. His experiences as a mortal will serve him well as king.

RHEA

Actually, he won't "remember", as you call it...anything. Yes, he will gain the power of memory when he becomes immortal, but he won't recall anything from his mortal life. He can only relive his immortal experiences. So *you*, my lovely, will no longer exist to him once I take him away.

MNEMOSYNE

He loves me.

RHEA

You...*you* are only a detour from the path of his true destiny. A dabbling, if you will. His hand, and his loooove, are promised to Hera, also foretold in the prophecy. Do not presume to hold any significance in my son's life. You are nothing. Now move aside; I will find him myself if you refuse to aid me.

MNEMOSYNE

No, I will turn him over. I cannot change his fate. But please, let me say my farewells to him first, alone.

RHEA

Very well, be quick about it.

(Mnemosyne returns to the bedroom where Lars is deep in sleep. She strokes his hair and speaks without disturbing him.)

MNEMOSYNE

Lars, oh Lars...are you happy? Are you pleased? You will surely be a strong and momentous leader. You are the world's savior. Treasure your mortality; strive towards greatness as if you were to die tomorrow. And Cronos will be conquered—but your greatest achievement will forever be conquering me. I am a woman, Lars. Remember me...

(Mnemosyne places her fingers at Lars' temples and closes her eyes in deep concentration. Tears roll down her cheeks. The bluebird begins to sing.)

When you are king, love...build me a castle in the sky...among the bluebirds that fly...