

# THE KEEPER OF SECRETS

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R E P R E S E N T E D B Y T H E V I N E Y S H A W A G E N C Y

The Myth of the Lynx

Her paws spread over the rocky ground, never flinching on the jagged pieces. It was dark, the sliver of white above not offering much in the way of light. The trees creaked as she wound her way through them. And layered behind their woody groans, there was the sound of the mountain, singing.

The whiskery fur on the tips of her ears fluttered in the breeze and captured the sound more vividly. She knew the mountain's song, more ancient than her, but she didn't understand it.

She was new to this world, the first of her kind. No other creature had paws as broad as hers with claws that could not only climb up the tree but down it too. No other creature had fur as thick. Not the wolf, whose hair bristled in the wind. Her fur nestled close to her body. But she was not as fast as the wolf, nor did she have a pack to keep her safe. She was alone. Incredibly alone.

She blinked dull grey eyes and inhaled the scent of apples. Not a food she'd eat. She preferred the hare, who made helpful rustles as they danced hither and thither.

*If only*, she thought. But if only what?

Padding into the clearing, she blinked up at the sky. The dark seemed to watch. Waiting. Was there only darkness up there? She'd heard the humans talk of points of light pierced into the black like snowdrops. But she could not see them.

Lowering her head, she shook to the tip of her bobbed tail and barked like the wolf - only hers was a sound as rough as pine needles. In the valley, she saw movement. Activity. Dancing flames and the humans who laughed and whispered.

Soundlessly, one of them appeared before her, clutching an object the shape of an apple. She had never been so close to a human before; she'd kept away from them. How quick they were to

catch the hare and eat them, how clever they were to tame the wolf and keep it leashed, how skilled they were at making fire to roast the deer. What would they do with one such as her?

‘Don’t be afraid,’ the human said, her words like rain falling through the leaves. ‘I am not quite a human, though I live amongst them. My name is Pandora.’ Pandora blinked and the creature noticed Pandora’s eyes had the fire dancing in them. As though reading her mind, Pandora said: ‘It’s nothing to be afraid of.’

The creature sniffed for a scent, but the smells of fire came only from the human fire below. Pandora smelled of nothing at all. The creature couldn’t stop her fur from stiffening.

‘Oh,’ Pandora sighed, her eyes flashing. ‘Perhaps the evils I released...’ And here Pandora gestured to the strange object she clung to before her head bowed. ‘Perhaps they’ve reached even you, lonely one.’

The creature’s head bowed too then, because the weight of loneliness is heavy.

‘I think we are the same,’ Pandora said. ‘We are alone, you and I.’

She met Pandora’s gaze and saw the fire, bright and fierce. But the fire made the darkness behind it darker still. *I have no fire*, the creature thinks. *Only the darkness.*

‘You want the light?’ Pandora said and smiled. ‘I can give you that. It’s here, in this jar. It is the only thing left inside.’

Pandora lifted the object closer and as she did so, the creature’s eyes flashed like the fire, no longer dull grey but dazzling yellow. What had seemed only dim before, had shape and edges. What she’d only heard before had shadow and form. What she’d once smelled had texture and movement too. In the valley below, she saw it all; she saw *into* those humans. Their fears and their hidden truths. Their strengths and weaknesses. Their hate and their love.

The creature began to growl like the bear. How much those humans had and how much they still wanted. She tore her gaze away and looked up and there – at last! – she saw the pinpricks of

light blinking down from above. The sky was alive. *She* was alive. The mountain sang and at last she understood its meaning. She was not alone.

What was this object Pandora held that had given her this sight? She tentatively sniffed until her whiskers touched its edges. Like the humans, within it was a secret too, as intricate as a spider's web - and as breakable. The mountain's song gave this secret a name: hope. It was so tiny, so transparent, it was barely a thing at all.

'Maybe,' Pandora said, 'you could take it. You see it, don't you? The thing inside?'

The creature's eyes flashed and yes, she saw that barely-there pulse called hope.

'It's an easy thing to lose,' Pandora said, eyes tired and sad. 'And I'm not sure how much longer I can stop it from disappearing altogether. The temptation,' she said and clucked her tongue. 'The temptation amongst the humans is too strong - as it was too strong in me - to lift the lid.'

Pandora cradled the object, the jar, closer to her body and the creature saw that her eyes blazed with uncertainty.

'There are many enemies in this world,' Pandora continued with a shake. 'The sea, the mountains that spew fire, the bitter cold, the lack of water, and the ground that shakes itself apart. Predator against prey. And worst yet, the human heart that seeks to destroy another for its gruesome pleasure. There are so many who would lift the lid on this jar just to watch their enemy fall.'

The creature frowned. She did not have any enemy, save the cold and the trouble of catching enough to eat. And she didn't see how lifting the lid on a jar would do much harm.

Pandora nodded, understanding her. 'How do you survive your enemy the cold?'

She thought of her cave and of her thick fur and of her clever ears that heard the hare's rustling and now her eyes that could see through the darkness.

Pandora shook her head. ‘Those are gifts, true, but they are not what keeps you alive. What keeps you alive is in this jar.’

The creature heard the mountain sing it: hope. She saw slivers of it, so impossibly thin and fine, stretch out from its hidden place to the humans by the fire. And a strand stretched to her.

‘All the world can call upon it,’ Pandora said. ‘It can reach out to every living thing.’

The creature sniffed at the strands but there was no scent, no sound. She swiped at the strand but it did not break – she did not seem to touch it at all.

‘It’s strange,’ Pandora said. ‘Hope is not a tangible thing at all. And yet – and yet without it, I fear we are all lost. You understand now, lonely one? That to lift the lid will mean hope is lost. And the best way to destroy an enemy is to take away their hope.’

Pandora shivered – as did the creature.

‘Will you guard it then? If you do, it will keep you company on your long journeys through the mountain. It will keep your paws warm even in the thickest snow. It will protect you from the iciest of winds.’

She wanted all of those things – but her ears twitched and flattened, as though buffeted by a howling wind.

‘Yes,’ Pandora said, reading her fear. ‘It’s not something you can ever give up. The want for rest may become hard to resist - but giving up hope, even for a second, will risk losing it entirely. It’s a thing to keep going, to persist in, to never, ever put down. It may seem like an impossible burden - which is why I offer you some help.’

Pandora raised her hand, while still holding the jar with the other, and beckoned to two of the humans who were stood apart from the others. The humans bowed their heads as they approached.

## The Keeper of Secrets by Ele Nash

‘Not all humans are bad,’ Pandora said. ‘Some are even glorious. These two,’ they lifted their nervous gaze and the creature saw one was tall with eyes like night while the other was small with eyes like day. ‘They will help protect you’

The humans nodded and truth and honesty seemed to radiate from them as warm as any fire. The loneliness within the creature faded.

‘Carry the secret,’ Pandora said, offering her the jar. ‘Keep it safe so that no human can take it. No wolf, no tiger. No lion. No sea. No icy wind. Keep it. Keep this secret with all the others that you know. And I promise these humans, and every one of their children, and their children’s children, every one of their line will protect every one of yours so that the world never loses its hope. Are we agreed?’

The creature held the weight of the jar – which was suddenly nothing at all but the secret itself. It had appeared so insubstantial, so thin and reedy – which indeed it was - but it was also heavy. It would slow her down as she trekked across the mountain.

As she thought all of this, without realising, she’d already tucked the secret within her. She thought it fluttered beneath her stomach but that was the new life she carried, little ones such as she to help carry the secret within them too.

Her eyes flashed and she saw the world for what it was: a web of parts delicately linked by this thing called hope. Each strand relied on other strands, spreading to the driest deserts and the coldest mountains and the deepest seas and even out to the stars themselves.

‘You have a name then, at last,’ Pandora said, smiling. She saw that the fire in Pandora’s eyes was only a spark, like the human’s. The fiery eyes belonged to just her now. ‘You have the light, Lynx.’

She inhaled and the name *lynx* burned within. She felt suddenly peaceful.

Pandora bowed her head once more, as did the humans. They walked, shoulders back as though a great weight had been lifted – which it had – back to the fire. Some of the whispering

humans turned their grimaces toward the Lynx. Her eyes flashed and the humans recoiled. Then she turned away, lips sealed in a curving smile.

The Lynx – so glad for her name! – breathed in the crisp air and felt the first flake of snow fall. As each flake came to rest, covering the rocks and rotting apples in white as sparkling as crystals, she began to walk, as she’s walked ever since, patrolling the mountain, listening to its ancient song and seeing with her light-filled eyes that the heavy, fragile secret is kept safe.

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This was the job of the Lynx, all Lynx. Over hundreds of thousands of years, they were the keepers of secrets. And they did it well, until the Lynx began to think that hope was invincible. But it was exactly then that those whispering humans, grown greedier and more selfish with time, began to rid the world of the Lynx. And not just them, but also the tiger and the leatherback turtle and the mountain gorilla and the giant panda and the monarch butterfly and the Bluefin tuna. And so many tiny insects, the world had yet to name them. The secret became endangered too, with fewer Lynx to keep it and to carry it. The strands broke apart and the web that kept hope alive throughout the world became full of holes and empty spaces.

With the world in a torment of storms and earth tremors, in war and injustice, in famine and in flood, the Lynx wakes with only one thought. Fragile strands of a spider’s web cling to his fur as he makes his way down the mountain and into the clearing. The secret, while grown ever more broken, has grown ever more heavy. He is alone, as he’s always liked to be. But now he feels lonely. He can’t carry hope without help – and human help is what he seeks.