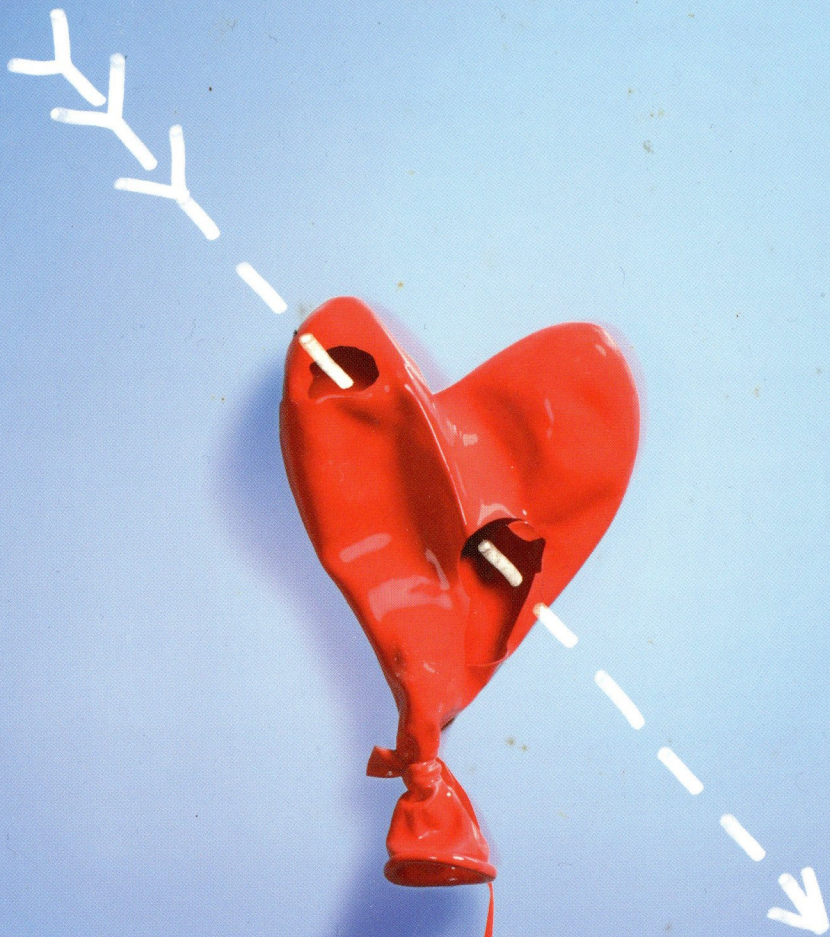


One arrow changes everything.



ARROWS

MELISSA GORZELANCZYK

PEOPLE DON'T UNDERSTAND LOVE.

If they did, they'd get why dance prodigy Karma Clark just can't say goodbye to her boyfriend, Danny. No matter what he says or does or how he hurts her, she can't stay angry with him . . . and can't stop loving him. But there's a reason why Karma is helpless to break things off: she's been shot with a love arrow.

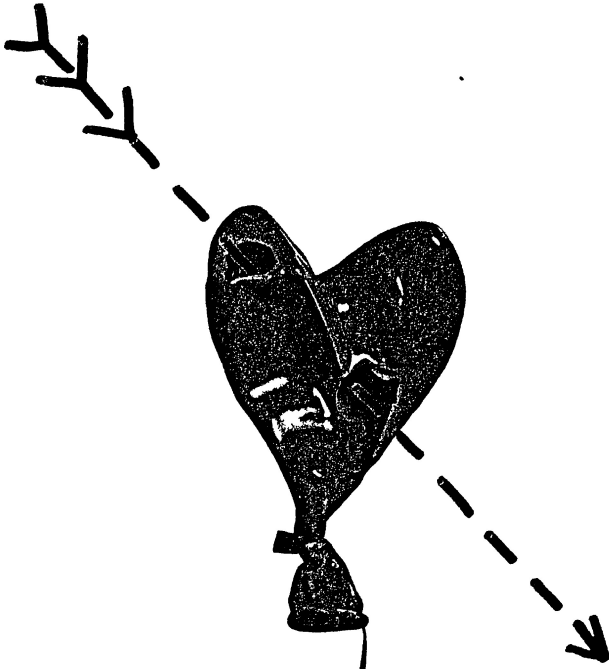
Aaryn, son of Cupid, was supposed to shoot both Karma and Danny but found out too late that the only other arrow in his pack was useless. And with that, Karma's life changed forever. One pregnancy confirmed. One ballet scholarship lost. And dream after dream tossed to the wind.

A clueless Karma doesn't know that her toxic relationship is Aaryn's fault . . . but he's going to get a chance to make things right. He's here to convince Danny to man up and be there for Karma. But what if this god from Mount Olympus finds himself falling in love with a beautiful dancer from Wisconsin who can never love him in return?









ARROWS

MELISSA GORZELANCZYK

PUSTAKA PERDANA



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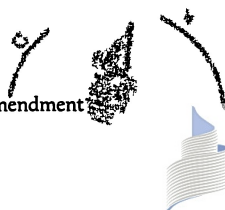
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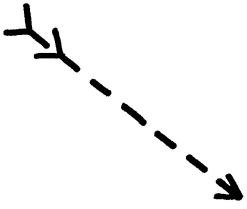
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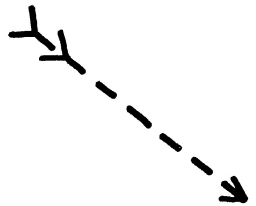
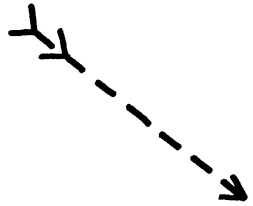


FOR SHEA,
whose love empowered me





ARROWS





»» CHAPTER 1 ««

AARYN

We landed at the edge of a high school parking lot, me with two arrows in my pack. Phoebe let go of my hand to scope out the area, appearing indestructible as she lifted her bow.

“Okay, Aaryn,” she said. We’d just met five minutes earlier, though she was one of the cupids all the students had heard about. She gestured with her chin. “Them.”

Arcs of golden light swam through the arrow she nocked into her bow, and when she retracted, the fletching made a dent against her cheek. Her kohl-lined eyes focused on a couple standing by the door of the high school, dressed up for their homecoming dance. They had no idea what was coming.

The girl, a short redhead in stilettos, darted quick glances at her date, who was wiping his palms on his suit pants. Freakishly tall, that guy.

Phoebe paused. With a snap, a glittery path tore through the air. The arrow disintegrated with a burst of light through the boy’s tie. Phoebe half smiled as her arms relaxed.

“Well, Son of Eros—have you ever experienced the arrows like this?” she asked.

“No. Just target practice. Dead arrows.”

She stood beside me, and for a second I felt awesome, getting one of the prettiest goddesses as my proctor.

“How cool is it that we ended up together on finals day?” She winked. “You’re just the god I was hoping to get.”

“Oh, uh, really?”

“Mm-hmm. Tonight is definitely helping my status.”

“Glad to hear it.” I cleared my throat, anxious to get on with the test. She seemed cool, though. Maybe she’d want to get to know me once I graduated.

With a satisfied smile, Phoebe placed a second arrow against the silver wire and brought the redhead into her sights. She did this little square-up-and-hesitate thing with her shoulders. The arrow flew and disappeared. Direct hit.

Things got pretty ridiculous from there. The teens held each other for a long time, the guy bending to her height, smoothing her hair out of the way so they could have an all-out tongue war. And then the reality of it all struck me.

Love was beginning to unfold out there, actual love. No one else in the world would matter as much to them as they did to each other. Two humans who hadn’t even reached adulthood, who’d barely started to learn about life, and they’d already found their soul mates. In Lakefield, Wisconsin, of all places.

I scanned the parking lot, which was as dead as the nearby farm field. “Who am I supposed to shoot?”

“Well.” Phoebe smiled. “I was thinking I should help you find the perfect couple. That’s not my job, just so you know—but I’d love to do a little favor for you. Eros would appreciate that, I’m sure.”

“I’m going to check out the school.”

“You can’t open the doors.”

“No one’s around,” I said.

“Aaryn. Wait. You know the code.”

I rocked on my heels, annoyed that she was right. The code about not opening doors was one of many the gods followed. *Never draw attention to yourself among humans.* A door opening by itself? Humans got creeped out by stuff like that.

Then another girl’s voice. I swung my quiver around on the leather strap across my chest. Two more teens were there. The girl, a brunette, threw her arms around the redhead—shocker, she’d stopped kissing the tall guy—then leapt to catch up to her date, some idiot wearing a suit coat and baseball cap. A real romantic.

I slid an arrow from my pack. It glowed brightly, a steady, vibrant orange.

“Ready to join the ranks?” Phoebe asked. Pride filled her voice. The light from my arrow cast shadows beneath her eyes.

And my targets? Too easy under that powerful parking lot light. The girl was smiling, acting like her date was the most interesting person in the world, though she seemed like the interesting one: athletic body shown off by an airy pink dress.

I snorted under my breath as the guy’s voice carried into the darkness. “You’re so sexy, Karma,” he said. Ha. What a name. Humans actually believed in stuff like karma. Mr. Romantic pulled her in, massaging her back as they kissed, his hands creeping lower and lower until they curved over her ass.

I sighed, then closed one eye. Everything around me blurred except the girl. This was it. My first match. The metal between my fingers glowing, the power to change someone’s life forever. Yes, I was the son of Eros, privileged, but like everyone else at

finals, this match was the beginning of my legacy. For a second my chest felt like it was going to explode.

I let go.

The arrow melted into the girl's back, a bull's-eye shot. The effect was immediate. She gasped when the kiss ended and her hands slid up his neck, slow and slinky. The power of the enchantment had struck. I drew out my last arrow, which had been matched as a pair. The arrows were made that way—made for each other, just like their targets.

“What the hell—” I held the arrow up. It wasn't glowing.

Phoebe started as I flicked my thumb on the blunt end. “Wait a minute, is that . . . ?” She snatched the arrow and shook it, like that might help. “A practice arrow? Is this some kind of joke?”

The guy began to lead his lovesick date into the back of a pickup truck.

“There's still time, right?” I said. “Let's just head back for a replacement arrow. There must be some record of the pair.”

Our eyes met as we checked the Hive, our social web, accessible to us with a single thought. One thought—a power button—and we controlled a galaxy of information with our minds. The rectangular display inside my mind lit up, ready to search.

“No way.” The arrow ration house had closed seven minutes ago.

Phoebe's hands covered her mouth.

“How could this happen? I can't let you go to Blackout, Aaryn, I can't. This is—”

“Don't get crazy. I'm not going to Blackout. Dad wouldn't let them do that.”

“This is serious. You can't pass finals. You really can't pass.

Leaving a human like this, only one of them shot, it's like—the worst possible failure.” She made a wild hand motion. “This is going to ruin me.”

“Jeez, don't panic yet.”

“I'm not panicking!”

Perfect. I twisted the end of my bow against the pavement, though I had to admit my pulse had sped up.

Blackout.

Where the failed gods go.

“How could you forget to grab a matching pair?” Her voice was getting shrill.

“Relax. This isn't my fault.”

“You didn't let your pack out of your sight, right?”

My bow stopped spinning. I couldn't tell her I'd been distracted by the Hive or that I'd gone into a private comb to compare proctors with my buddy Chaz. She'd think I was a complete idiot. “I kept my pack right here the whole time,” I lied, tugging the strap.

The girl was laughing again, her head popping up for a second as Mr. Romantic shook out a quilt and handed her the corner.

“What am I going to do?” Phoebe said. “If the assembly finds out . . . No, they can't, we have to lie. They can't find out.”

They were sitting up now, facing each other, him leaning in to nuzzle her ear. Time on Earth seemed to slow. At least the guy appeared to like her.

“Do you, uh, know anyone? Who went to Blackout?” My voice was low.

“No. Of course not. Never.”

Where the failed gods go as humans, their memories wiped.

The teens were kissing again, and then they flopped out of sight. *Thump*. One of them bumped the truck bed.

“This is what we’re going to do.” Phoebe squeezed my arm until it stung, but I didn’t bother pulling away. “No one is going to find out about this. Got it? No one.”

“Do you think she’ll be okay?” I nodded at the truck.

“Oh, um, I don’t know, maybe—whatever! Forget about them. I’m going to say you passed. You passed, okay? If the assembly finds out about that arrow, there will be no mercy. It won’t matter whose son you are.”

I swallowed, though it felt like a knife was picking at my throat. “You’re the boss. Tonight never happened.”

Phoebe slid her hair behind her ears and took a shaking breath. Her gauge earrings made her face seem fierce. “This is really bad, I’ll admit it, really, really bad, but it’s going to be okay, I promise.”

“Well, hey—not everyone gets a happy ending.” My parents, for instance.

“We have to get out of here.” Phoebe grabbed my hand and yanked. Within seconds we had sliced through the atmosphere and returned to Mount Olympus, fog-breath circling our feet. There was white all around us, silver, gold, and stone. The land of the gods. We stood in the enormous corridor in silence, two cupids, though it didn’t feel awesome the way I’d expected. Phoebe’s emerald eyes were still watery, her hands trembling. She swallowed, which sounded more like a gulp.

“So, um, yeah . . . happy you passed?”

The question left a sour feeling in my stomach. That girl down there. Her life had changed, all right. My fist fell slack. “Yeah. Finals. Wow.”

“You’ll be a good cupid,” she added, almost like an apology for how the night had gone. “Everything will be fine, see? No one even knows we’re back. And you—are you okay?”

“I’ll be fine.”

“To think I almost lost you tonight. Oh my God, I shouldn’t even be saying that up here.”

Her anxiety was getting to me. A tight, suffocating feeling began to clench my chest. I stood tall, tried to get rid of it. I was a cupid, finally, after all those years of working my ass off. And hey—the three-year age gap between Phoebe and me had become irrelevant. Yeah, I was younger, but we were equals now. We’d botched finals together and survived. Maybe chocolate and flowers would help her feel better.

I offered her my arm, but the tight feeling stuck. “Let’s see if there’s a party.”



“I’m happy for you,” I said. My mouth had a sour taste.

“Thanks. I gotta get back in. See you at school.”

He turned, but I pulled him in for a hug and let my cheek rest against his neck for a long time, a safe, beloved place. “See you,” I said. I clung to that promise, like seeing him tomorrow would save me.

Like it would save us.



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