

## Stuck Like a Dope With a Thing Called Hope

Of all good things that mortals lack, hope in the soul alone stays back

*Greek mythology arrives in 21<sup>st</sup> century reality*

1,000 words

I want to say I wish I could have a five pound note for each time somebody comes out with, “What’s in that precious box of yours then, Pandora?” But it’s safer to keep quiet, because since The Incident everybody round here is angry or insanely jealous or trying to get in my knickers. I don’t blame them for the last one. I might be made originally from sticky grey *lutum*, but my clay days are over. I have become all woman.

I blame all the bad stuff on the incompetent Lilitha, a witch with whom I now inhabit a dump. Everything that’s happened is her fault. It was Lilitha, you see, who grabbed my box and opened it, as if the spirit of Zeus were in her very gristle. Forget what Wikipedia says. I never put so much as a finger on the damn thing. It was all down to Lilitha the Lid Lifter, with her long nosy nose, her dangly shiny green plastic earrings, that she makes out are pure freeze-dried toad snot, and her bilious spider web complexion.

Whoever thought I’d end up living with a witch? It’s bonkers. But I’m a survivor. I’m the P girl. The diva. They’re desperate to get me on telly and there’s a bidding war going on right now between *Love Island* and *I’m a Celeb*. I’ve got the best ever back story. It goes like this. One moment I am sleeping like a baby in sixth century Athens then next thing I know, I wake up in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the United Kingdom, in Epping, deep in the forest. And it’s a real pain because I’m inside a tatty house and Lilitha’s a lousy cook and there isn’t a nail bar within ten miles. Somehow since I got to Essex, I keep wanting manicures. And don’t even talk to me about kebab shops. I can’t eat that stuff. I am a dolmades and stifado girl.

It’s a real pain, living with Lilitha, who I am sorry to say is a total twat whose magical powers have unfortunately waxed and waned long since. How do I put this? She’s useless.

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And her familiar, a common black and white domestic short hair, is constantly sleeping. In fact today it hasn't moved an inch from where it was yesterday, it looks totally moth-eaten and, oh, one of its ears has fallen off. Just a moment. Oh dear. I see. Right. May the gods rest its poor soul. Makes perfect sense now. A lot of fighting went on with the forest cats and poor pussy did come off the worse for wear, though he was a little tinker around the dog. He hated the dog. I'm not keen myself. That dog has eaten everything in the larder and now we're starving because it pees on the spinach patch and nothing grows any more. But the dog's getting fed somewhere because he still tries to have sex with everything and everybody. Except Lilitha and me. She's too ugly, even for a dog. And me? I just give it a quick kick up its randy arse. That dog needs a spell put on it. By a vet with a needle.

It amazes me that people still come around for spells, even though it's all over social media that Lilitha is crap. And when they turn up, they always ask the question, "What's in that box?"

According to Lilitha, I am quite good at looking like a stupid girl with no brain but I am not stupid and when I see the old witch trying to conjure up a steak dinner from a used frog, I know fully well which one of us is stupid.

My public, who adore me, reckon I came via one of Lilith's pathetic mistakes but they love that I am here. I reward them for their loyalty with pics of me in my skimpiest Victoria's Secret. You should see my Instagram. It's bloody brilliant.

But why do I stay here? Well, I'm waiting for the call from Channel Five. Meantime I am not flourishing. And I'm not naturally tanned any more. I miss the Grecian sunshine. I miss the Aegean Sea lapping around my bare toes which, come to think, could do with another pedicure. Funny, I never bothered with pedicures back in Athens. We just stopped a passing slave who'd bite down our toenails for half a drachma. I miss home. It was so civilised. And I

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think I'm getting a little bit peaky. I crave spanakopita and fat olives and I'd murder for a baklava. My body needs sugar and iron. I mean, I know I look good pale but I need feeding.

And while I'm waiting for my future to beckon, I find myself thinking about the box. It's now upstairs in my room, alongside *Witchcraft for Dummies*, a kind gift from me that Lilith rejected, of course. How I wish she had the power to help us out of this mess because you must realise that when Lilitha conjured me and my box into this tumbledown shack, and opened the said box, the world very soon got a lot worse than anyone could ever imagine. Put it this way. Things flew out. Now what's the list again? Sickness, death, turmoil. Strife, jealousy and oh fiddlesticks, I always forget the others. Bear with. How many have I done? Right. Okay. Gotcha. The other three are hatred, famine and passion. Is that the eight? Yes. And every one of them shot out the box like you wouldn't believe. I don't know how I managed to slam the lid shut, but I did.

But the other day somebody said something, and it put an idea in my head. So, I've been thinking. I don't even know myself what's left inside the box, if anything, but maybe it's worse wondering about it than actually knowing. I mean there might be something that could cheer us up or even help us and goodness knows we need help. We all hate each other. We're sick, envious, stressed, diseased, dead, hungry, angry and, in the case of the dog, permanently randy. And all we've got for dinner is spanakopita with no spanaki. We're doomed.

You know what? I'm going to shimmy upstairs and lift that lid.

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