

Liberty University

Creative Writing Thesis:  
Resurrecting Olympus

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## Creative Writing Thesis: Resurrecting Olympus

**Abstract**

The objective of this creative project was to reintroduce Greek mythology to the public, adapting the ancient tales to appeal to an ever-evolving world. In order to do the myths justice, it was important to examine adaptations and interpretations over the centuries to determine the philosophical trajectory of mythology. My studies unearthed a diverse portfolio of academic perspectives ranging from the likes of the more formal philosopher Thomas Bullfinch of the 1900s, to the modern, comedy-infused commentator Stephen Fry. Each voice revealed something new to consider. Synthesizing these varying positions into a holistic narrative, I set out to pen a collection of tales of my own with the expressed purpose of revitalizing interest in mythology outside of academia. This thesis is only the beginning of my mission to reimagine the Greek pantheon as beloved figures of fantasy literature to appeal to 21st Century readers.

## **Dedication**

This project is dedicated to Nina Case whose constant support and unconditional love made this journey possible.

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## **Artist Statement**

### *Introduction*

To quote the genius that was Ray Bradbury, “You must stay drunk on writing so reality cannot destroy you.” Human beings, regardless of the religion or philosophy they subscribed to, have always sought the revelation of something beyond the toils of this life through a higher power that assigned greater meaning, or a method of escaping it entirely. It was in the strange realm left between the divine and oblivion that fantasy was conceived. If further proof of man’s desire for more was necessary, art, literature, music, and all other forms of creative expression were littered with models of the ‘ideal.’ Figures of beauty and physical prowess revealed what men continued to hope to achieve even as they eternally fell far from the mark.

Evaluation of my own life yielded the conclusion that no truer words have been spoken than Bradbury’s. Fantasy preserved my sanity since the beginning of a near-decade-long wrestling match with chronic illness. With books being portals beyond my unfortunate circumstances for so long, writing for myself was the next logical step in my quest for freedom. With the stroke of a pen, I ruled kingdoms, slew dragons, and erected empires. The more I explored on paper, the greater the impression of the power of words became. Words gave me wings after floundering around in darkness, a phenomenon, I came to understand, was not exclusive to me. If there was even the slightest chance that I might facilitate a similar jailbreak from tragedy for someone with my own work, then writing was a worthwhile endeavor to me.

### *Impetus*

Greek mythology stood as a prime example of humanity's longing to devote itself to something beyond the individual. Nature was personified and deified in models of what the ancients believed to be human perfection in an all-encompassing polytheistic religion. Every aspect of Greek life was devoted to one divinity or another, rooting the gods and goddesses into the very souls of their worshippers. While modern scholars might contest the merit of ancient pagan beliefs, what cannot be disputed was Greece's status as one of the premier empires of the ancient world. For better or worse, the drives and motivations that the pantheon kindled in its acolytes played a role in both Greece's historic rise and downfall. The same idols that inspired pursuits in philosophy, art, and prowess in warfare also encouraged rampant debauchery, resulting in something of dichotomy for future generations to consider.

The higher Greece climbed, the further it fell. Emphasis on military strength declined as the Greeks focused inward, chasing the dream of an art-centric utopia. Though pleasant in theory, passiveness proved lethal with Greece's culture crushed under the wheels of invading Roman chariots. Seeing how intrinsically tied to the psyche of the Greek people their mythos was, Rome recognized they could not cut off a once-great civilization at the knees without weaponizing the very fiber of their own natures against them. Rome adopted Greece's religion as their own, bastardizing the pantheon and adding it to its own mythology as a final show of dominance, kowtowing Greece in true Roman fashion. Their efforts to assert supremacy, though effective in its day, ironically ensured Greek culture's survival. Romans immortalized a vital piece of the Greek identity that outlasted their empire and the powers who continued to wrestle over what remained through the ages, preserving it for the enjoyment of people like me.

Like much of the modern world, I first encountered the Greeks in history class in elementary school. While accounts of Greece's many lost kingdoms and epic battles recreated in countless films were fascinating in their own right, academic juggernauts like Socrates paled in comparison to the likes of the fantastical Hercules. Eventually graduating from the children's version, I discovered Greece's idols were startlingly human. They felt greed, experienced intense jealousy, and were even left heartbroken by lovers who preferred fellow mortals to gods. Every circumstance sent ripple effects through the golden palace of Olympus and the mortal realm beyond, credited with triggering power struggles and wars that changed the course of human history. The most revered members of the pantheon from Athena to Zeus were not immune to pain and suffering. Mythology served as a source of comfort as I navigated my tumultuous teenage years, rapidly evolving into obsession when I found my creative footing.

My interest was truly piqued freshman year of high school and I consumed every resource I could get my hands on. I uncovered a veritable treasure trove of material within the literary canon with scholars beginning with classical Homer to the more contemporary works of Thomas Bulfinch. Each new poem, anthology, or collection presented a fresh interpretation as each author left behind a piece of their own ideas in their work. Experiencing the myths through the eyes of different men and women provided me with multiple versions of tales of the gods' exploits. As it stood, I was armed with the freedom to choose, rewrite, and adapt the parts I liked best to form a whole in a shape of my choosing. With my trusty notebook close at hand, it was a freedom I did and will persist in reveling in as my own narrative continues to develop.

*Vision*



As communicated by Bradbury, most readers desired to lose themselves in other worlds they encountered in books as a means of escape from reality. To provide the most edifying experience, authors featured characters either of a superior race than humans entirely or humans that gained some form of privilege beyond normal circumstances. Common tropes included the young squire who discovered he was heir to the throne or a young outcast who manifested supernatural abilities in her time of desperation. Greek mythology presented no shortage of such examples, with mortals being born of one immortal parent, given the favor of a member of the pantheon, or earning immortality by accomplishing the impossible. For my part, I found these tales to be the most compelling and chose them to be the focus of my efforts.

My intended portrayal of the myths followed the events of the Titanomachy in which Zeus overthrew his father. Seizing the heavenly throne of Olympus for himself, Zeus set into motion a war between the elder Titans and younger Olympians that raged on for a millennia, with man swept up in the crossfire. This intense power struggle of the divine birthed intrigue that would put the cutthroat medieval Tudor court to shame. While the more famous gods and goddesses were certainly featured as integral parts of the narrative, the majority of the story was experienced through the eyes of mortals and lesser deities who clawed their way up from the primeval conditions they found themselves in. Whether it be lust for power, gratification of the ego, or desperation that drove them, recognizable figures like Ganymedes, Hercules, and the three Graces led the charge.

Each character provided a unique perspective by design. Ganymedes was amongst the first humans created by Prometheus. Instructed to fashion sentient beings for the singular

purpose of worshipping the Olympians, Prometheus gave his creations free will, defying Zeus and inviting his wrath. Upon Prometheus' imprisonment for his treachery, Zeus unleashed all manner of misfortune upon humanity and took Ganymedes, a favorite of Prometheus, in a twisted quest for revenge. Forced to serve as Zeus' catamite and cupbearer, Ganymedes vowed revenge against the gods, using his trusted position to sow dissent. Working as a triple agent, Ganymedes served Zeus as well as Perses, the leader of the Titan rebels, stirring up conflict wherever the opportunity presented itself and fanning the flames of war.

Hercules was a demigod who wrestled with finding an identity among the mortals who feared him for his supernatural strength. His physical prowess allowed him to excel on the battlefield but little else. The revelation of his true parentage, as the illegitimate son of Zeus and a mortal woman, only left him with more questions. He sought to claim his birthright, spurring him on a journey to garner his father's attention and earn a place among the gods. While Zeus remained detached, Hercules attracted the attention of great immortal warriors like his half-siblings, Ares and Athena, on his quest for notoriety. Serving various mortal kings, Hercules acted as a mercenary in foreign armies and a bodyguard to royal households, adding to his earthly fortune with each exploit. Hera, witnessing the rise of her husband's bastard from the clouds, desired to see him fall, setting traps Hercules must overcome to reach Olympus.

The Graces were three embodiments of ancient ideals of femininity, serving as attendants to the incomparable beauty, Aphrodite. Sisters Charis, Thalia, and Euphrosyne were the daughters of Helios, the Titan lord of the sun, and Clymene, who was originally the wife of Prometheus before his imprisonment. When their elder brother, Phaethon, was mysteriously

killed after riding their father's fire-bound chariot, the sisters banded together to uncover the truth of his death. Unfortunately, the conflict between the Titans and Olympians forced them apart with Clymene defecting to the side of the Titans and dragging Euphrosyne along with her. Charis and Thalia toiled under their selfish mistress' command while Euphrosyne was married to Perses, the Titan leader. When Aphrodite's affair with Ares was uncovered before the Olympian court, Charis became Hephaestus' wife and the future queen of Olympus, fracturing their family further. On opposite sides of a terrible war, the sisters worked to find ways to save their family and those they hold dear.

These characters and their stories held special places in my heart, from the moment I met them in the pages of books. Ganymede found himself in unimaginably cruel circumstances and was determined to get even with those who wronged him. Similarly, Hercules realized his parentage held weight and resolved himself to claim what was owed him as a son of Zeus. As for the women, their struggle was a bit more personal if nothing but for the shared identity of being female. Each of them were pushed and pulled in so many directions, to suit the agendas of others, without any concession granted for how they might have felt. Despite their differences, Ganymede, Hercules, and the Graces initially conformed to their surroundings as a means of survival. Realizing their own power, each of them resolved themselves to resist the hand they had been dealt in life in their own ways.

For me, rebellion of this nature was refreshing and completely admirable. It fueled my own desire to be freed from the circumstances I found myself in when their stories fell into my lap. I felt helpless and trapped by a hopeless diagnosis that dashed all of my carefully laid plans.

My apparent options were to either adapt to my situation or go insane mourning what had never been. The characters I so loved offered me a path I had not considered; fighting back. Ganymede, Hercules, and the Graces all chose to rise above misfortunes that threatened to cast them as victims forever, taking their lives back to carve out futures they desired. They set an example for the masses of what can be achieved when one simply has the will to better their position, just as they did for me.

### *Context*

While I was enthralled by Greek mythology, it did not escape my notice that my peers were decidedly not. For my generation of 21<sup>st</sup> Century young adults, the typical required high school readings of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were dry at best. Any knowledge of mythology was either gleaned from Homer's archaic chronicles or Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series, with the latter belonging to the teen fiction genre and geared towards more juvenile readers. Nevertheless, the popularity of the series amongst children revealed that the problem of disinterest did not lie with the myths themselves, but how they were presented. Similarly, adult fiction titles like *A Court of Thorns and Roses* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* rested comfortably at the top of bestseller lists years after their original publication. If the old tales of the Olympians were to be reimagined, mingling mature themes with fantasy, the material would certainly appeal to audiences as evidenced by the success of other works.

Despite its ancient roots, Greek mythology touched on societal issues relevant today. Humans, Centaurs, Harpies, and Satyrs were regarded with a unique sort of pseudo-racism with the members of the pantheon treating them like chattel or pieces on a chessboard in their

perverse games. There were stories containing slavery, trafficking, and spousal rape. Adulterous love affairs fractured families and the wicked triumphed over the heroes. Each tale was startling in its imperfection and relatability, elements that would carry over when mythology was launched from monotonous historical accounts into the realm of fiction writing.

Furthermore, this project was not a reimagining bordering on spoof as has often been the case with entities like Marvel and DC Comics turning figures of mythology into superheroes. While I personally selected the versions of each character's story I intended to tell, my work stayed true to the essence of ancient tales. Perhaps it was arrogant, but a secondary motivation for creatively retelling mythology was to revive interest in Greek culture beyond the desire to vacation in Santorini for an Instagram photo-op. The Greeks possessed a rich history and a resilient people that endured unimaginable tragedy that the modern world was either ignorant or in denial of. Within the last decade, Greece came under threat of invasion from Turkey and, not only did no one lift a finger to assist them in the fight to maintain their sovereignty, news outlets did not even acknowledge it. I hoped this project could ignite interest and get people to pay attention to what was happening to Greece.

### *Significance*

Though the modern world would like to claim otherwise, faith, or lack thereof, was at the root of every action an individual took. The value society conferred on religion was dwindling in public but continued to thrive in private. As someone who came from a long line of pastors and participated in ministry, it goes without saying that I was raised in the Christian religion. Unfortunately, like many of my generation, I had long been frustrated with the church. In my

experience, the cruelest, most depraved, and most self-righteous people were the same ones that preached love and dealt double standards from the pulpit. I believed in faith, the Bible, and a personal relationship with God. These were things that I sought to honor and demonstrate to the world but preaching a sermon to the masses had never been a desire of mine.

While Greek mythology was distinctly pagan, anything could be used to glorify God. C. S. Lewis' famous series *The Chronicles of Narnia* demonstrated how fantasy could be turned toward allegorical purpose, layering biblical principles into the plot and even personifying God in the lion Aslan. If handled carefully, the weaving in of redemptive ideals similar to those of the Christian faith could be accomplished with mythology. However, rewriting mythology to make a statement of my personal beliefs was not the intention of this project. I wanted to honor the Greek people by revitalizing their traditions for Western society, not overtly change their stories for my own agenda.

### *Conclusion*

There was an old proverb that said, "God laughs when you make plans." To say I did not plan on being a writer would be an understatement. I had been primed for medical school and then onto a career in the surgical suite since my freshman year of high school. If I had my way, I would be looking at samples under a microscope in a sterilized university laboratory and hating every moment of it. My path was diverted due to a series of what many would deem unfortunate circumstances, an opinion I once held myself. In reality, the truth was I had stopped listening to God and what He wanted for me. Fully aware of my determination to follow through with the decisions I had made, God intervened in such a way that I could not help but pay attention to His

direction. In the painful process of God cutting me down in order to force me to trust Him by making me dependent upon Him, I uncovered the joy of writing.

Now that I have tasted creative freedom, there is no going back. After years of being an avid reader and feeling frustrated with the selection the 21<sup>st</sup> Century had to offer, I had the ability to give life to the stories I had always wanted to read. The Greek myths continued to be an endless source of enjoyment and inspiration that I wished to see renewed for the entertainment of the masses. Given enough time, I hoped to craft a narrative that did justice to the timeless tales I came to hold so dear. Earning an MFA in creative writing from Liberty University would better equip me to accomplish my newfound goals.

## Critical Paper

### *Introduction*

History stands as a monument to man's greatest triumphs and most tragic failures in equal measure. Regardless of the religions or philosophies one subscribes to, it is undeniable that humanity temporarily occupies an imperfect world. Man deploys imagination to combat the harshness of reality, reveling in what lies between fantasy and truth. In this space that permits dreaming, humans craft a narrative of what they wish to be, rather than what they are. Greek mythology embodies man's desire to make sense of life, to aspire to something more, and to live by some form of code. The pantheon personifies even the most minute elements of nature and displays distinctly human vices, giving them claims to mortal and immortal planes of existence. Their natures assume responsibility for inexplicable natural disasters and their squabbles serve as origins for human wars, rationalizing away every tribulation by assigning divine cause.

While more recent thinkers no longer use Greek mythology to inform religious beliefs, the pantheon still stands as a pillar of the foundation of human society. Mythos provides historical context for ancient Greek culture and informs artistic pursuits ranging from painting to songwriting. Philosophers, classical and contemporary, reveal just how deeply engrained the pantheon is in cultures of the world through their own academic examinations. Each case study contains retellings and interpretations as individual as the authors themselves. Their narratives come together to form a holistic view of modern academia's perspective on the pantheon.

### *Bulfinch*

Thomas Bulfinch takes the stage mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, first publishing his anthology of Greek myths and tales in the year 1867. The gods, goddesses, and heroes come to life under



Bulfinch's skilled hands. While the timeline is relatively loose, Bulfinch strings together historical events gleaned from ancient texts. Every major event of Greek history is accounted for, diligently traced back to some triggering event on the immortals' part. Each chapter centers on individual stories involving mortal and immortal figures acting as foils each other's adventures. Despite his academic roots and the more formal language style, Bulfinch flouts much of the stylistic conventions of his era. Bulfinch pens his narrative with a mingling of classical deference and near-Dickensian playfulness, exhibiting his unique flare for storytelling.

Bulfinch reveals an intention to breathe new life into Greek mythology in the preface of his work. To Bulfinch, "mythology is the handmaid of literature; and literature is one of the best allies of virtue and promoters of happiness" (1). Knowledge of mythology translates to an understanding of "the elegant literature of [. . .] language" that engenders true appreciation (Bulfinch 1). Nevertheless, Bulfinch acknowledges the downfall of treating mythology as strictly historical or philosophical. Conventional narratives "are no longer adequate [. . .] in light of fresh institutions about society, literacy, the pre-Homeric world, and relations with the ancient Near East, that myth—one of the most pervasive aspects of Greek culture—[are] left in its old and rather cobwebby pigeon-hole" (Kirk 74). Sources providing "only the dry facts without any of the charm of the original narrative" prevent everyday people from enjoying mythology (Bulfinch 2). For his part, Bulfinch seeks "to solve this problem, by telling the stories of mythology in such a manner as to make them a source of amusement" (2). Rather than indulging his vanity by producing a manuscript designed to demonstrate his academic prowess, Bulfinch synthesizes the ancient tales into something laypeople might appreciate. He looks to the future, hoping that his work will set as an example to "teach mythology not as a study, but as a relaxation from study; to

give [. . .] the charm of a story-book, yet by means of it to impart a knowledge of an important branch of education” (Bulfinch 2). The dual nature mythology possesses must be honored as whole without one side being emphasized by undermining the other. Mythology is artistic and educational in equal measure, a fact that Bulfinch wishes to impart to his audience.

The preface is followed by an introduction that sweeps readers through the genealogy of the gods, beginning with the rise and fall of the Titans born of the primordial deities. Bulfinch quickly moves on to the conception of humanity, detailing the creation story with man presented as something of a beginning. Immortals reveling in the bountiful flora and fauna of Mother Earth still feel “a nobler animal [is] wanted, and Man [is] made” (Bulfinch 11). Prometheus, the cleverest of the Titans, takes up the earth in his hands, “and kneading it up with water, [makes] man in the image of the gods” (Bulfinch 11). Though man is made to be temporal and inferior to their divine models, they are set apart from the rest of nature. Prometheus grants them “an upright stature, so that while all other animals turn their faces downward, and look to the earth, he raises his to heaven, and gazes on the stars” (Bulfinch 11). Nevertheless, humans are soft and physically weaker than the creatures they have charge over. Man is granted fire “to make weapons [. . .]; tools with which to cultivate the earth; to warm his dwelling, so as to be comparatively independent of climate; and finally, to introduce the arts and to coin money, the means of trade and commerce” (Bulfinch 12). After humanity finds its feet, Bulfinch’s narrative truly begins, launching into every tale with a bent towards the mortals who find themselves caught up in the gods’ antics.

Unlike other authors of his day, Bulfinch makes a point of bringing mankind center stage, rather than shining a spotlight on the pantheon. Though Bulfinch respects the Greeks and their ancient beliefs, his tone is never worshipful. In fact, Bulfinch's emphasis on humanity intentionally puts the imperfection of gods in stark relief. The Titans and Olympians engage in petty struggles, shamelessly operating in extremes with the obvious belief in their own supremacy. When the gods are rejected, they slaughter the rivals for their lovers' affections without remorse. If one deity slights another, the wronged party unleashes all manner of calamity on the transgressor's innocent human acolytes in perverted vengeance. Immortals are far from perfect, falling from the pedestal they once comfortably perched on. Bulfinch's presentation of mankind reveals his perspective; mythology is not something to be aspired to or serve as religion in the modern world but enjoyed as the collection of dramatic adventures it is.

### *Fry*

Contemporary philosopher and writer Stephen Fry adopts a similar position to Bulfinch in a 2017 manuscript of his own. For Fry, mythology is a collection of stories that reveal underlying elements of human nature that might be uncomfortable to face when not framed as outlandish stories. The gods' divine status facilitates a degree of separation even as they engage in baser behaviors man is often guilty of. As Fry points out, projecting the inequities of the world onto supposedly perfect beings allows people to explain away difficult emotions or situation. Fry uses the reality of the fallibility of the pantheon to remind the masses that the Greeks should be honored as the magnificent storytellers that they are with the pantheon being a natural byproduct

of their skill. Like Bulfinch, Fry concedes that the myths carry educational value, but believes they are better suited being treated as works of artistic fancy.

Fry asserts a lifelong fascination with the Greek myths in a personalized foreword. It reads like a personal letter to Fry's readers as he confides the thrill of reading the myths he first felt in early childhood. With warmth and humor evident in his tone, Fry lauds the "energy, humor, passion, particularity, and believable detail of their world held [him] enthralled from the very first," hoping "they will do the same for [readers]" (10). The intention is obviously to share his joy with everyone willing to pick up the book with Fry "[welcoming] those who may never have encountered the characters and stories of Greek myth before" (10). He goes on to assure readers "no 'classical education' is called for, no knowledge of the difference between nectar and nymphs, satyrs and centaurs, or the Fates and the Furies is required" (Fry 10). Essentially, Fry seeks to give anyone who desires to learn a chance to experience mythology in all of its glory without being hampered by the personal commentaries of ideologues. Ancient Greeks "hide their ritual or historical sense under a mask of seeming childishness" (Graves 168). Audiences are reminded that there is "absolutely nothing academic or intellectual about Greek mythology; it is addictive, entertaining, approachable, and astonishingly human" (Fry 10). When examined for what they are, the myths are just as much of a train wreck as the real world, perfect in their imperfection that makes them relatable and relevant even now.

Diving into the myths themselves, Fry outlines the bloodline of the gods, beginning with the ancient Greek version of the 'Big Bang.' The world begins with a being called Chaos who is more of a force than an actual deity. Though personified, it is genderless and amorphous, an

entity Fry describes as “a kind of grand cosmic yawn” (18). Taking it a step further, Fry explains that the ‘yawn’ is really “a yawning chasm or a yawning void” like the nothingness of outer space without the stars and solar system (18). Out of Chaos comes the first immortal beings, personifying the earth itself, the sea, and everything else in between. These deities are “primal, elemental principles that [are] devoid of any real color, character, or interest” dubbed ‘primordials’ (Fry 20). They are “the First Order of divine beings from whom all the gods, heroes, and monsters of Greek myth spring,” the predecessors to the more famous Olympians (Fry 20). Fry does not emphasize historical evidence or context, simply recounting the myths in detail by tracing the gods’ genealogy and moving forward through the generations of immortals.

Stephen Fry’s acknowledgment and explicit statement of his intentions to revel in the fantasy of mythology free him from needing to conform mythology to ancient history. Rather than abridging mythology to fit into a conventional narrative that could undoubtedly be used to demonstrate Fry’s intellect, Fry allows the myths to shape the narrative themselves. Though humans are still integral to the tales, the gods are the focus and Fry does not attempt to confine them within mortal parameters. Each deity is endowed with individualized gifts according to what elements or creatures they have domain over, highlighting their supernatural natures. He allows the pantheon to continue to keep its status as the collection of awe-inspiring figures from his childhood while tempering his portrayal with the reality that even deities are flawed.

### *Hamilton*

Edith Hamilton’s own anthology of the Greek myths presents a perspective that is quite the departure from the ideals of Bulfinch and Fry. Originally published in 1942, Hamilton’s book

embraces the romanticism of Greek mythology, an angle some might credit as being a natural byproduct of her being a woman. Whether Hamilton's gender identity influences her work, her sex certainly signals a shift in academia with Hamilton successfully taking on a mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century male-dominated environment. Despite her penchant for the dramatic elements of mythology, Hamilton demonstrates her philosophical and historical acumen. She explains how the myths reveal the collective psychology of ancient Greek culture and the universal desire to escape reality into fantasy. Similar to Fry's obvious intention to show his readers how mythology can be enjoyed without a classical education, Hamilton gives her audience leave to find the pleasure in stories about the pantheon.

Hamilton's analysis of Greek mythology begins with something of a profile on the Greek people and their endless pursuit of utopia. When human issues like the rise and fall of kings or wars are not included, myths are entirely fictitious inventions of some orator's mind. Nevertheless, story contributes a case study about "the way the human race thought and felt untold ages ago" (Hamilton 1). Revered figures like Homer are enraptured by the bounty of their surroundings and are endlessly curious about the sources of earthly beauty. Anyone with half a desire to draw connections "can retrace the path from civilized man who lives so far from nature, to man who lived in close companionship with nature" because they cherish it (Hamilton 1). Mythology brings readers back to "a time when the world was young" and the "imagination was vividly alive and not checked by the reason" (Hamilton 1). The sense of wonder imparted in the myths opens the mind "so that anyone in the woods might see through the trees a fleeing nymph, or bending over a clear pool to drink, behold in the depths a naiad's face" (Hamilton 1). After

experiencing such liberation in her own examination of mythology, Hamilton pens her own version of the stories she loves to inspire her readers to dream.

Indulging in imagination is not the sole motivation for the ancient Greeks' conception of mythology, nor the only purpose behind Hamilton's book. Greeks see themselves as the beginning of perfection, attempting to improve themselves in the idols they fashion. In contrast with the other great empires of the day, the Greeks "[make] their gods in their own image" (Hamilton 3). Surviving artifacts pay endless homage to the Greeks' vanity, cataloguing every triumph. Sculptors watch the athletes "contending in the games and [feel] that nothing [will] be as beautiful as those strong young bodies" (Hamilton 4). Athletic champions with the most impressive physiques become the visages of Apollo. Silver-tongued thieves who cheat death and make spectacles of ducking the law become the clever Hermes. According to Hamilton, artists and poets "[realize] how splendid a man [can] be, straight and swift and strong" with "all the thought of Greece centered in human beings" (4). The pantheon is escapism and ego in equal measure, though Hamilton highlights the fact the Greeks keep their gods human in spirit.

Continuing the progression of her narrative, Hamilton emphasizes the dichotomy of beings who are designed to be physically perfect but left just as mentally or emotionally blemished as any man. Members of the pantheon "are not really gods; they are mortal men, or they are natural forces, or they are personifications of moral qualities; [. . .] and the only way to understand them properly is to look beneath the surface" (Zwerdling 448). Zeus, the king of Olympus and head of the pantheon, is just as flawed as any of his mortal disciples. He is notoriously unfaithful, "[hiding] his love affairs from his wife" and standing as "a capital figure

of fun” for the Greeks who “[like] him all the better for it” (Hamilton 4). As for Zeus’ female counterpart, Hera is “the stock character of comedy, the typical jealous wife, and her ingenious tricks to discomfit her husband and punish her rival, far from displeasing the Greeks, [entertain] them” (Hamilton 4). Unlike the other pagan cultures of the day that are steeped in reverence and austerity, the Greeks are permitted to laugh. For the ancients, “laughter in the presence of an Egyptian sphinx or an Assyrian bird-beast [is] inconceivable” but feels “perfectly natural in Olympus, and it [makes] the gods companionable” (Hamilton 4). This sense of connection inspires even greater devotion to the deities in the Greeks who revel in their freedom.

Aside from the pantheon’s obvious hilarity, Hamilton highlights the fact the gods fulfill the more important role of answering the Greeks’ questions about life, comforting them as they navigate the world. The simplicity of lightning being Zeus striking the sky in frustration after a tiff with his wife or a volcano’s eruption being the giant Typhon straining against his chains beneath his mountain prison “is the miracle of Greek mythology” (Hamilton 4). This results in “a humanized world, [with] men [free] from the paralyzing fear of an omnipotent Unknown” (Hamilton 4). There is a face and a collection of relatable stories put to every facet of life beyond human control. Zeus is not some untouchable king in the cloud, but “a person living in a world where civilization has made an entry” (Hamilton 7). While his treatment of Hera may be reprehensible to some, Zeus also “[punishes] men who lie and break their oaths; he is angered by any ill treatment of the dead; and he pities and helps [humans who honor him]” (Hamilton 7). As for the human heroes in mythology, the outlandish stories of Hercules wrestling lion and freeing Prometheus give the Greeks hope of conquering the impossible themselves.



Not unlike Stephen Fry, Hamilton cleaves to the wistfulness, mysticism, and romanticism of mythology while admitting its defects. Only, to her, these inconsistencies or contradictions are not inadequacies, but the very things that make mythology so powerful. Untouchable, unimpeachable gods do not inspire as much devotion as those who might understand human inequities by virtue of their having a few of their own. The gods are cast in a much more sympathetic role than in other polytheistic and even Abrahamic faiths of the ancient world. They are made to be beloved characters in novel or play, rather than idols worthy of worship. Hamilton's narrative is crafted to engender feelings of camaraderie between the gods and her readers by highlighting their humanity.

### *Hansen*

Contemporary academic William Henson pens a narrative that is a stark contrast to the likes of Bulfinch, Fry, and Hamilton. Rather than reinventing mythology to serve a particular purpose or cast the pantheon in a new light, Hansen focuses on the art of storytelling from the perspective of a historical scholar. The myths are recalled as in most collections. However, the focus is not on the stories themselves, but the genius behind how each one is crafted, underscoring the skills required to produce a compelling narrative given the fact that Greece and Rome represented primarily oral cultures. When Hansen goes beyond the beauty of Greek imagination and permits himself to insert his own ideals into the stories, he pays special homage to the human figures of mythology. Since man is responsible for the advent of the gods, man is the beginning and end of it all.

A historian first, Hansen musters an effort to resurrect the ancient Greece through mythology, or at least the human figures within it. Interest in mythology is on the decline with modern students “[demanding] that what they are taught or what they discuss is ‘socially relevant’” (Walcot 37). Hansen points out to readers “the great majority of these stories are set not in the distant mythological past, but in the historical period, the so-called human era, and their gaze is accordingly not upon the feats of gods and heroes but upon the doings of human beings of different sorts” (*Greek & Roman Folktales* xxv). Nevertheless, despite humanity being “in the foreground, the world they move in includes gods and nature spirits (satyrs, centaurs, nymphs), shape-changers (lamias, werewolves), the quasi dead (ghost, revenants), and other beings” (Hansen, *Greek & Roman Folktales* xxv). Every story is a commentary on the people who first tell it, “[offering] a unique window into the fantasies, anxieties, humor, passions, and values of ancient persons young and old, male and female, free and slave” (Hansen, *Greek & Roman Folktales* xxvi). Humans born of one immortal parent, gifted with abilities by the gods, transformed by curses, or accomplishing impossible feats of heroism are the dearest to the Greeks because they are closest to themselves.

While he enjoys the myths, Hansen sees his anthology as a means of preserving the thoughts of a bygone civilization. It is a monument to the Greeks, rather than the gods, presented in “a wide selection of traditional oral stories” (Hansen, *Greek & Roman Folktales* xxvi). The stories are all “informal narratives such as legends, novelle, anecdotes, jokes, fables, fairytales, and the like, many of which are not easily accessible even to classical scholars” (Hansen, *Greek & Roman Folktales* xxvi). Excluding oral tales deprives readers of “the benefit of a unified concept of the traditional story” (Hansen, “Greek Mythology” 103). Hansen determines to “offer

these tales for their crystallization of ancient life and thought as well as for the pure enjoyment they afford as stories, as expressions of an old and exquisite art” (*Greek & Roman Folktales* xxvi). An attempt is made to transport the readers back in time to moments where Greek shepherds trade stories around a campfire. Readers are encouraged “to imagine themselves as guests of Helen, who [. . .] slips her wondrous drug nepenthe into the wine bowl, bids the chalices be filled, banishing grief and anger and all thought of miseries, and proposes that the company pass the time pleasantly in the telling of stories” (Hansen, *Greek & Roman Folktales* xxvi). Pleasure lies solely in the sharing of stories and the sense of community that storytelling brings, not the stories themselves.

In keeping with his advocacy for humans as the premiere subjects of mythology, Hansen flouts any sort of traditional order in his anthology. Hansen opens his first chapter under the heading “Kings and Princesses” with the first section covering the romance of Cupid and Psyche. Characters and their stories are essentially ordered according to their relation to Olympus, moving from mortal on immortal couples to demigods. Other figures like heroes and kings who do not have claims to immortality by blood or marriage follow according to which gods show them favor. Though expertly composed, Hansen’s work carries a clear ulterior motive beyond the enjoyment of the reader as he makes a statement of modern culture as he sees it. Each tale is colored by Hansen’s stated affection for and yearning to revive the art of storytelling he views as having deteriorated since the time of the Greeks, cast the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in the shadow of what might have been had Greece not fallen.

*Martin*

Not unlike William Hansen, Richard P. Martin takes the academic approach to mythology. While Fry, Hamilton, and Bulfinch make much of the fun in mythology, Martin follows his profession as a scholar. Martin uses mythology as something of a study on the social development of Greek civilization and how mythology is intrinsically tied to the trajectory of history. Predecessors to Martin in the realm of philosophy draw similar connections, but Martin differs in his insistence on explaining mythology anthropologically with the ego of an expert. His commentary is entwined with every rewritten myth in terms that laypeople might understand. Under Martin's pen, mythology becomes an educational tool so that people might learn about history in a creative way.

Readers are forewarned of Martin's purpose in reinterpreting the myths from the beginning. The introduction of Martin's narrative outlines the nature of mythology from Martin's view as a reflection of "the thoughts of a complex civilization and at the same time allow [people] to enter the vibrant private spaces of an archaic culture" (1). Mythology is perhaps the last monument to ancient Greece besides a few still-standing ruins. In the modern world, mythology is commercialized to feed consumerism, "[taking] over for less than divine objects, providing labels and images for everything from rockets to sneakers to cement" (Martin 2). Films, music, poetry, cartoons, and even "children's books [. . .] spread awareness of the stories, but at the cost of distorting and trivializing them" (Martin 2). Disney films like the 1997 animated flic *Hercules* are prime examples, portraying the hero "as somewhat of a buffoon, conceited and oafish" with a story arc of "one long attempt to find a way to get into Olympus" (Emerson 260). There is no great triumph to Hercules' story. Tales serving as a cornerstone of civilization "once [unifying] a whole culture, enabling it to reflect on major public concerns,

have largely turned into private icons, ripped from their social, religious, and artistic roots” (Martin 2). Martin does not see mythology as a collection of fairytales but contextualizes it according to what it means for the Greeks.

According to Martin, the pantheon is religion for the ancients, meaning that separating the cultural implications from mythology perverts its nature. Martin’s ideals can be found in “thousands of books and articles [that explore] the intricate web of meaning that binds these narratives to their society to one another” (2). There is an urgency to get readers to take mythology seriously and “recognize that good stories have a profound effect on all cultures” (Frauenfelder 210). Like all things that come under academic scrutiny, the trend of how mythology is viewed in academia constantly evolves. The greatest and most “dominant paradigms [are] challenged, and contributions to the current dispute over the correct constitution of the research question proliferate in the scholarly literature in both classics and other disciplines” (Katz 85). Even people with knowledge of “the basic stories might not be aware of the latest thinking on how the stories fit within ancient Greek culture” (Martin 2). In an attempt to bridge ant gaps and create a holistic narrative, Martin uses headnotes to “include the interpretative work of scholars, while not overwhelming the down-to-earth retelling that follows” (2). Regardless of personal feeling, it cannot be denied that Martin makes an honest effort to share the pedagogical side of mythology in such a way that the everyday modern reader might appreciate it.

Martin moves from his introduction into sections of generalized categories of the subject matter each myth covers. Subjects range from wars and petty rivalries to beautiful love stories.

Sections are spearheaded by Martin's commentary that examines the Greeks' perspective on each subject as can be gleaned from the myths. No matter how a subject is framed, the implications of the activities of divine beings on humanity is unparalleled with Martin constantly referring back to man's innate desire to explain what is wrong with the world. The pantheon provides something of a scapegoat as the Greeks wrap their own faults in tales of their gods to justify themselves and each other. Though perhaps less pleasant and more clinical than other anthologies, Martin's narrative is earnest in its intention to be real.

### *Schwab*

German scholar Gustav Schwab's narrative is yet another departure from the academic norm. From his worldview to his book's structure, Schwab is entirely unique. Rather than admire the romanticism of mythology or extol the virtues of art in ancient Greece, Schwab seeks to draw attention to the spirituality of mythology and the Greek people by extension. As a result, Schwab's narrative is free from the constraints of other writings. He is not required to follow a timeline or group stories together in categories since spirituality is entirely subjective and varies between each tale. In this instance, spirituality equates to how intimately acquainted readers can get with the gods. Schwab desires to create a kinship between modern mortals and the pantheon like the Greeks felt, arranging his collection to give intimate profiles on each mythological being.

Werner Jaeger, a fellow German academic, introduces Schwab's 2018 English republication of the original 1946 text. Jaeger explains the intent behind Schwab's work with an extensive analysis of the historical significance of mythology and development of storytelling as a foundation of Greek culture. Mythology is an educational tool with lessons from the gods,

quickly becoming the center of all Greek life. As a result, the “entire humanistic education of the Greeks [is] welded into unity through the majesty and spiritual force which myths exerted on all stages of the inner development of the individual” (Schwab 16). For a scholar to understand mythology, “he must turn his back on those fascinating pictures of the Olympian world which have inspired so much later poetry and fix his thought on the practices of worship and the beliefs which they implied” (Fairbanks 111). Even the most fantastical stories “contain a germ of empirical reality, for they are connected with cosmic phenomena, such as the sky, the stars, earth, and sea, or they take for their point of departure religious rites and institutions and relate a mythical story to explain their origins” (Schwab 22). Man is wrapped up in heroic models of human excellence like Achilles and Hercules who carry a grain of historical truth in their legends. With the passing of time, the truth becomes more heavily shrouded in mysticism with the “powerful dramatic impulse which [leaping] into being [. . .] born of the increased intensity of the spiritual struggle with the problems of actual life” (Schwab 23). These connections take myth beyond mere fairytale with its transcendence of time standing as testament to its significance.

The people of ancient Greece invest themselves in their mythology, pouring out their souls and projecting their lives onto their deities. Mythology becomes a spiritual art by virtue of this alone, but there is much more to be said on the matter. Schwab’s anthology is to the Greek pantheon what the Bible is to the Christian faith. Each story is crafted specifically to connect readers with the divinity of the gods, emphasizing the underlying spirituality woven into each tale. While Schwab is by no means encouraging readers to convert to paganism modeled after the ideals of a bygone era, he works to impress upon his audience that these figures were once

divine. Ancient empires fall to their knees before effigies of Zeus, crying out to the heavens for deliverance from their troubles. Though it might sound blasphemous to some, when framed this way, each tale of Zeus shaming his wife with his infidelities becomes as sacred as Moses' receiving the ten commandments.

### *Conclusion*

Famous Greek philosopher and orator Aristotle declares, "The friend of wisdom is also a friend of the myth." Despite the varied sentiments of philosophers and writers, the importance of mythology and the sway it holds over society centuries later is indisputable. Whether the concentration of a thinker's narrative is on mythology's educational, historical, fictional, or even spiritual value is irrelevant to the underlying acknowledgment that it is worthy of the fascination it is still regarded with. Bulfinch, Fry, Hamilton, Hansen, Martin, and Schwab bring entirely unique interpretations to the table from different periods in history. Their personal standpoints reflect or oppose the academic trends of the times at which their books appear on the shelves, presenting a study of mythology's continued significance. Individually, different worldviews allow readers to draw their own conclusions, favoring narratives that appeal to them the most. Working in tandem, these brilliant minds come together to form a holistic narrative for 21<sup>st</sup> Century readers to understand mythology in its full glory.



## **Creative Manuscript**

### *Pantheon*

#### **Prologue**

It occurred in the early days, after the revered Mother Gaia no longer waxed lustful under the caress of her lord and husband, Uranus, that the most promising seed of that celestial union dethroned his father. King Cronus' coronation marked the beginning of the era of the Titans, a race of immortals that reigned over both the landscape of their mother and the vaults of the heavens in which their banished father made his abode. Indeed, so great was the power of the young king and his many brothers that it was not long before the sweet illusion of infallibility held them spellbound, convinced of their eternal victory.

Perhaps such a glaring fallacy of being can be understood when the whole of the world appeared in alliance with the Titans' rule. The skin of Gaia's highest mountains and lowest valleys was without blemish, glowing with health as it freckled in an abundance of greenery. Fantastical creatures populated every charming dimple and wise wrinkle of her. From porous caverns spilled all manner of precious stone, metal, and mineral, only intensifying belief in security with inexhaustible natural wealth.

For a time, it seemed, a golden age had dawned.

But the slaying of a king inspires crippling fear in the one that follows, as such was the case with mighty Cronus. The king's subjects found their mercurial master to be cruel and generous, trusting and paranoid by unsettlingly changeable turns. These moments of instability left the king vulnerable to the very thing he so desperately strove to avoid, revealing the soft underbelly of a figure credited with implacability.

Where most men, immortal or otherwise, might derive sufficient comfort from the arms of a loving wife and the nurturing of the fruits of such union, King Cronus' fear deprived him of the joys of creating progeny. As his wife fell pregnant repeatedly under his attentions, the terror over falling victim to murderous machinations at the hands of his offspring grew, choking out what little tenderness and goodness remained. While the girls were spared, the sons of the king were banished from their father's sight, veritably entombed in remote regions of the world.

Prince Zeus received the benefit of his mother's anticipation of his confinement, having been forced to part with two of her beloved babes previously. Queen Rhea spirited her infant son away in the night, the arms of a nursemaid the vehicle of salvation. The elder sons resigned themselves to their fates, existing in a state of passivity with their unjust captivity bearing no apparent consequence. Their fortunate youngest brother, however, nursed a grudge within his breast until it festered so foul that the only possible form of release required the death of the object of his rage.

Cronus ensured the course of events he had been so desperate to avoid by stirring such hatred in the potential instrument of his destruction. Inflaming the outrage of Cronus' abused compatriots against the ranks of the Titans, Zeus heralded the end of an age with his father's head dangling from his fist by the hair. And so, it had come to pass; the dreaded day in which a son supersedes his father by way of violence and unleashes a war cry heard around the world.

## Chapter 1

Lord Ganymedes lifted his arm to squint at the crude map sewn into the lining of his cloak. A gust of icy wind frustrated his efforts, catching up the heavy woolen panel and biting his exposed torso through his tunic. Ganymedes bit back a curse as he shuddered with the cold, electing to trust his memory and pulling his cloak around himself protectively.

Ganymedes' mount plodded along faithfully beneath him, seemingly unaware of its master's suffering at the hands of the harsh mountain terrain. He marveled at the beast's sure-footedness, considering the wisdom of urging it into a faster gait. It would certainly cut Ganymedes' travail short, but traveling in winter was treacherous. Any hazards were shrouded in a generous layer of snowfall. The last thing Ganymedes needed was for the horse to take a spill and leave him stranded in the middle of nowhere.

There was no way Ganymedes would make it to Othrys on foot and the newly-crowned Titan king was expecting him.

Recent months had seen a sharp rise in tensions between the Olympian royal family and the surviving Titans. Zeus' brutal slaying of King Cronus and seizure of Olympus under the cover of night did nothing to win the hearts and minds of his new subjects. Dawn saw the founding of a new dynasty before the Titans could mount a defense with most forced to bend the knee to survive. Dissenters lucky enough to escape the executioner's blade fled to the wild lands beyond Olympus' reach. The rebels' hatred festered in exile for decades, biding their time.

After years of torment at the hands of the Olympians, Ganymedes reckoned his hunger for vengeance matched that of any Titan. As a mortal, however, Ganymedes did not have the luxury of a lifespan of a millennia. Ganymedes twilight years were upon him, as the gray hairs

he observed in the looking glass constantly reminded him. If Ganymedes' was to live to see his darkest desires fulfilled, he had to act now.

Fortunately, the Titans' coronating a king meant their hesitance was at an end.

Cresting a mountaintop, Ganymedes nearly cried with relief as the Titan fortress came into view. The imposing stronghold stood in defiance of the serenity of the white mountainside, a monument to war amidst Mother Gaia's untainted beauty. Walls of black stone Ganymedes guessed were as thick as he was tall and battlements rimmed with iron stakes undoubtedly deterred even the most brazen of enemies. Terrifying though it might be, this site held the key to Ganymedes' salvation.

"Halt! State your business," a command came from above at Ganymedes' approach.

Casting his eyes skyward, Ganymedes caught sight of the owner of the booming voice. A sentry stood atop the bastion abutting the gate, holding a spear aloft with the head aimed at Ganymedes' chest. The sunlight glared off the shining insignia in the center of his obsidian breastplate.

At the sight of the many-headed black dragon, Ganymedes' thought of the monstrous hydra lurking in the southern mountains after escaping even the most skilled hunters. The burden of Ganymedes' purpose settled like a stone in his stomach. Within moments, Ganymedes would be standing in the presence of Perses the Ravager.

"I am here to speak with the true king. I carry news of the usurpers and their plans,"

Ganymedes declared, hoping his voice did not sound as shaky to the guard as it did his own ears.

The guard remained unmoved, the only sign he had heard Ganymedes being a slight drop of his shoulders. He seemed to be studying Ganymedes face, attempting to decipher any signs of deceit in its expression. His spear was still poised to impale Ganymedes at a moment's notice.

Finally, the Titan relented, bringing his spear down to his side and waving an arm in a signal for the gate to be opened. Ganymedes let out a breath he was not aware he had been holding, his lungs burning from the strain.

Gently nudging his mount's flank, Ganymedes entered the fortress' ward. Casting his eyes about, Ganymedes discovered that while the outside of the fortress appeared barren, the inside was bursting with life. Ramshackle stalls propped against the interior walls formed a crude, yet vibrant market. Livestock of every species shuffled about in pens, waiting to be sold or slaughtered for the banquet tables. Armored soldiers marched back and forth, rotating between their assigned stations. Titans of every shape and size milled about, garb ranging from the finest silks and furs to the roughest wools according to their station. Even the occasional satyr or centaur could be spotted amidst the throng.

Though there was much to draw the eye, Ganymedes fixated on a woman who seemed out of place despite her obvious comfort with her surroundings. Her skin was so pale it brought to mind the pallor of day-old corpses, complexion contrasting with hair so black it sheened blue. Clothed in a nondescript gown of gray with no adornments, it was impossible to discern her status. Passersby ducked their heads, shying away out of deference or fear. As Ganymedes' drew near, she fixed startling, eerie green eyes on him, arresting his attention. The horse beneath him stopped, refusing to venture closer as a smirk lifted the corner of the woman's mouth.

"Lord Ganymedes, my father awaits you in the grand hall," she told him. Her smirk widened into an unsettling grin Ganymedes hoped was meant to be welcoming in some perverse way. He could not suppress the chill that traveled down his spine.

It was all Ganymedes could do to keep himself from stumbling as he dismounted. A wave of nausea crashed over him as his feet touched the ground and threatened to carry him away. Taking hold of his horse's bridle, Ganymedes attempted to guide the beast to the nearby hitching post but it would not budge.

"Fret not, your mount will stay put," Perses' daughter assured, her eyes flickering with something akin to amusement. Ganymedes knew she was toying with him, though he had not the slightest idea how. Releasing his grip on the bridle, Ganymedes took a step back. The horse stood perfectly still as though frozen in place, eyes glazed over and unblinking.

The hairs on the back of Ganymedes' neck stood on end. Some enchantment was at work.

When Ganymedes turned to face the would-be sorceress, she was already entering the castle, undoubtedly expecting him to follow. Biting his tongue, Ganymedes trailed behind, feeling cowed as he dropped his gaze to his boots. The phenomenon he witnessed earlier of everyone in the yard avoiding her made sense. Magic wielders were feared and rightfully so.

Ganymedes stopped when the train of his guide's gown entered his field of vision.

"Father, I have a gift for you," the witch announced his arrival, her tone acerbic. "It is customary to kneel in the presence of your king," her warning only loud enough for Ganymedes to hear. Awareness of his situation came rushing back as though Ganymedes' had snapped out of a trance. Embarrassment heated Ganymedes' cheeks as he dropped to his knees. The sound of the witch's footsteps retreating signaled Ganymedes was at the king's mercy, for better or worse.

"You sent by raven you have something to offer that may be of value to my cause, though I remain skeptical. A man so willing to betray his lord and master is not to be trusted," King Perses' voice was silky and soothing, despite his threat.

“I owe Zeus no loyalty,” Ganymedes replied, fighting to not sound as anxious as he felt. The king had the upper hand and they both knew it. Anger boiled in Ganymedes’ veins, hating that he was at the disadvantage. He felt as though he were a boy again, quaking as he stood before Zeus in the throne room of Olympus.

“Look at me, mortal,” the king demanded. Ganymedes obediently lifted his eyes from his lap, keeping his face impassive as to not give away his thoughts.

Perses the Ravager was certainly not as Ganymedes envisioned him to be. The throne the Titan king occupied was more of an ornate chair, constructed to be more functional than awe-inspiring, draped with furs. His lanky frame was swathed in black robes, a lopsided bronze circlet resting atop his head of unremarkable brown hair. Sprouts of gray colored his temples, despite the extremely slow aging of the immortals. With one elbow propped against the chair’s arm, Perses rested his temple against a loose fist, one ankle resting atop his opposite knee. His posture made him look relaxed and uninterested, but Ganymedes knew all too well appearances could be deceiving. For Ganymedes’ part, the king’s shrewd feline eyes belying the apathy he affected were concerning.

“Say your piece,” the king ordered, leaning back and lifting his chin in silent challenge. A smirk, reminiscent of the one his daughter wore, quirked Perses’ mouth. Ganymedes swallowed thickly, wondering if this was how house mice felt in traps.

“Your Majesty, I have long held the conviction that the Titans are the true rulers of the world. Zeus is a pretender and a traitor, occupying a throne that rightfully belongs to you,” Ganymedes launched into his prepared speech. The king grinned knowingly at Ganymedes’ obvious flattery, but there was no anger in his face, emboldening Ganymedes to continue.

“War has yet to be formally declared, but the usurper will see your proclamation of yourself as king as an act of aggression. The righteousness of the act is inconsequential.”

The witch materialized beside her father in flash of green light, leaning in to whisper in the king’s ear. Perses sent Ganymedes a sideways glance as his daughter spoke, nodding to whatever she said before resettling in his seat.

“As a loyal servant of your king, what would you advise?” The witch questioned, pinning him with her strange eyes as she looked down her nose.

“I shall advise you just as I have the pretender; Hyperborea is the key to victory. The land is too wild for invasion. You must win Lord Helios to your side. As it stands, the lord’s eldest daughter is betrothed to Zeus’ son. That marriage cannot happen if you are to take back what is yours. I will act as your agent within the enemy’s court, if Your Majesty will permit it,”

Ganymedes answered, measuring each word carefully and watching for any reaction.

King Perses and his daughter simply stared back at him. Ganymedes felt compelled to bow his head, hoping the sign of submission would dispel the tension. The witch’s gaze turned to her father’s profile, as if waiting for some direction from him. Perses jumped to his feet and clapped his hands loudly.

“Well, it seems we have a spy, Perseis,” the king declared, addressing his daughter while keeping his eyes on Ganymedes. “I am sure he will devise his own schemes to aid us. In the meantime, let us show him what we have set in motion without him.”

Perseis frowned at the king’s back as he swept out of the room, turning to narrow her eyes at Ganymedes in suspicion. Ganymedes ignored her, standing tall as he walked in the king’s



shadow. A lingering moment passed before Ganymedes' heard the witch's footsteps plodding behind them, his lips twitching with the need to smile at the small victory.

The king led Ganymedes through the labyrinthine halls of the castle. Despite the lack of windows leaving the building in darkness, Ganymedes could make out the rich green banners with the Titans' dragon emblem hung on every wall. Beyond the heraldry, the corridors were bereft of and furnishings or personal effects. It was as if the fortress and everyone living within was devoted entirely to the Titan cause, so far as to deprive themselves of basic comforts. Stopping at a door at the end of the passage, the king produced a key from within his robes. Turning it in the lock, the mechanism gave way, the sound echoing off the walls.

With a push from the king's shoulder, the door opened, its hinges groaning in protest. The chamber within was just as barren as the rest of what Ganymedes had seen. It was dark, small, and clammy with a single banner hanging on the back wall. Stone slabs formed a rudimentary table in the center, a generous layer of white gauze resting over what Ganymedes could only assume was a corpse. Fear gripped Ganymedes heart like a vice as he forced his feet to propel him into the space behind the king. A slam and clanging behind Ganymedes told him the door's lock had clicked back into place, trapping him inside.

Perseis stepped around Ganymedes, crossing to the table. Gripping the gauze, the witch cast it to the floor, revealing what was hidden underneath.

Stretched out on the cold stone was the most beautiful woman Ganymedes had ever seen.

Her slender frame was perfectly proportioned, her height regal but not so great as to be imposing. Though girlishly thin, she possessed womanly curves, full breasts giving way to slim waist flaring out slightly at the hips. Long, thick lashes lay against the unblemished tawny skin

of her face, high cheekbones framing a dainty sloping nose. Impossibly full lips fixed in a permanent pout rested above a gently pointed chin. Luscious curling tresses of umber hair was parted to fan over her shoulders and arms resting against her sides. Though no breath inflated her lungs, she seemed to be glowing with vitality.

“What is this?” Ganymedes asked.

“This is the beginning of our war, my friend,” King Perseus declared, beaming with confidence.

Coming to stand at the body’s head, Perseus opened its mouth, leaning over to slot her own lips against it. Ganymedes watched in shock as the witch’s eyes glowed ominously as she breathed into the body’s mouth. All at once, the body came alive, shaking as though it were having a fit. The witch stepped back just as the body sat up, coughing and sputtering as it breathed on its own.

The newly-animated woman looked frantically about the room and Ganymedes found himself staring into bewildered eyes.

## Chapter 2

Charis lifted her head from where it rested atop the backs of her hands, eyelids protesting the act of opening. Layers of heavy parchment littered with estate accounts crinkled under her movements, drawing her attention back to the task that had consumed her energies long after wisdom dictated retiring to her bedchamber. Ink streaked the skin of her slender fingers, the tender tips raw from having been set to quill well into the late hours of the night. The results of her efforts were certainly impressive, family expenses dating months back recounted in figures calculated with unmatched precision, though her aching neck contested the exercise's value.

Footsteps tramped overhead, the sound curving Charis' lips in an involuntary smile. Her younger sisters had arisen and would wreak havoc on the poor household servants if a timely intervention was not made. With a final glance at her handiwork, the lady fled the sanctuary of the library, her footsteps growing lighter as the grip of sleep slipped from her limbs. Thoughts of the coming day collided into one another in the chaos inherent to a reviving brain, each prospect livelier and more hopeful than the last.

Chimes of sweet laughter carried down the stone corridor from the shared bedchamber the sisters occupied. Charis pushed aside the heavy panel of the oaken door. The room was truly sumptuous in its luxury, the floor of polished marble made soft by layers of lush rugs. Large silken pillows dyed a variety of rich colors to accompany matching coverlets lay in stacks to form loosely defined beds. Draperies light enough to be veils swayed in the morning breeze, rendering the room dreamlike to the eye. But the beauty of the space was hardly comparable to that of its occupants.

Euphrosyne spun about on pink toes in an airy dance, laughing as she went. Bright amber eyes flashed from blushing faces split with bright smiles, alight with happiness only attainable for the still-innocent. Auburn tendrils of unruly curls swayed against the backs of bare knees in time with the merry tune on Thalia's tongue. Unable to resist in the face of so much joy, Charis flung herself into the caper. The sisters came together in a ring, hands clasped, whirling until dizziness dictated they collapse against the bedding strewn about beneath them as they dissolved into hysterics.

Pillows were tossed between the girls as the revelry tapered off, each trying to outdo the other in the force with which the plush cushions connected with their opponent's face. After a particularly satisfying strike to Thalia's forehead, Charis propped her body up on her elbows, studiously ignoring the inquisitive gaze she felt boring into her profile. When the chafing under such intense scrutiny became unbearable, Charis turned to find herself mere inches away from Euphrosyne's penetrating stare.

Euphrosyne had always possessed the uncanny ability to flay her siblings' carefully constructed façades to reach the vulnerable souls beneath. Undoubtedly born of their closeness in age and the uncommon camaraderie it afforded, the talent that might have been a comfort in younger years now seemed altogether lethal.

"Father was in seclusion in his study for quite some time last night. A messenger from the capital was with him," Euphrosyne observed. Charis felt rather than saw Thalia perk up at the mention of the messenger. Meeting Euphrosyne's gaze, Charis' eyes locked with her sister's in a voiceless battle of wills to keep one another silent. Every fiber of Charis' being revolted even as

her mind worked to formulate a reply that would curtail further discussion and prevent the eruption of conflict.

“Good morning, sisters!” Phaethon declared in a singsong tone that sounded comical in his booming voice as he threw open the bedchamber door. Gratitude toward her impish elder brother for the unintentionally granted reprieve flooded Charis’ heart as he flung himself down against his sisters’ discarded weapons. But Thalia’s interest had been piqued and she would not be so easily thwarted.

“Brother, what do you know of the messenger that arrived last night?” Thalia queried, her anticipation for news evident. Understanding dawned on Phaethon’s face, chasing away all levity as his gaze rested on Charis.

“He came from the palace. Apparently, the crown prince is to wed another,” Phaethon spoke slowly as though he were measuring each word.

“What of Charis?” Euphrosyne asked, her head tilted in confusion.

“She has been thrown over, you idiot!” Thalia snapped, her expression thunderous. Euphrosyne did not react to the barb, keeping her face impassive as Thalia rounded on Charis.

“No tears? No anger? Do you not understand what has been done to you?” Thalia demanded.

“Father came to me last night. I have had time to accept it,” Charis explained, studiously keeping her gaze trained on inspecting her hand resting in her lap. Her aloofness was an utter falsehood. Though she had not been in love with the prince, his rejection stung. Fortunately, Thalia attention was elsewhere.

“Did you know? You kept this from us all night?” Thalia interrogated Phaethon, her voice becoming shrill as her temper flared. Phaethon threw his hands up in surrender even as he grinned unrepentantly. Though he succeeded in silencing Thalia’s screeching, Phaethon found himself pummeled under her fists. His laughter only made her hit him harder.

“Father has played the game of neutrality for too long. The king will demand some assurance of loyalty if Father will not give his oath, especially now that Charis will not be queen someday,” Euphrosyne’s voice was little more than a whisper, but the words were powerful, halting Thalia’s attack. Charis’ raw nerves were chafed afresh as the uncertainty of their family’s future was laid out before them.

“But our family has been slighted. The king should be begging Father’s forgiveness,” Thalia huffed haughtily, crossing her arms. Her confidence in the strength of their father’s position rang hollow.

“That is foolishness. The king will never admit wrongdoing, let alone seek to repay us,” Phaethon snapped, eyes flashing with irritation. When Thalia did not immediately react, Phaethon took the opportunity to retreat. All charm once again, he launched himself up off the floor and extended a hand to Euphrosyne with an exaggerated bow.

“Come, sister. We shall go to the stables.” Euphrosyne cast a glance over her shoulder as Phaethon bounded from the room, dragging her along. The tension came rushing through with a vengeance in the wake of their departure like a winter wind.

Sending a pointed look promising a continuation of their conversation over her shoulder, Thalia rose to her feet, years devoted to dancing in every elegant movement as she glided from the bedchamber. With a huff and far less graceful ascent, Charis followed, apprehension pooling

in her gut as she waited for Thalia to speak. Thalia seemed content to leave Charis in suspense, sashaying her way across the sweeping veranda that spilled into diligently manicured gardens. Maids flitted about in the sunshine, trimming and preening flowering plants under their mistress' watchful eye.

Their mother, Lady Clymene, stood in the shade of the overhang of the veranda as she surveyed the work, her back to her young daughters. Mustering her brightest smile, Charis wished her mother a good morning as she dutifully trailed Thalia. Clymene spun at the sound of her greeting, the answering smile she flashed Charis turning her face girlish, though light did not quite reach her soulful eyes. Recent days had subdued Mother's normally flamboyant temperament, her cheeriness lying buried under a melancholy that reflected Father's worries.

Hearts accustomed to beating as one shared their burdens as well as affection.

Thalia cut a path through the hedges and shrubberies, intent on a particular rosebush. She scooped up an unattended basket as she went, light footfalls against the lush grass carpeting the earth never slowing. Charis found herself hard-pressed to keep up, hastening her stride to a jog. Envy for Thalia's superior athleticism pricked anew as Charis internally bemoaned her own penchant for chasing down long-forgotten poetry in the family library. Frittering away most of her days shut indoors ensconced in a dusty room suddenly seemed incredibly wasteful.

Charis finally reached her sister who had begun her assault on the roses of her choosing. Thorny stems gave way under the blade of Thalia's knife, blossoms falling into the basket strategically placed at her feet. Wariness stole over Charis as she drew near, Thalia's aggression towards the innocent flowers not boding well. The silence stretched on until Charis felt as though she were choking.

“What angers you so? You cannot feel wounded on my behalf,” Charis asked. It seemed Charis’ tongue had decided the period of limbo was at an end, and an imaginary gauntlet was thrown down between sisters.

“Of course, I take your part in this!” Thalia cried, “But it is only a fraction of the outrage I feel as I watch you sit idly by as though you feel nothing. Playing the fool is unbecoming.”

“I am fully aware of the wrong that has been done me, but I never even met the prince. Tell me, is it truly me you feel for or your own loss?” The words were out of Charis’ mouth before she could stop them. She fought the urge to apologize, knowing that showing weakness would make it worse. Better to challenge Thalia and stand her ground on the chance that her sister would back down.

Thalia’s eyes widened, the fleeting flash of hurt in their depths inflicting Charis with a pang of remorse. Apollo’s clandestine departure was still fresh in the minds of the whole family, though Thalia understandably felt the loss keenest.

Their revered father had become something of a foster father to High King Zeus’ children at their mother’s request. Prince Apollo and his twin sister Princess Artemis found refuge in the quiet countryside of Hyperborea. Though acknowledge by their father, the twins came from one of his many mistress’ wombs and the queen had no scruples about punishing her husband’s lovers. Tucked safely in the sweet valley under a blanket of sunlight, youthful years bled together in a blissful blur of swimming and dancing, running wild across the vast estate in every spare moment not devoted to studies. Lady Clymene ensured each child was rigorously instructed in subjects ranging from mathematics to the arts, flouting expectations and educating her girls the



same as the boys. It had truly been an ideal upbringing, removed from the taint of politics polluting the capital city of the immortals and the war raging beyond the mountains.

But divorce from all manner of suffering breeds an extreme naiveté that often blinds one to reality. At least, such was the effect it had on Thalia's formative years. Love had grown where wisdom and practicality would never have permitted it to take root.

When Thalia was not dancing about on her dainty feet, she spent her time pouring over poetry, wrapped in a world of tragedy and romance. Finally experiencing the latter left her vulnerable to the former when Apollo singled her out, holding her captive in his passions. Thalia was suddenly thrust into the center of someone's world, promoted from country bumpkin to stand at the prince's side as he walked through life. As the lovers matured, their bond only deepened, companionship evolving into hushed endearments and stolen embraces.

Warnings of the constraints of royal duty and likelihood of broken promises fell on deaf ears. Thalia's mind and heart had been utterly consumed by *him*, and if Charis was any judge, still were. Even now Thalia's hopes for a life with her love lay packed away gathering dust in an attic chamber.

Charis waited for Thalia to fly into a fit, but it never came. Thalia robbed the basket of the fallen roses and spun on her heel, fleeing the gardens and Charis' company without another word.

Charis watched her sister's back for a moment before cutting her own path across the garden to the west gate. Passing under its sturdy wooden frame, the soles of Charis' sandals crunched against packed pebbles of a rudimentary path. Normally traversed by servants, it encircled the entirety of the estate, connecting the various entrances of the lower floors for

convenience. Most importantly, it wound around against the walls that closed the property off from the surrounding wilderness in case of attack. Thankfully, events had never necessitated the walls be tried against anything more formidable than an errant flock of sheep from the centaurs living in the villages in the surrounding forests.

Charis' personal use of the path was a small act of rebellion against her watchful mother who forbade it. Ducking into the kitchens, Charis found herself swept up in the chaos of preparations for supper. Maids spun about in a blur, oscillating around the ovens, hearth, and tables laden with the bounty of the season's harvest. Old Agora stood in the midst of it all, relishing her role as housekeeper, barking out exacting orders over the din of moving bodies and clanging iron in rasping vocalizations. With her prickly former nursemaid in such a temper, it would have been advisable for Charis to simply slip past the hullabaloo into the house.

But Charis had never been one to resist a chance at exacerbating the dear woman, especially when she was worked up into such a fuss.

Catching sight of her young mistress, Agora's pale blue eyes widened, her thin lips pursed in displeasure. While the woman's cold expression might have sent a maid away crying, it had quite the opposite effect on Charis' spirits which soared in perverse satisfaction.

"Charis! You have brought the entire garden in on your hem!" Agora cried in indignation as her shrewd eyes swept over Charis' dress. "Be gone this instant, wicked girl!"

With a saucy shake of her dirty skirts, Charis scurried down the hall, beaming from ear to ear as the sound of Agora's shrill scolding faded behind her.

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Euphrosyne curled herself up in the window, drawing her shawl tighter about her shoulders to ward off the evening chill. Father's lands were aglow under the sunset, the lush forest beyond the estate walls set against a dreamy backdrop of soft pinks and golds. A pair of doves darted about among the clouds, playing together as they cooed. Euphrosyne fancied herself soaring with them. Thalia's peeved voice broke the spell.

“Syne, why are you lazing about?”

Euphrosyne turned to see Thalia scooping armfuls of brightly colored linens, wools, and silks from a trunk. Charis and Thalia were taking the best gowns between the three sisters to show themselves off to the best advantage. For Euphrosyne's part, she reveled in having an excuse to wear her simplest chitons and wraps. If Mother had guests, they would easily mistake her for another servant. The thought of some noblewoman's flustered apology brought a smile to Euphrosyne's face as she pushed herself to her feet and crossed the room.

Charis shot Euphrosyne an apologetic smile as she approached, handing her a gown to fold. Thalia flung the pile in her arms across Charis' bed with a huff before bending to snatch up a cloak, shaking it out with far more force than necessary. She said Apollo's name under her breath like an oath as she worked and Euphrosyne groaned. Father over the supper table that Charis and Thalia would not only be in attendance at the royal wedding, but he had offered them up to serve in the new princess' household. Steam came out of Thalia's ears the whole meal, the pressure in her head liable to burst and sweep their family away in the fallout.

While Thalia was undoubtedly angry about being summoned, it was just another excuse for her bitterness. Navigating her turbulent moods was getting old.

“No one at court has heard anything of him? That cannot be right.” The frustration tinging Thalia’s queries pricked Euphrosyne’s heart with rare sympathy for her sister. That is, until the memories of the endless whining of the past few years came flooding back.

Euphrosyne carefully lifted a stack of freshly folded clothing, intent on an escape into the adjoining dressing room. She was not fast enough.

“Syne, you have to have heard something of him from Artemis. You were friends, she would not have just left you in the dark!” Thalia’s words came out in screeches, making Euphrosyne’s ears ring. Euphrosyne dropped the delicate fabrics in her hands to keep herself from shredding them with her fingernails.

“As I said when you asked yesterday, no one has written to me,” Euphrosyne ground out.

Euphrosyne refrained from saying whatever transpired between Thalia and Apollo ended her friendship with his twin sister as well. Apollo and the rest of his family severed all contact the moment he left the estate to study under Chiron the Wise, the sage of the Centaurs living in the northernmost mountains of their father’s land. When his letters stopped coming, Thalia quickly spiraled down into a depression, love becoming obsession.

“One of you must know something! Why are you torturing me?” Thalia cried, her eyes filling with tears.

“Torturing you?” Charis repeated, her voice getting low and dangerous. A chill went down Euphrosyne spine, remembering that tone from childhood spats. Their eldest sister was sweet, but Thalia’s theatrics stretched everyone’s patience. Euphrosyne knew it would get ugly if Thalia did not get ahold of herself.

“Yes! Both of you are cruel and unfeeling! He meant nothing to you!” Thalia flailed her arms as tears streamed down her face.

“Nothing? Apollo was our brother. Or did you forget us, mired in your misery as you are?” Euphrosyne reminded, struggling to keep her voice even as it constricted with sadness.

Her words fell on deaf ears. Thalia dismissed her with another swing of her arms, launching into another self-pitying tirade.

“If he has not come by now, he will not be back for you at all.” The words left Charis mouth through gritted teeth, her anger finally overtaking her composure.

“How dare you?” Thalia cried, her eyes flashing with murderous hatred.

Thalia rounded on Charis, hand lifted to strike. Euphrosyne was faster, stepping between the sisters and taking the slap intended for Charis’ cheek. Rage dissolved into shame as Thalia recoiled, eyes clouding with disbelief.

“Syne, I—”

Whatever apology Thalia was about to muster died in her throat. Euphrosyne simply shook her head before turning and striding from the chamber.

### Chapter 3

Ganymedes hid himself in the shadow of one of the overly ornate pillars strewn about the great hall of Olympus' palace. Despite its impressive size, the hall nearly brimmed to capacity with guests from all corners of the earth. While the official reason for the gathering was the crown prince's wedding, Ganymedes' knew the real attraction was a glimpse of the legendary beauty that was the prince's bride measured up against the heir's own broken body. Their eagerness to have their perverse curiosity satisfied was palpable, reminiscent of salivating dogs waiting to sink their teeth in a haunch of meat.

Ganymedes' plans were falling into place perfectly and it was all unfolding like a bad drama staged for his pleasure. Acting on Perses' orders, Ganymedes brought the Titan witch's creation to Olympus, naming her Aphrodite. She was strategically placed under Prince Hephaestus' nose, and within days, he was ready to take her to wife.

Prince Ares, the younger of Zeus' legitimate sons, reclined on a dining chaise nearby, unbothered by the commotion encircling him. Ares' white teeth flashed in a cold smile and the mischievous twinkle in his dark blue eyes rendered his strong features rakish. The boy was entirely too handsome for his own good and wealthy besides, a fact not unnoticed by the matrons stationed about the reception hall. Unsuspecting unwed daughters were shoved in Ares' general vicinity, betrayed by grasping mamas more concerned with their daughters' status than happiness.

Their scheming was in vain. Ares would not be tethered unless explicitly ordered to fall on the sword of matrimony by his father. Of course, any marriage pact Zeus foisted on the boy would be ordered under Ganymedes' direction. The social-climbing mothers would be better

served groveling to Zeus' lowly advisor. Ganymedes' smirked darkly thinking of the humiliation the proud women would suffer if they were reduced to begging him for betrothals.

As the only human among the immortals, Ganymedes was used to being overlooked. While it might have irked him in his youth, Ganymedes now saw it for the advantage it was. The Olympians' inability to see him as anything of consequence meant they were constantly exposing their weaknesses. Their arrogance left them vulnerable and it was Ganymedes' prerogative to exploit that, someday igniting the flames that would raze Olympus to the ground.

A hush fell over the party, pulling Ganymedes out of his musings.

Lord Helios of Hyperborea had made his appearance, resplendent in a bright tunic in his house colors of crimson and gold. Wine goblet in hand, the powerful Titan swept through the crowd, his children following behind, drawing the eyes of everyone in attendance.

He was as good as a traitor to them, after all.

While many at the party had lost kin to the fighting, Helios' house remained intact. Hidden away in the remote mountainous realm of Hyperborea, Helios and his people avoided the blaze that set the rest of the world on fire as the lord maintained his family's neutrality. In the years Ganymedes had been serving Zeus as an advisor, he had taken the opportunity to stoke the flames of Zeus' paranoia over Helios' undeclared allegiance. With the betrothal between Prince Hephaestus and Helios' daughter broken, Zeus' fear of conflict was greater than ever. Ganymedes planned to use it to his advantage.

If the lord felt the hatred stirring in the room, he gave no indication. His handsome features were set in neutral lines that gave nothing away, posture proud even though everyone in

the room would rip him to shreds if given the opportunity. How Ganymedes longed to see that lofty head bowed.

The old Titan would learn a hard lesson soon enough.

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Charis claimed a dining chaise, clinging to the raft bobbing in the choppy sea of Olympus' royal court. The palace brimmed with guests from far and wide, all of the nobility in attendance for the crown prince's wedding and eager to catch a glimpse of the legendary beauty that was the prince's bride. She saw her father standing unbothered by the commotion encircling him as he stared off into nothing. Charis wished she possessed the same carelessness he had in spades, the feeling of pitying eyes on her everywhere she went chipping away at her composure. Indeed, the emotions roiling inside her must have been playing across her face, for Father met her stare and sent her a knowing smile.

Father had been fielding confrontations with the nobles since the festivities began. Each put themselves forward as a friend while seeking to bait him into making some incendiary comment he could not take back. Their scheming was in vain. Though Father exacerbated the king, the crown was forever indebted for what their family did for Zeus' children. Unless Zeus wanted to cause a rift in his own house, he would not raise a hand to Father, especially after the insult of Prince Hephaestus wedding another.

For Charis' part, the lot of them could all hang. The journey to the palace had made the widely lauded capital city seem more a mountain of rot than a paradise.

At Father's insistence, they had left the phoenixes they commanded outside the city, going the rest of the way by carriage as to not draw attention. Stealing looks through gaps in the



carriage curtains, Charis had seen grubby, barefoot human children ricocheting between buildings on the cobblestone, rags hanging from their necks. She witnessed emaciated women balance baskets of various wares on bony hips, weaving their way through the bustling market in the slums while men shouted above the din of the crowds in hopes of attracting customers to their ramshackle stalls. Ladies of the night exposed their flesh and jeered at youths who blushed under the dirt caked on their faces in shame, scurrying off with their heads bowed. Scraggly mutts plunged through traffic from their hiding places in dark alleys, bursting out in front of the carriage. Though Charis cried out for them to flee, they were unafraid of being trampled under the hooves of the chargers.

When the carriage finally stopped, Charis found herself in the heart of a grand district of buildings built on a hill. fluted columns licking the sky braced every structure, stone pristinely white in spite of the unavoidable filth of the bursting city. Cradled in that pocket of luxury was the palace, a beacon of the immortals' rule gleaming in the midst of mire visible from miles away.

Charis' collective observations made her laugh under her breath. It was all a great joke in the form of a monument. Not that was any better in regard to genuineness at the moment. Euphrosyne had not said so much as a farewell to Thalia since she had been struck. They were hardly the happy family they pretended to be.

Hands tapped Charis' shoulder blades, jolting her from her musings and tearing a yip of surprise from her throat. A familiar laugh sounded behind Charis' shoulder, revealing the culprit of the scare to be Princess Artemis. Embarrassment heated Charis' cheeks as all the gazes of the

partygoers that were not already trained on her sought the source of the commotion. Artemis skipped around the chaise, standing before Charis with her arms akimbo.

“Well, you look positively miserable,” Artemis declared, eyes twinkling with mischief. Charis was on her feet in an instant, pulling Artemis into her arms. The princess returned the embrace, clutching at Charis back tightly.

“It has been far too long. Let me look at you,” Charis said, stepping back to examine her friend. Artemis was as wild as Charis remembered.

Mere hours into the celebration, and Artemis was already disheveled beyond repair. Plaits of ebony curls once pinned with such care now hung about her face, pearl drop pins poking out and falling. The fastening sash about her waist was loosened and askew, leaving the wraparound gown drooping unflatteringly on her boyish frame. Dirt marring the once spotless hem completed the look of a savage wood nymph, entirely inappropriate for the daughter of the immortal king of the known universe.

“You are an absolute mess,” Charis cried before she was seized by a fit of giggles.

“That is a fine thing to say after so many years apart,” Artemis clapped back. A childish pout contorted her face for a moment before she joined in Charis’ laughter.

With a remonstrative look at her friend, Charis went about setting right what she could, straightening Artemis’ attire and repining what locks she could reach from her position. Artemis gave a long-suffering sigh under Charis’ ministrations, impatient to rush off to whatever mischief she had abandoned to pester her. Marginally satisfied with her efforts, Charis stopped to survey her handiwork.

“Are you quite finished, Chariclo?” Artemis asked with a huff. Charis raised her eyebrow, feigning sternest even as the sound of her childhood nickname softened her. She gave Artemis a playful shove to her middle.

“Yes, now tell me what I have missed in the time we have been apart.” Artemis’ face fell at Charis’ words, her eyes clouding and her brow darkening. Charis joy at their reunion dissolved into concern.

“Much has happened, too much to tell now,” Artemis replied, her voice dropping low so that only Charis could hear. Before Charis could press for more, a hush had fallen over the banquet.

Artemis turned to find the reason for the cessation in gossip and idle exchanges of pleasantries, Charis following her gaze. Everyone watched as the king made his entrance, his wife on his arm. Resplendent in matching golden robes, the royal couple made their way to the pair of thrones atop the dais overlooking the feasting tables of ambrosia and all manner of sustenance conventionally enjoyed by mortals. Charis could not help but stare at the striking picture Queen Hera made beside her husband.

Shrewd jade eyes appeared to glow from their place above the queen’s bronzed cheeks, complimented by the color of the turquoise stones set in a collar of gold climbing her slender neck. The yards of silk forming her skirts shimmered with her gliding strides as she crossed the room. Curls the color of summer wheat showing the first signs of fading encompassed a tall crown inlaid with stones matching the rest of Her Majesty’s adornments. While the king was all apparent approachability with his jovial smile and cheeks flushed with merriment, courtiers shrank under the queen’s impassible expression, collectively holding their breath and giving her

a wide berth. She inclined her regal head ever so slightly in greeting to the few fortunate enough to have her favor as she passed.

Charis might have wielded the power the queen did and held the throng in rapt attention had things gone as they should.

Scraps of details of the queen's murky past resurfaced in Charis' mind. Murmurings of the king having forced his sister to wed him upon his winning the crown at the price of slaying his father did little to tarnish the image Charis had before her. On the contrary, the queen's ability to rise above and not give consequence to damaging accusations only reinforced Charis' making an idol of her. As the niece of the king's official mistress, Charis and her family should have been the queen's natural enemies, but the great lady had been the epitome of kindness during their time at court.

The king and queen assumed their perches over their subjects and the din of the festivities rose again with a vengeance. Artemis squeezed Charis' hand before taking her place with the royal family on the dais. Charis fell back upon the chaise, not caring if her descent was graceful.

Prince Hephaestus had yet to make an appearance at his own wedding feast, the anticipation of his arrival setting Charis further on edge. Phaethon left a cluster of young women cloying at him, dangling a goblet of a new libation dubbed 'wine' by the elusive Prince Dionysus lazily from his fingers. Her brother had the posture of a proud tomcat, stalking over to Charis' chaise at the feasting tables. He draped his impressive physique across it, forcing Charis to tuck her legs under herself to make room. Leaning forward, Phaethon rested his chin atop Charis' shoulder, breath brushing her cheek and fluttering the wispy curls about her ear as the scent of something adjacent to vinegar tickled her nostrils.

“You must try this. It will put you in far more agreeable spirits,” Phaethon enthused, his smile easier and brighter than Charis had seen in months. It was pleasing to see him so relaxed, even if the instrument of freedom was a mite dubious.

“No, thank you,” Charis refused, her voice sounded strained and far more peeved than she intended to her own ears. Phaethon must have taken note of it too, interpreting it as a challenge to rile Charis further.

“I have not seen our sister’s lover,” Phaethon whispered, tone dripping with wickedness. “It would seem even her . . . charms could tempt him.” Charis bristled at the barb as indignation for her sister rose in her throat like bile.

“Bite your tongue!” Charis gasped, “You should not say such things in the hearing of others. You should not speak at all for that matter.” Her protest earned her a sound more scoff than laugh, her brother charging ahead.

“Fret not, dear girl. I have it on good authority Apollo has still not taken a wife,” Phaethon promised, cheek audible in his voice, “Our sister is preserved, at least for a time.”

Charis might have mounted some reply had she still been listening.

Crown Prince Hephaestus, the man who was once to be her husband, now stood in the doorway his parents had entered moments before. His impressive stature and bulk dwarfed the space. A coarse sandy beard obscured the square jawline and strong chin she knew so well. Sharp eyes the color of icicles were alight with an emotion Charis could not decipher. Old scars marred the skin of the right side of his body, starting at his temple and disappearing beneath his tunic. He limped slightly as he moved, the cane in his right hand supporting his body. The rumors she had

heard of his monstrous appearance made sense, but were clearly exaggerated. Charis could not find fault with him beyond the unfortunateness of his injuries.

Then Charis spied his bride beside him. The lady in question was truly a sight to behold, outdoing the expectations of those who had believed the tales of her beauty and unequivocally disproving those that doubted.

Princess Aphrodite presented herself before the gathering with the same haughtier of an actress meeting her admirers after a performance. With a smooth, honey-hued arm wound covetously through her husband's elbow, Her Highness stood with her willowy frame contorted into angles contrived to flatter her figure to the greatest advantage. A head of shining midnight curls tilted coquettishly to one side as she regarded her husband with glittering cocoa eyes slanted to a feline tilt from under a fringe of thick lashes. Her full bottom lip was trapped beneath a row of pearly teeth, a becoming pink coloring the tawny cheeks of her delicate oval face.

Hephaestus bent to whisper something in his bride's ear, deepening her blush. The prince earned himself a laugh that sounded musical to the ear, though it put Charis in mind to start off retching before the onlookers.

"No wonder the prince threw you over. She is a temptation no one could resist," Phaethon practically cooed against Charis' ear, oblivious to her fractured feelings.

Whatever passed between the prince and his wife was certainly a show. Aphrodite practically danced through the banquet, artfully guiding her husband in the direction of the most prominent guests for introductions. She was evidently ignorant of the inconvenience Hephaestus suffered weaving through cumbersome furniture with a lame leg, consumed with eagerly

clasping the hands of the peers of the land she anticipated ruling with pleasure. For Charis' part, coy smiles did little to fool a body who had seen enough of them.

Eventually, Hephaestus and Aphrodite found their way to Charis' father. The princess dipped her head in feigned deference, her swelling bosom spilling out of the swooping neckline of her gown. With a near-imperceptible nod of her head, Lord Helios summoned his children to his side.

Phaethon sighed, tossing the remainder of the wine in his goblet down his throat as he pushed to his feet. Ever the showman, Phaethon bowed to Charis, arcing his arm overhead in an overly gallant gesture, grinning like a fool and turning his palm up for Charis' taking. Charis complied with a roll of the eyes and an unsuccessfully repressed giggle, allowing herself to be ushered towards the seductress and her lovestruck victim.

“Heartiest congratulations. You have won yourself a rare one indeed,” Phaethon declared, slapping the prince on the back. Hephaestus teetered over his cane under the blow, brow furrowing momentarily as he steadied himself.

Aphrodite propped herself against Hephaestus, making a fuss of helping him regain his balance to give the impression of an attentive wife. Hephaestus' unruly beard parted as the bear of a man beamed from ear to ear, pride lighting his rugged face.

Phaethon and the prince fell into the usual habit of men of giving each other a ribbing, volleys of light insults glancing harmlessly off their marks. Too late Charis realized she was staring, memorizing the face of the man who spurned her before ever laying eyes on her. Catching her, the prince favored her with a small smile that sent her stomach somersaulting under the fabric of her gown, her skin suddenly feeling warm. Aphrodite pounced on the shift in

her husband's attention. Phaethon either did not notice or willfully ignored the shift in the atmosphere, pasting on his most winning smile.

Father stepped forward to make introductions when Phaethon did not.

“Your Grace, may I present my daughter, the Lady Charis. She and her sister, Thalia, shall attend your bride.”

The prince's eyes widened as his wife fixed an openly viperous glare turned on Charis.

Charis felt as if she were doused with icy water, her smile faltering. There could be no mistake whatever had just transpired would cost her dearly and all feelings of pleasure departed.

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Hercules listened to the revelry that gave no sign of quieting long after the moon and stars crowded out the sun. Despite the palace's thick marble walls, Hercules could hear every sound of drunken debauchery and it made his vigil on the wall that much more difficult with his attention so divided. A particularly shrill laugh made the tense warrior jump, his hand reflexively dropping to where his sword rested against his hip.

A low chuckle behind him had Hercules drawing the blade in the next breath, whipping around to point it at the shadows.

“Who goes there?” Hercules demanded, dropping his voice to mimic the hard tone he used when commanding his men. Rather than intimidate the interloper, Hercules merely earned himself another laugh.

Princess Athena, Hercules' foster mother, stepped out of the shadows, dark eyes dancing with mirth. Hercules swore under his breath, returning his sword to its sheath as he felt his cheeks flame with embarrassment.



“I appreciate that you take your watch so seriously, but I do not believe any Titans are nearby,” the princess teased, her statement dissolving into a fit of giggles. A grin stole across Hercules’ face at the sound in spite of himself.

Normally, Olympus’ warrior princess was a picture of severity, standing tall in armor beside the throne as her father’s personal protector. As the daughter of King Zeus’ first wife who was cast off before his ascension, many thought Athena’s position at court a simple token of a father’s guilty conscience. Those who were smart enough to see past the ends of their noses knew different. Without Athena, Zeus’ empire would crumble as quickly as it was erected. Wise beyond her years, Athena’s patience and even-temperedness balanced her father’s brashness, saving Olympus from certain disaster more than once. Any other being, immortal or otherwise, would falter under such a heavy weight on their shoulders. Though it wore on her at times, Athena bore the burden with grace.

There was no hint of strain on her now. Unfortunately, Hercules found himself in the position of casting a pallor over her temporary joy.

“War is everywhere, princess,” Hercules reminded quietly. Athena only rolled her eyes, laughter fading to leave an easy smile in its wake.

“We have not been at war for centuries, my boy. The Titans simply remind us they still exist every once in awhile,” Athena replied, her confidence sounding hollow to Hercules’ ears.

“Hubris does not suit you, even when you are in jest,” Hercules replied, turning his back on Athena to return his gaze to the palace courtyard below them. Carriages stood at the ready, footmen keeping steeds ranging from horses to griffins alert in case their masters and mistresses

suddenly appeared. A particularly magnificent stallion shied to the side at a groom's approach, clearly as restless as Hercules felt himself.

Athena laid a calming hand on Hercules' forearm, the tense muscles loosening under her touch.

"Perhaps time away would do you some good. A chance to return to the simplicity and quiet of the mortal realm," the princess offered. Now it was Hercules' turn to laugh.

"You and I both know that when war does come, the human realm will be the first to be consumed," Hercules replied. He felt Athena stiffen behind him.

Hercules knew her words were born of a desire to protect those she loved and yet he was punishing her for it by reminding her of the bleak reality. She was not the cause of his restlessness and frustration. He patted the hand that rested on his arm in a silent apology.

"No, you are right," Athena conceded, "I would prefer you close anyhow. I cannot have you foolishly barreling headlong into danger without me."

"It is not as though I go looking for trouble. It simply finds me," Hercules pouted and crossed his arms in mock offense, relieved Athena resumed her teasing.

"Of course," Athena sarcastically agreed. They both knew she was right. If there was a fight to be had, Hercules could not help but throw himself into it.

Born to Alcmena, wife of mortal Prince Amphytrion, Hercules was slated for a life of privilege. That is, until Amphytrion surmised Hercules was not his blood and cast him out. As a youth, Hercules wandered the earth, offering himself as a mercenary. It was not long before his name spread, his skill and reputation preceding him wherever he went. Kings were eager to engage his services when their borders were threatened, but quick to send him on his way with

his wight in gold when their wars were won. Hercules could hardly blame them. Men like him were dangerous to keep around.

Bloodlust seized him when he heard the sound of blades clashing, exciting him and turning him more beast than man. Those who faced him in battle were right to be terrified. Though he owed his legend to his ferocity on the battlefield, it came back to haunt him in the quiet moments of daily life. He had tried his hand at farming and being a family man, but the violence never left him, making him too volatile to live peacefully among mortals.

Hercules needed to have an enemy to fight to keep sane. As the patroness of mortals warriors prayed to, Athena took note of those who excelled. Those who distinguished themselves in one way or another found themselves in her favor. Hearing tales of Hercules' labors slaying monsters and waging wars, Athena recognized his superhuman strength for what it was; the result of a half-divine, half-mortal heritage. She trained him herself, increasing his lethality tenfold and giving him an enemy truly worthy of his hatred.

What he owed her could never be repaid, gratitude nearly overwhelming him.

Turning to face the divine woman who raised him, Hercules raked Athena into his arms, burying her face in his brawny shoulder.

## Chapter 4

A blanket of stillness settled over the house even as its occupants thrashed beneath it like a restless toddler rebelling against an ordered afternoon rest. Most of the servants had disappeared from the main rooms to their attic dormitories, retiring in anxiety over the quality of their efforts readying the house. A select few of their number had exchanged their woolen day tunics for finer chitons, taking up posts about the estate to welcome the master upon his return.

Euphrosyne paced the ornate sitting room, eyes straying to the window facing the drive cutting through the forest. Her father and brother would be coming into view on phoenix-back any moment, the caravan of family carriages following behind on the ground. She both craved and dreaded his presence, knowing what he was bound to bring with him. The house was a tempest all day, old Agora channeling her disquiet into inventing problems that only the martyred housekeeper could solve before Father's arrival. Euphrosyne shoved down the urge to flee from the tension, screaming internally.

Lady Clymene waltzed into the room, her customary serene smile in place. Pale blue silk swished about her long legs as she glided across the space, the color complimenting the startling gray of her eyes. Fading russet hair was piled high atop her head, a bright silver circlet resting among the pinned curls.

Euphrosyne recalled sitting on the floor of her mother's bedchamber as a child while maids took painstaking efforts to deck their mistress out in finery for a simple family dinner. When Euphrosyne asked her mother why she was dressing so well, Lady Clymene smiled indulgently and explained, "A wife should always give her husband a healthy reminder of the joys awaiting him at home."

“You look beautiful, Mother,” Euphrosyne assured. The thought of her mother still choosing her ensembles for her husband’s benefit after centuries of marriage brought a smile to Euphrosyne’s face.

“Thank you, sweet girl,” Mother replied, her voice bright and cheerful. She gracefully lowered herself on a chaise and smoothed her skirts, a queen preparing to accept tribute. Clearly, Mother had been spared Agora’s foul mood, having cloistered herself in her bedchamber after overseeing the gardening.

“You look troubled,” Mother observed, her calm voice probing gently. Euphrosyne groaned and paced with renewed vigor, feel her mother’s gaze follow her around the room.

“I am worried for my sisters, especially Thalia. Her . . . unhappiness makes her vulnerable,” Euphrosyne gritted out, suppressing the growl in her throat.

“She is heartsore, dearest,” Clymene soothed, though the statement of the obvious only rankled Euphrosyne further.

“Yes! It is an open wound. The vultures at court will smell the blood and come to feed,” Euphrosyne retorted, her voice tapering off at the end. She felt her shoulders sag, the release of such vehemence leeching the strength from her bones.

Clymene regarded her daughter with such an expression of concern it nearly set Euphrosyne to sobbing where she stood.

“Oh, my sweet girl—”

“My lady! The master is home!” Agora shouted, barreling into the room and nearly tripping on her skirts in the process. Clymene held out her arms to her old servant, permitting the

woman to stand at her side. Euphrosyne retreated to a corner of the sitting room to put as much distance between herself and her perceptive mother as possible.

A great commotion sounded at the front of her house, signaling the lord's arrival. Euphrosyne jumped out of her skin at the noise, her agitation momentarily forgotten. Father would set all right now that he was home.

Yet, it was not the familiar rich rumbling of her father's laugh that followed, but shouts of panic. A servant Euphrosyne recognized as Lycaon appeared in the doorway, face ashen and panting.

"My lady, there had been an accident. Master Phaethon—"

Mother was pushing past him and into the hall before he could finish his sentence. Euphrosyne was slower to react, her mind working to absorb what she had heard.

"Lycaon, with me," she ordered, the servant following her as she chased her mother. Euphrosyne sprinted through the house, coming out the grand front doors to the courtyard. It seemed as though the entire household were gathered, standing in a circle and shrouding what rested in the center. Euphrosyne caught sight of the vibrant blue of her mother's skirts before she was swallowed by the crowd.

"Stand aside!" Lycaon shouted to the commingling of estate servants and her father's tenants. No one paid any heed, forcing Lycaon to bodily throw himself against spectators to clear a path for Euphrosyne.

When Euphrosyne finally managed to fight her way through, what she found sent her heart plummeting in her chest.

Pelagon, Father's largest phoenix, was sprawled on the earth, his shimmering crimson plumage caked with dirt and blood. A gaping wound marred the bird's chest. Euphrosyne judged it would prove fatal as daylight waned. He snapped his beak at the onlookers, giving a wheezing sound meant to be a warning that came with a spray of blood. No one was able to draw near with even Mother standing back, arms crossed defensively.

Dropping her shoulders and holding out her hands in a calming gesture she had seen her father make, Euphrosyne dropped to her knees before the creature. Pelagon lifted his head, turning a keen yellow eye on her as if he were taking the measure of her. Apparently coming to a decision, Pelagon lifted his wing, showing her what he was so fiercely protecting. Phaethon lay in a crumpled heap, his body bent at unnatural angles. Pelagon nudged Phaethon with his beak in a vain attempt to rouse him. When Phaethon did not stir, the bird let out a mournful croak.

Euphrosyne was vaguely aware of the wail that burst from her mother's throat behind her as tears filled her own eyes, blurring the scene as she fell to her knees. Phaethon's form was twisted up in his cloak as though he were already wrapped in a shroud for burial. Crawling to him, Euphrosyne caught sight of the blood dripping from his nose and pooling in the corner of his mouth. His breath was shallow and labored, each exhale tapering off with a wet gurgle.

Phaethon was drowning and there was nothing Euphrosyne could do to save him. Choking sobs wracked Euphrosyne's body, fresh tears spilling from her eyes. Tearing his hand free from the mangled mess of his cloak, she clutched Phaethon's cold fingers as if the strength of her grip would keep him alive. At her touch, Phaethon's eyes fluttered, opening and flooding Euphrosyne with relief.

“Brother!” Euphrosyne cried, taking hold of Phaethon’s tunic and pulling him to lay across her lap.

“I hate . . . seeing you cry . . .” Phaethon’s garbled voice soothed. Euphrosyne’s heart constricted as though a fist were gripping it in a vice. Before she could think of a reply, Phaethon’s breath halted and left him in a sigh. His warm eyes hollowed out, glazing over as his soul left.

Pelagon dragged his head up from the ground to look at Phaethon. The great bird let out a mournful croak, his whole body slumping to the side as though he had gone limp. He had clung to life to discharge his duty to his master, but now that Phaethon was gone, Pelagon’s vigil was at an end. Euphrosyne reached a hand up to grasp Pelagon’s feathers, feeling his chest rise and fall for the last time.

Stillness reigned over the courtyard, the only sound the weeping of those gathered who loved their lord’s family enough to feel the loss. The master’s heir was dead, the light of the future snuffed out. Euphrosyne rested her forehead against her brother’s chest, closing her eyes in defiance of the sight before her as a feeling of numbness swept over her. Arms wrapped around her from behind, gently pulling her away.

“My lady, let us see to it,” Lycaon spoke softly.

“I will not leave him,” Euphrosyne whispered.

“He is no longer here, my lady. Agora is with your mother, but she will need you to comfort her,” Lycaon said, his words ringing true.

Euphrosyne allowed him to move her, rising to her feet and staring at nothing as she was ushered away. Now, the crowd let her pass, hanging their heads as they parted. She suddenly



stopped in her tracks, a single thought cutting through her foggy mind. Lycaon looked back at her, concern etched into his kind face.

“Where is my father?” Euphrosyne asked. Lycaon balked at her question, taking a step backwards to create distance between them. He looked away from her as he hesitated to answer.

“Tell me!” Euphrosyne demanding, taking fistfuls of Lycaon’s chiton and forcing him to face her as panic seized her anew.

“I am sorry, my lady. The master is missing.”

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Ganymedes dangled a goblet between his fingers, idly swirling the ale within as he stared into the flames flickering in the hearth. Night had settled over the palace, giving Ganymedes a measure of peace as its occupants retired to their respective chambers. The silence gave Ganymedes time to think. If Ganymedes’ were not careful, his recent success would inflate his ego. Arrogance bred complacency and Ganymedes could not afford idleness.

Aphrodite was wed to the prince, according to Perses’ orders, but she was proving to be difficult to manage. Her new status seemed to have emboldened her, indulging in every vanity and pleasure available when she should be focusing on providing her husband with an heir to secure her position. Half of Ganymedes’ time was consumed with safeguarding Aphrodite’s reputation of morality and sobriety that was becoming a greater falsehood with each passing day. He wondered why the witch had not fashioned the girl to be simple-minded and obedient. Perhaps Aphrodite was meant to test Ganymedes’ resolve.

Little did Perses’ know that he was just a tool like all the rest. Ganymedes’ fellow man might worship the immortals as gods, but he was under no illusions about what they were. Their

depravity knew no bounds and he would see them all burn if it killed him. The Olympians would be the first to be fall in repayment for Ganymedes' stolen boyhood.

As favorite of man's creator, Prometheus, Ganymedes spent his formative years on the craftsman's knee. Prometheus educated him, sharing knowledge of science and magic gleaned through the ages. No mystery was unsolvable, nothing hidden. He was dazzled, his eyes filled with the stars as Prometheus unraveled the secrets of the cosmos. Ganymedes' was shown the unfathomable beauty of existence so many missed because they simply had no desire to discover.

Just as swiftly as Prometheus had opened the world to Ganymedes, Zeus scorched it, reducing paradise to a mountain of ash. Zeus' men came for Prometheus in the night, dragging him from his bed and carrying him off to the dungeons for an unknown crime. Though Ganymedes' hid, the soldiers found him, taking him to stand shaking before Olympus' king. There was not justice under the cover of darkness, as Ganymedes came to learn. When Zeus was finished was finished with him, Ganymedes was left in a heap on the floor where he once stood, broken and bloodied.

Even now, the recollection of the lust that simmered in Zeus' eyes that first time made Ganymedes want to retch. But Prometheus had made Ganymedes clever. He quickly learned that his tears would not save him. Feigning acceptance and even pleasure left Zeus vulnerable to manipulation. It was not long before Zeus regarded Ganymedes as his lover, confiding in him in the aftermath of taking his pleasure. When Zeus realized Ganymedes' advice had merit, he gave Ganymedes a seat on his council. As long as Ganymedes suffered Zeus' attentions, he carried the same authority at court as the king's children.

Draining the contents of his goblet, Ganymedes chucked the empty goblet across the room. The gold vessel clanked against the stone of the back wall.

“I sincerely hope you were not aiming at me, my lord,” a voice spoke in the dark.

Poena’s form crept out from behind the gauzy curtain in the window. The demoness slunk across the dark room with the agility of a cat. A dark hood cast a shadow over her face, a long cloak dragging behind her as she moved. Pieces of light bronze armor were bound to her limbs with strips of leather. Every divot and scratch evidencing years of combat was highlighted by the glow of the firelight as she drew near.

“Is it done?” Ganymedes asked, knowing full well she would not have returned if her task proved unsuccessful.

“Yes, master. The boy was slain,” Poena reported as she knelt before him. She pulled the head of a javelin from her belt, lifting it above her head and offering it to him. Ganymedes took it, running his fingers along the blood crusted on the iron proving the kill.

“You take pride in your work. Why give this to me?”

“Fulfilling my task required the death of a phoenix. There is no honor in killing such a magnificent creature,” Poena replied, her voice tinged with shame.

Ganymedes turned away from her, crossing to his desk and tossing the weapon onto the oaken surface. He plucked a purse of gold from its resting place on a stack of parchments, weighing it in his hands before tossing it to the ground before Poena. A hand thrust out from beneath her cloak, snatching it up as though she feared it would be taken.

“There is more,” Poena confessed, keeping her head bowed.

“What more?” Ganymedes demanded. In all the time Poena served Ganymedes, she had been beyond reproach. There was no reason to doubt her skills, but wariness crept over him. He braced himself for whatever Poena was to say next.

“Lord Helios attempted to save his son and was likely injured. I could not linger long enough to mount a search without risking discovery.”

Ganymedes mulled over Poena’s revelation. Phaethon’s death could not be traced back to him, but Helios’ disappearance could be beneficial and detrimental to his plans in equal measure. A grieving woman provided an opportunity. Perhaps Lady Clymene would prove easier to maneuver without her husband or son there to guide her. Helios’ sister, Lady Selene, was married to Perses’ general, after all. He would simply have to devise a plan to account for all possibilities.

“What did you observe of the family?” Ganymedes inquired, his mind racing.

“They mourn the loss of their son and brother. Lady Clymene remains in Hyperborea with her daughter,” Poena replied, finally lifting her head to meet his eye. Ganymedes tried not to recoil at the sight of her mangled face, schooling his expression. The scars she bore were owed entirely to the many dangerous missions she had embarked on under his orders. Though Ganymedes knew he was responsible for her disfigurement, the sight never ceased to unsettle him no matter how many times he looked upon her.

“You have done well,” Ganymedes praised, stepping behind his desk to reach for a sheet of parchment and a quill. Touching quill to page, Ganymedes penned condolences for Lady Clymene’s loss, offering her and her surviving children a place with the Titans. If Ganymedes had any reservations about writing in Perses’ name, he shoved them down. The chance to sever

Olympus' ties with Helios' house once and for all overrode any fear of the Titan king's wrath. Losing Hyperborea would be a great blow to Zeus.

"Now, I have another task for you. See to it that Lady Clymene receives this. You are to place it in her hands and her hands alone. Remind her of Lady Selene's love for her and her children," Ganymedes commanded, dropping the missive into Poena's open palm. She curled bruised fingers around it, sliding it into the belt around her waist.

"You may go," Ganymedes dismissed her. Poena rose to her feet without saying another word, departing as silently as she entered.

When Ganymedes was certain Poena was gone, he released a heavy sigh, feeling himself deflate. The events of day had leeched the energy from his bones and it was finally catching up to him. Though Ganymedes' mind was still alert, his body cried for rest, rankling him with the reminder of his infernal mortality. He could not remember a time his bed had looked so inviting.

There was much to attend to, but Ganymedes gave into temptation. Flopping down upon the downy mattress, Ganymedes rolled over to stare up at the silken canopy hanging above him, scheming until dreamless sleep claimed him.

## Chapter 5

Euphrosyne clutched her knees to her chest, desperate for some means of comforting herself as she huddled in a corner of her bedchamber. The room seemed hollow with Charis and Thalia gone, though it did not compare to the emptiness she felt in the wake of Phaethon's death. Her cheeks itched, chapped and crusted over with dried tracks of salty tears. She had been useless for days, dumbly walking the halls of the house like a phantom from the stories Phaethon used to scare her as a girl.

When the search parties returned and reported there were no signs of Father, Mother had cloistered herself in her chambers for hours before emerging as the consummate noblewoman. Beautifully dressed with not so much as a hair out of place, Mother stoically ordered Phaethon's body to be wrapped and a pyre built in Father's orchard. It was Phaethon's favorite place to play as a boy. Euphrosyne thought it a proper send off for her brother even as the memories threatened to tear her broken heart from her chest. Perhaps the most devastating part of it all was the knowledge that there would be no more memories made.

Phaethon's body was carried out of the house on a wooden slab, Lycaon at the fore of the men who volunteered to convey their lord's son to his final destination. Servants and tenants filled the orchard, flanking Euphrosyne and her mother who took their posts at the head of the pyre. A sentry brought a torch as Phaethon was laid atop the pyre, looking to Mother for permission. Mother gave him a nod, her impassive expression maddening.

As the sentry put the torch to the kindling, it was all Euphrosyne could do to keep her legs from buckling beneath her. Watching her brother's beloved form go up in a puff of smoke forced her to confront the fact he was truly gone.

A knock at the door brought Euphrosyne out of her reflection, startling her. It was only a few hours before dawn. Everyone should still be abed. She opened the door to find her mother on the other side. Her mother had changed out of the gown she wore at the funeral, donning a heavy traveling gown and cloak.

“Let me in and shut the door. Quickly now.”

Euphrosyne wordlessly stepped aside. Her mother swept around her, stuffing her fingers into a pair of leather gloves as she passed. Shutting the door, Euphrosyne turned to regard her mother. The hard look in her eyes filled Euphrosyne with trepidation.

“We are leaving. Immediately,” Mother announced, casting her eyes about the room. Euphrosyne did not miss the way her eyes lingered on Charis and Thalia’s empty beds. She opened the trunk at the foot of Euphrosyne’s bed and rummaged through its contents. She lifted a knapsack from the trunk, stuffing a few gowns into it.

“Why? Where are we going?” Euphrosyne’s tired mind caught up with her mother’s words.

“We are going to see the king,” Mother replied. Her tone told Euphrosyne she would not broker any resistance. She was giving orders.

“We are going to Olympus?” Euphrosyne asked, frowning in confusion.

“No, you imbecile!” Mother snapped, nostril flaring, “Zeus is responsible for this, I know it. We are going to see King Perses.” Euphrosyne felt as though the ground had pulled out from underneath her and not for the first time in recent days.

“But what about Charis and Thalia?” If Zeus was responsible for Phaethon’s death and Father’s disappearance, her sisters were in grave danger. Their positions at court placed them in the enemy’s hands. Mother did not intend to abandon them, surely.

“Lycaon has been instructed to deliver a letter to them personally. They will follow us shortly,” Mother answered, hardly hiding her irritation. She tossed a winter gown and wool cloak in Euphrosyne’s direction.

“Put those on. We will take the servant’s staircase out to the gardens. There are horses saddled at the back gate.”

“And Father? He would not have wanted us to leave Hyperborea,” Euphrosyne countered, gaining her footing now that she knew what was happening. Father would not approve of them running to the Titans and effectively declaring themselves for their side after fight to keep Hyperborea’s independence for so long.

“Your father is not here. Now, we must survive,” Mother reasoned, taking hold of Euphrosyne’s hands and squeezing them. Euphrosyne searched her mother’s eyes, seeing the desperation shining in their depths.

Euphrosyne extricated herself from her mother’s grip, turning to avoid her pleading gaze and pace the room. It was clear her mother’s mind was made up. If Euphrosyne were to choose to remain, she would be alone.

Coming to a decision, Euphrosyne scooped the clothes off the floor. When she looked up, her mother was smiling with relief.

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Charis tightened the silken sash at her waist, straightening the pleats of her gown before entering Princess Aphrodite's private dining room. She only hoped she looked presentable after dressing is such a hurry. The princess required fresh cut flowers be placed about her chambers every morning. Wrestling the royal gardeners into handing over irises and lilies every morning was becoming increasingly difficult, making Charis tardy for her breakfast duties.

The dining room was open and airy, light pouring in from the large windows along the back wall. Pillars between each window were wrapped in flowering vines, the vibrant blooms offsetting the creamy tones of the space. Plush white rugs cushioned much of the stone floor. Lounges upholstered in ivory linen were arranged in a tight circle around a single marble table, creating an atmosphere of intimacy and encouraging conversation over meals.

Though beautiful, the space was not exactly practical. Not that the princess was concerned with cleaning. That was what maids were for.

Charis took up her post beside Thalia against the back wall, waiting for the princess to make an appearance so they could begin serving.

"Where have you been?" Thalia hissed, fixing her with a glare. Charis ignored her, keeping her gaze fixed to the opposite and waiting in silence.

The door to the princess' bedchamber finally opened, Aphrodite appearing in the doorway. Charis tried not to be envious of how breathtaking her mistress was even upon waking. With her curly hair slightly mussed and sheer nightdress teasing the generous curves of her figure beneath, her state of dishevelment only made her appear more charming.

“Good morning, my lady,” Charis and Thalia greeted in unison. The princess merely groaned in response, waving them off and pinching the bridge of her nose before flopping down on a chaise.

“I am not quite the thing this morning, ladies,” Aphrodite explained, “Some quiet would do me good.”

Charis’ jaw clamped shut immediately. Drawing closer to pour milk into a goblet, she caught a whiff of the tart smell of wine on the princess’ breath. Clearly, she had imbibed and was feeling the effects. Prince Dionysus’ beverage had become popular among the Olympians after its introduction at Prince Hephaestus’ wedding, though Charis did not understand the appeal. From what Charis observed, it made people unpredictable and sloppy, her mistress being no exception. The already difficult woman became almost unmanageable when drunk.

Princess Aphrodite tore a piece of the sweet bread before her, soaking it in the milk before putting it in her mouth. Her movements were sluggish and uncoordinated, nearly resulting in the milk sloshing across her lap. She cursed, slamming the cup down on the table and pushing it away from her as if it were at fault for her clumsiness. The cup tipped over, the milk remaining within pouring over a tray of lemon cakes.

Now, the princess was angry. She threw her arms in the air with a cry of frustration, reminding Charis of a toddler in the throes of a tantrum.

“Clean this up!” the princess commanded. Charis lifted a corner of the linen tablecloth, doing her best to soak up the spilled milk. Thalia was frozen, a fiery look in her eyes Charis knew all too well. She sent a silent prayer to Mother Gaia to give Thalia patience.

A voiced bellowed in the hall, arresting the attention of everyone in the room.

Prince Ares bounded into the room a moment late, the princess suddenly all aflutter at his appearance. She seemed to positively glow with delight, the ill effects of her overindulgence the night before completely forgotten.

Ares swaggered into the room as though it were his own, sprawling across the chaise beside Aphrodite. Everything about him reminded Charis of the tomcat Father kept in the stables to keep rats from spreading disease to the phoenixes and horses. He was smart enough to manipulate those around him and arrogant enough to think he would always get away with it. Every instinct Charis had screamed not to trust him, but she could hardly instruct her mistress on whose company she should keep.

Nevertheless, Charis was acutely aware of the fact that the interaction she observed could easily give rise to damaging scandal. Ares' presence in Aphrodite's private quarters before she dressed was entirely inappropriate and would be weaponized by the court gossipmongers if they caught wind of it. For Charis' part, she thought the princess would be better served spending time getting to know her new husband, rather than engaging his brother.

The princess giggled prettily at something Ares said, playfully shoving his shoulder. Aphrodite was sitting upright now, scooting down her chaise to be closer to the prince. She leaned forward to whisper conspiratorially in his ear. Her position put her generous bosom on display just beneath the prince's nose and Charis had no doubt that it was intentional.

Feeling uneasy, Charis turned her back to the scene. Thalia sent Charis a long-suffering look, not bothering to hide her feelings as her lip curled in disgust.

A soft knock sounded against the door leading to the hall. Charis opened it, finding Prince Hephaestus on the other side. Despite the initial awkwardness of having the woman he

jilted serving the woman he wed, the prince had been kind to Charis. He was clearly besotted with his wife and Charis could hardly condemn a man for following his heart. Unfortunately, finding common ground with the prince only made her mistress' behavior that much more difficult to tolerate.

“Good morning, my lord. Please, come in,” Charis welcomed him, stepping aside to let him pass.

“Thank you, Lady Charis,” the prince replied, smiling warmly.

Charis shifted to see her mistress' fingers intertwined with Prince Ares'. She snatched her hand away as her husband entered, having the decency to color with shame. Prince Ares just smirked. If Prince Hephaestus notice what has transpired, he gave no indication, heading straight for his wife.

“Good morning, my love,” Hephaestus greeted Aphrodite, dropping a kiss on the crown of her head. Charis watched curiously as her mistress rubbed the spot he kissed as if to wipe it away. A long-suffering look darkened her cheery countenance. Over the last few weeks, Charis witnessed Aphrodite's overdramatic displays of affection fade cool indifference. Outright derision was new.

Charis was thankful Prince Hephaestus' back was turned.

“Good morning, brother. You seem in fine spirits,” Hephaestus observed, claiming a chaise for himself. He carefully lowered himself to the linen cushions, groaning a bit as he descended and propped his cane against the table.

Aphrodite rolled her eyes at him, her earlier irritation reemerging.

“I had a wonderful sparring session with a few of the guards this morning,” Ares explained, his eyes flashing as a wicked smirk spread across his face. “You might join us in the training yard later, brother. It is a shame you cannot participate, but you might find some enjoyment in observing.”

The look in Ares’ eyes said he did not think it a shame at all.

“Perhaps I will,” Hephaestus replied noncommittally, “but there is much work to be done at the forge.”

“Oh no, husband. Do not spend your day in that infernal pit you call a workshop. You will not be welcome in my bed if you come to me covered in soot and smelling of smoke,” Aphrodite whined, her lips pressing in a childish pout.

“As you wish, wife,” Hephaestus promised with an indulgent smile.

“It is settled then and I know you will feel better for it. Your infirmity should not keep you from experiencing what it is to live as a man,” Ares declared, cloaking his taunt in an innocent smile.

Aphrodite coughed into her goblet she had picked up from the table at some point, hiding her snickers. Hephaestus visibly bristled even as his face remained impassive.

“Girl, some wine,” Ares commanded suddenly, addressing Charis.

“It is rather early, my lord,” Charis offered, not daring to refuse though she wished to.

“You are not to advise him; you are simply to obey,” Aphrodite admonished, her voice dropping ominously low. Thalia took initiative, leaving the dining to retrieve the pitcher of wine from the parlor. The princess kept in on hand for entertaining guests in the evening, though she usually ended up drinking it herself.

Charis felt Aphrodite's disapproving gaze follow her as she made Prince Hephaestus a breakfast plate. Thalia returned with the pitcher in hand, momentarily diverting the attention away from Charis.

As Thalia approached Prince Ares, she stepped on the hem of her gown. She fell forward, unable to keep ahold of the pitcher as she tried to regain her balance. The pitched was upended over the prince's head, dousing him in dark red liquid.

The prince shouted in surprised outrage, jumping to his feet and sending wine splashing over the chaise and carpet.

"You stupid cow! You ruined everything!" Aphrodite screeched at Thalia, eyes blazing and nostrils flaring. Thalia fell to the floor, using her skirts to sop up the wine from the floor. Charis knelt on the floor beside her,

"Forgive me, my lord," Thalia pled, looking up at Ares with glassy doe eyes through her lashes. Charis recognized the expression from childhood when Thalia was trying to soften their father after she had done something wrong. Prince Ares froze as he regarded her from above, his rage dissipating.

"It is nothing," Ares finally settled on, letting out a heavy sigh as he looked down at his stained tunic.

"Nothing? She has ruined my dining room!" Aphrodite cried, eyes welling with tears.

"My dear, I am sure it was only an accident," Prince Hephaestus tried to soothe her, holding his arms out to her. Aphrodite stamped her foot, but said no more as she buried her face in her hand before falling into his arms.

“I think I will go change,” Ares announced, spinning on his heel and striding to the door. He nearly ran roughshod over a maid waiting in the hall.

“Excuse me, my lord,” the girl apologized, dipping a curtsy as Ares stormed off. Aphrodite lifted her head from her husband’s chest at the sound of the newcomer’s entrance.

“What do you want?” Aphrodite asked, narrowing her eyes. The girl paled and stammered out the reason for her errand.

“There is a man waiting in the kitchens. He bears a message for Lady Charis and Lady Thalia, if Your Grace will permit him to see them.”

“Yes, yes,” Aphrodite agreed, “Get out of my sight, the lot of you.”

The maid curtsied and fled the room so quickly she was long gone by the time Thalia and Charis made their exit. Once they were safely out of earshot, Charis gripped Thalia’s arm, forcing her to come to a halt.

“You did that on purpose,” Charis stated, searching her sister’s face. There was no point in phrasing the obvious as a question; Thalia was too graceful to have fumbled such a simple task and was far cleverer than people realized. Thalia’s face cracked in a self-satisfied grin.

“Of course I did,” she admitted proudly. Charis barked out a laugh, linking arms with her sister as they continued on their way to the kitchens. When they arrived, they were surprised to find Lycaon waiting for them.

Charis did not realize just how much she missed home until she beheld a familiar face. Flinging herself into Lycaon’s arms, Charis wrapped him in an embrace strong enough to crack ribs. She did not care how many eyes she had drawn or how unladylike she appeared.

When Charis stepped back and saw the sadness haunting Lycaon's eyes, the sweetness of their reunion soured.

"What has happened?" Charis asked. Lycaon looked around nervously, taking in the many servants observing them.

"Not here. Follow me if you please," his intensity only heightening Charis' rising sense of alarm. Exchanging a look with Thalia revealed her sister was equally troubled.

Standing outside the kitchens in the cook's small herb garden, Lycaon produced a scroll from his satchel. He pressed it into Charis' palm.

"I will be brief for your safety and mine," Lycaon whispered, "Your brother is dead and your father is missing. Everything your lady mother has to say is in that letter. Burn it after your read it. I wish I could stay, but I was instructed not to tarry."

Charis stared at the letter in her hand in a daze. Lycaon turned to leave, but Thalia grasped his arm.

"Phaethon is dead?" Thalia asked in disbelief.

"Yes, my lady," Lycaon answered, sympathy shining in his eyes. "There was a funeral for him in your father's orchard two week past." Thalia sank to her knees, eyes widening and jaw going slack.

Charis tore away the wax seal of her mother's letter, devouring the words on the page like a starving man eats food. Mother wrote she suspected Zeus to be behind Phaethon's death, urging her daughters to join her in Othrys where the Titans dwelt in exile. Her purpose was clear; Mother wanted to revenge for Phaethon's death and was willing to defy Father's wishes for the future of Hyperborea and declare for the Titans to get it.



“I really must go,” Lycaon declared, “Take care, my ladies, and know that your people are with you.” He clasped Charis and Thalia’s hands, disappearing through the garden gate into the bustling palace courtyard. Thalia remained on the ground, tears rolling down her cheeks as silent sobs shook her shoulders. Charis paced, too absorbed with her mother’s determination to treat with the Titans to give in to her grief.

“What does the letter say?” Thalia choked out the question as she went on weeping.

“Mother blames Zeus for Phaethon’s death. She has gone to the Titans and urges us to follow,” Charis answered, dropping the scroll in Thalia’s lap.

“Then that is what we will do,” Thalia viciously swiped the tears from her cheeks as she perused the letter for herself, resignation in her voice. Her eyes were vacant as though the fire was gone from her.

“Now is not the time to run and hide. Father wanted us to be here.”

“Father is not here, is he? No one know what has happened to him. Phaethon is dead, which means the future of our house rests on us,” Thalia spat, the fight returning as she jumped to her feet to stare Charis down.

“I have no intention of spending my life being mistreated by that spoiled brat of a princess. The court already regards us with suspicion and it will only get worse when they find out what Mother has done. We are truly friendless,” Thalia cried, standing so close to Charis there noses were nearly touching.

“I have no wish to fight with you,” Charis sighed, stepping away from her, “You are welcome to do whatever you please. If Mother believes Zeus killed our brother, I intend to uncover the truth of it.”

Charis snatched her mother's letter from Thalia's hand, resolved to swallow her feelings and return to her mistress. Thalia was right; the entire palace would soon hear of her mother's actions. It was imperative for Charis' survival that she pretend ignorance to buy herself time to earn some goodwill before her mother's betrayal was common knowledge.

"Sister," Thalia's quiet voice stopped Charis in her tracks, "I am with you."

•

Euphrosyne rubbed her frozen hands together, desperate for warmth. Her entire body ached from days of riding in snow and sleet. Now, standing in the Titan fortress before a roaring fire, Euphrosyne felt just as cold, but for an entirely different reason.

Everything about the structure screamed hostility. The stark sitting room they had been left in had soldiers outfitted in full armor stationed in every corner, their eyes following her and her mother's every movement. There was no mistaking she and her mother were behind enemy lines.

Mother stood before the hearth, holding her hands over the flames, blank eyes staring into nothingness. At first, her silence had unnerved Euphrosyne. She had not spoken a single word since they crossed Hyperborea's borders, leaving Euphrosyne to wonder if she intended to harm herself the first few days of their journey.

Euphrosyne was reminded of when she asked her father why he was so intent on neutrality. Her father told her war made men's hearts sick with hopelessness and he wanted to spare their people. His worst nightmare was coming to pass and it began in his own home.

"Sister!"

A woman burst into the room, rushing towards Mother. The guards all advanced, keeping the woman from approaching.

“Really boys? My brother’s wife and daughter pose no threat to me,” the woman declared with a bright smile. Euphrosyne studied the woman’s face, hoping to catch glimpses of her father. She possessed Father’s dark eyes and strong features, though the lines of her brow and jaw were softer.

Her arrival roused Mother from her stupor. Euphrosyne tried not to be resentful of the ghost of a smile Mother favored the woman with. She might be Euphrosyne’s aunt by blood, but she was a stranger and Euphrosyne had been desperately trying to coax a reaction out of her mother for nigh on a week.

“Selene,” Mother greeted, clasping hands with the woman. “Euphrosyne, say hello to you aunt.” Mother gave Euphrosyne an expectant nod, looking impatient when Euphrosyne did not immediately do as bid.

“Aunt,” Euphrosyne dipped into a quick curtsy. Lady Selene seemed to be taking the measure of her, appraising her from the crown of her head to her feet sticking out from under her hem. Her scrutiny made Euphrosyne feel like a heifer at auction. Apparently, Lady Selene deemed Euphrosyne suitable, smiling at her with approval.

“You did not tell me what a pretty little thing she was,” Selene accused good-naturedly. Euphrosyne sensed something deeper behind the comment, frowning at her mother in confusion.

Mother’s face gave nothing away, looking detached and dispassionate as Selene proceeded to circle Euphrosyne where she stood.

“I daresay the king will be pleased.”

Euphrosyne flinched.

“What is she talking about?” Euphrosyne demanded, not bothering to hide the panic creeping into her voice. Her mother just stared back at her. The silence was maddening, making Euphrosyne want to scream and tear her hair.

“Ah, you have not told her,” understanding donned, Selene’s face lighting with perverse amusement. “Our king is in need of a wife, niece.”

“No! I will not—” A sharp slap to the cheek cut off Euphrosyne’s protests. Euphrosyne’s hand flew to her smarting face, seeing her aunt’s hand poised to strike again. When Euphrosyne instinctively shied away, her aunt dropped her hand to her side.

“Do not be selfish, girl. Your mother has done much to make a way for you,” Selene spoke to her as though she were a misbehaved child, “You will be a queen. Do not squander the opportunity.”

Selene smoothed Euphrosyne’s hair before turning on her heel and sweeping from the room.

“Euphrosyne—” Mother started, stepping toward Euphrosyne with her arms outstretched. Euphrosyne retreated beyond her reach.

“I will honor the bargain you have made and marry the king,” Euphrosyne assured her, “But I am no longer your daughter and you are no longer my mother.”

## Chapter 6

Euphrosyne sunk deeper into the bath, submerging her head in the tepid water. She paid no heed to how the sudsy water stung her eyes and her lungs burned for air. Taking advantage of the safety the water provided, Euphrosyne screamed until she felt she might drown.

Breaking the surface, Euphrosyne found Lady Selene sitting on a stool beside her.

Not bothering to acknowledge her, Euphrosyne fished the bar of soap out from the bottom of the tub and started scrubbing her arms. Her aunt snatched the soap from her.

“Be gentle, girl,” she scolded, softly running the soap along Euphrosyne’s arm. “You do not want your skin to be raw for your wedding day.”

Euphrosyne did not resist Selene’s ministrations, but did not acknowledge her either, keeping her eyes firmly trained on the wall before her.

“Ah, it is to be silence, I see,” Selene tutted, “Very well, you may just listen. I know you resent your mother and I for arranging this marriage.”

“I do not know you well enough to resent you,” Euphrosyne corrected, finally turning to meet her aunt’s eye. She held her hand out and quirked a brow, silently asking that the soap be returned to her. Selene let it slide through her fingers into Euphrosyne’s waiting palm.

“That is fair, I suppose,” her aunt continued as Euphrosyne resumed washing, “I have been absent your whole life, but that is because I was not permitted to be apart of it.”

Her words gave Euphrosyne pause. She knew her aunt was wed to Perses general, the Titan Astraeus. Given Father’s stance on the war, Euphrosyne knew that reason alone could not have induced Father to keep her and her siblings away from their own blood. Yet, Euphrosyne could not recall Father ever making mention of her having an aunt.

“What did you do to make my father angry?” Euphrosyne challenged, glancing up from the tub to gauge her aunt’s reaction. Selene recoiled so slightly it was almost imperceptible, her eyes sparking as she grappled for a response.

“I followed my husband,” Selene answered simply. Euphrosyne scoffed at the half-truth. Though speaking with her aunt was maddening, she had to admire the woman’s artfulness. She had witnessed Selene twist conversations to her advantage more than once since her arrival.

“Keep your secrets,” Euphrosyne replied, shrugging her shoulders in surrender. Selene was clearly relieved Euphrosyne had dropped the subject.

Rising to her feet, Selene crossed the room to Euphrosyne’s bed. A gown Euphrosyne had not noticed before was laid out across the furs.

“I thought this an appropriate wedding dress,” her aunt offered. Euphrosyne recognized the proffered gown for what it was; an apology for the role her aunt played in ensnaring her in an unwanted marriage.

Euphrosyne had half a mind to return the gown in tatters, but she could hardly afford to make enemies of her own family before she was even crowned. Already whispers spread of the falling out between her and her mother. The rift left both her and her mother vulnerable, a fact Euphrosyne was acutely aware of.

“Thank you, Aunt.” Selene nodded, giving Euphrosyne the first genuine smile she had seen.

“Now, get out of the bath before your skin wrinkles.” Selene ordered. Euphrosyne could not help the laughter that bubbled in her chest as she complied.

•

Euphrosyne studied her reflection in the looking glass, admiring the transformation the combined efforts of her aunt and maid had wrought. She hardly recognized the creature staring back at her.

Kohl lined her eyes, making them appear brighter. Her cheeks glowed with a permanent blush from the tinted powder her maid applied, livening her complexion. The girl had even added paint to Euphrosyne's lips, subtly reddening them. Following her aunt's recommendation, she wore the gown of finely woven deep green wool. Gold thread embellished the swooping neckline that exposed the creamy flesh of her neck and much of her chest.

Selene had succeeded in taming Euphrosyne's curls, plaiting and pinning them atop her head. Her aunt embellished the elaborate coiffure with bejeweled pins taken from her own collection to serve as another peace offering. A delicate circlet of gold inlaid with green gemstones rested against her forehead. The piece was a wedding present from King Perses who would be her lord and husband in a matter of moments. When he gave it to her that morning, he promised it would soon be replaced with an ornate crown he had already commissioned to be crafted for his new queen.

Selene appeared in the reflection beside Euphrosyne.

"You look positively perfect," her aunt declared, beaming with approval. Though it would hardly be the wedding Euphrosyne had dreamt for herself as a girl, she felt a twinge of anticipation.

At first, the age difference between herself and the king had intimidated if not repulsed her. His fierce reputation did little to help matters and Euphrosyne spent her first week in Othrys finding hiding places throughout the fortress to avoid him. Eventually, he tracked her down,

summoning her to his study. She could have hardly refused without being in direct disobedience of her sovereign. The king proved himself to be unfailingly kind toward her from that very first meeting and passing quiet evenings together quickly became routine.

It was not the husband that Euphrosyne had reservations about.

What weighed on her now was what her marriage would symbolize. Perses declaring himself king was the first sign the Titans were truly ready for war. Taking a queen meant Perses intended to sire heirs and establish a dynasty of his own. It was a challenge that demanded an answer.

“Well, that is not the face of a blushing bride,” Selene teased, pulling Euphrosyne out of the mire of her thoughts. Euphrosyne shook her head, smiling sheepishly.

Selene cleared her throat, a flash of discomfort clouding her expression.

“You know what to expect tonight, yes? After the festivities, I mean,” her aunt asked tentatively, watching for Euphrosyne’s reaction.

Bit and pieces of knowledge Euphrosyne had gleaned from conversations over the years formed her understanding of the wedding night. She did not feel as though there were any gaps that needed filling.

“Yes, Aunt,” she replied, chuckling when Selene audibly left her, her relief obvious. A knock sounded at the door, her maid reappearing.

“My lady, the feasting has begun. The king awaits you in the reception hall.”

Euphrosyne smoothed her skirts, glancing at her reflection one last time.

“Shall we?” Selene asked, offering Euphrosyne the crook of her arm. Euphrosyne smiled gratefully, linking her arm with her aunt’s as they left her chamber.



Though Euphrosyne was glad of her aunt's company, she could not help but wish it was her mother with her now. In a matter of moments, she would be crowned before the Titans, her old life a thing of the past.

Sounds of revelry grew louder as Selene and Euphrosyne drew near. The celebration was in full swing, regardless of whether the bride was in attendance at her own wedding or not. A guard stood watch at the entrance to the banquet hall.

"My ladies," he greeted, bowing to them before preceding them into the hall. The guard slammed the butt of his spear against the stone floor, drawing the attention of the gathering.

"Lady Selene and Lady Euphrosyne!" the guard bellowed, announcing their arrival. All eyes were on Euphrosyne and her aunt. Euphrosyne surveyed the crowd, seeking any familiar faces. Her eyes came to rest on the king standing behind a table on a dais. He caught sight of her, sending her a warm smile.

"Titans, your queen!" King Perses toasted, raising a goblet in her honor. The entire banquet hall erupted in cheers. Every sentry pumped their fists in the air, spears and staffs striking the floor in unison. Selene squeezed Euphrosyne's arm, practically glowing with pride.

The guests parted, forming a path through the celebration to the dais. Euphrosyne climbed the steps of the platform to stand beside the king. A marriage contract was unfurled over the surface of the king's table, two quills at the ready.

Euphrosyne's heart clenched when she looked up and saw her mother weaving through the crowd. They had not spoken since Euphrosyne was told of her betrothal. She was clearly on a mission, not sparing Euphrosyne so much as a glance.

"My lord king," Mother addressed the king, dropping into a deep curtsy.

“My lady,” King Perses acknowledged her, producing a silk coin purse. He dropped it to the table, the coins within jiggling when it landed.

“Your daughter’s dowry returned, as promised.”

A wave of nausea washed over Euphrosyne, quickly replaced with searing anger. Her mother had bartered and sold her like a slave at market. Now, she had the audacity to demand Euphrosyne’s brideprice for herself.

“Thank you, my king,” Mother responded, swiping the purse off the table. She did not bother counting its contents.

“By your leave, I will return home to my husband’s lands.”

Perses nodded his consent. Euphrosyne felt at sea, her mind grappling with what was unfolding before her. Her mother was leaving her alone in this place.

Euphrosyne froze in place as her mother circled the table to stand beside her. Drawing close enough to touch, her mother planted a quick kiss on Euphrosyne’s forehead. She was careful to avoid Euphrosyne’s eye.

In the next moment, Mother withdrew and dismounted the platform. Euphrosyne watched her mother leave the banquet hall, doing her best to school her expressions, knowing that the Titans were paying close attention to everything she did.

The king’s touch on her arm returned Euphrosyne’s attention to the task at hand. He held out a quill to her, their fingers brushing when she accepted it from him. Turning to face the carefully prepared contract made Euphrosyne uneasy. A hush fell over the revelers as Euphrosyne felt the pressure of every gaze trained on her. She suppressed the niggling feeling that she was signing her life away as she plied quill to paper.

King Perses signed his name beside hers, their union finally made official. Euphrosyne set her quill down, stepping back and lifting her head to face her new subjects.

“All hail Queen Euphrosyne!” a sentry shouted, breaking the silence. Every Titan joined in, the din of their cheers deafening. Euphrosyne could not hide the grin that spread across her face. Perses took Euphrosyne’s hand, raising it over her head until the noise began to die down.

“Now that I have my queen, I will have a successor,” Perses proclaimed, “The imposter will soon be routed and Titans will sit the throne once more!”

Euphrosyne stiffened beside her husband.

The Titans had declared war.

•

Charis lay in bed, listening to the sounds of the world waking as the sun rose in the sky. Sleep had left her hours ago, the worries dogging Charis’ mind chasing away any hope of respite. The princess would rise in a few hours, subjecting Charis and Thalia to another day of pretending. In the interest of self-preservation, Charis and her sister made every effort to ingratiate themselves to their mistress while they waited for news of their mother.

Rolling over, Charis took the opportunity to examine Thalia. Her sister appeared soft in sleep, no frown or pout contorting her features as she dreamt. Soft puffs of air left her slightly parted as she breathed, a slight whistling sound going through her teeth. Thankfully, Thalia did not seem to be plagued by the fears that taunted Charis in the dark.

A chill morning breeze swept through the chamber, compelling Charis to pull the furs covering up to her chin as she flopped over on her back. Staring up at the ceiling, Charis’ thoughts shifted to the changes she had observed in her mistress’ behavior the last few days.

Something had shifted since that uncomfortable breakfast incident. Though Charis was grateful for Thalia's invented accident, Charis could not help but wonder how far their mistress would have gone in her callousness toward her husband if there had been no intervention. Considering the princess allowed her husband's brother to call his manhood into question to his face, Charis shuddered to think what was said when Prince Hephaestus was not present.

Perhaps more troubling was the amount of time the princess was spending with her husband's brother. Prince Ares certainly made himself welcome in the princess' chambers too often to be appropriate, even for family.

The sound of the iron knocker striking the panel of the door has Charis nearly jumping to of her skin. She shot up in the bed, kicking the furs from her legs. Thalia groaned beside her, lifting her head from the pillow and looking at Charis through bleary, half-closed eyes.

"What is it?" Thalia asked, her voice laced with grogginess.

"I do not know," Charis answered, scooping her shawl off the floor where it had fallen off the back of a chair in the night. Clutching the material about her shoulders, Charis ran through the dinning room and parlor to reach the main door, finding a guard on the other side.

"Lady Charis, you and your sister are requested to attend the king's council," the guard informed her, "I have been sent to escort you."

"What is going on?" Princess Aphrodite seethed, appearing behind Euphrosyne's shoulder. Charis turned to face her mistress, resisting the urge to roll her eyes.

"My sister and I are to attend council," Charis informed her. The irritation at being woken dissipated, the princess' face breaking out in a self-satisfied smirk. She knew that whatever the king wished to discuss boded ill for Charis and Thalia and she delighted in it.

“Do not keep the council waiting,” the princess encouraged, the sickly sweet smile she used to manipulate her husband sliding into place easily.

Thalia emerged from the dining room, rubbing her eyes and dragging a pelt from the bed behind her. The princess wrapped her arms around Thalia’s shoulders propelling her toward the door. Charis took her sister’s hand, not bothering to disguise the animosity simmering in her eyes as she faced her mistress. Aphrodite’s smile only widened.

The guard waiting for Charis and Thalia to step out into the hall. Aphrodite slammed the door behind them with far more force than necessary, making her distaste known if it was not already obvious. Charis imagined she saw a flash of sympathy in the guard’s eyes as he led them to the king.

Charis squeezed Thalia’s hand as she plodded along beside her, still not fully awake and oblivious to the gravity of the situation. The king must have discovered their mother’s defection to the Titans. It would be naive to think Charis and Thalia were not to be punished for it in some way. That is, if the king did not believe them to be guilty of treason themselves. They could be walking to their execution and just not know it yet.

Coming to the end of the long corridor, the guard stopped at an ornate door that was much taller than the others. Gold coated the marble carvings laid against thick wooden panels. The guard pushed the door aside, revealing a room that was just as extravagant. Marble pillars stood tall about the room, supporting a domed ceiling painted with a beautiful mural of a woman who looked rather like the queen. A giant circular table rested beneath the painted woman’s gaze, flanked by eight chairs.

Lord Ganymedes, the king's advisor, stood at the far end of the room, his hands behind his back. His posture reminded Charis of a tutor Phaethon has as an adolescent. He had the same air of general disapproval for everything around him, complete with a cold eyes and pinched lips. Charis recognized him from the wedding where he tried to goad her father. She knew the man was slippery. If it were just him standing in judgement, Charis would have taken hold of her sister and fled. Thankfully, other members of the council were present.

The king sat at what Charis assumed was the head of the table, though the shape did not naturally establish one. He looked bored, resting his chin atop his hand. Queen Hera occupied the place to the king's left. Beyond the royal couple, Princess Athena, Princess Artemis, Prince Hermes, and Prince Dionysus filled some of the other seats. Prince Hephaestus, Prince Ares, and Prince Apollo were absent, representing the three of the remaining chairs. Most of them regarded the sisters with neutral expressions.

"You may stand watch outside the door," Ganymedes told the guard. The man nodded, shutting the door and leaving the girls' fates in Ganymedes' hands. Charis and Thalia sunk to their knees on the floor before the council.

"The king has just been informed that your mother has declared Hyperborea for the Titans," Ganymedes stated, accusation in every word. Thalia bolted upright beside Charis, the sluggishness gone from her in an instant.

"We had no part in that," Thalia retorted.

"Oh, but that is far from all," Zeus' advisor continued, "Your sister is wed to Perses, the Titan pretender."

Charis lifted her chin, refusing to be intimidated. Ganymedes was only a mortal. The king's children were watching her, waiting for her reaction.

“Our mother and sister make their own decisions,” Charis asserted.

“You expect the king to believe there is no design to your family's actions? No collusion to have a presence on both sides of the war?” Ganymedes demanded.

“Why you presumptuous son of a—” Thalia growled, catching herself before she swore. Ganymedes did not move, a strange gleam in his eye. He wanted to get a rise out of them and Thalia would play into his hands if she was not stopped.

Charis reached for Thalia's arm, giving the soft flesh a gentle squeeze in warning.

Prince Hermes trained forward, resting his elbows on the table as he regarded them.

“Is your mother on some misguided quest to avenge your brother? Do you deny the rumors that she believes the king responsible for your brother's death?” Hermes asked.

“Is there some reason she should?” Charis challenged. Hermes quirked an eyebrow, his eyes sparking with amusement even as his face remained blank. The king, however, snapped to attention, flashes of lightning dancing in his eyes as his temper flared. Hera placed a soft hand on her husband's arm, staying him.

“The death of young Phaethon was a terrible tragedy. I am sure Lady Clymene can be persuaded of the crown's innocence,” the queen allowed. “In the meantime, there is little sense in accusing the girls without evidence.”

“Your Majesty, your gracious nature does you credit, but I do not believe you are considering the different facets of the situation we find ourselves in,” Ganymedes continued,

“Lord Helios is in the wind, Lady Clymene has given her youngest daughter to the Titans, and yet, the elder girls remain.”

“That is hardly indicative of a crime, Ganymedes,” Princess Athena observed.

Ganymedes opened his mouth to speak, but the door to the chamber opening cut him off.

“What is the meaning of this?” Prince Hephaestus’ baritone voice reverberated throughout the room. “I returned from the forge to hear that my wife’s ladies have been seized.”

The king seemed to withdraw a bit at his son’s entrance.

“Your Grace, these woman are now the sisters of the wife of your father’s greatest enemy. Suspicion is warranted,” Ganymedes scoffed, every word dripping with condescension.

“Perhaps under usual circumstances,” the prince argued, “but as members of my wife’s household, they are under my protection. Dragging them before council without informing me feels underhanded.”

“My apologies if you were not told. The ladies are still subject to interrogation to assess the threat they pose,” Ganymedes reasoned. The prince was having none of it. Charis could feel the anger rolling off of him in waves. She twisted her body slightly to see Hephaestus standing tall over his cane.

“I have known the sisters since I was a child. Regardless of the actions their mother might have taken, they would never do anything to harm this family. This proceeding is an utter farce,” Artemis spoke up.

“That was many years ago, princess,” Ganymedes reminded, “Much changes with time.”

“And when would they have had conspired with their mother? Under his wife’s nose?”

Artemis questioned sarcastically.



Thalia covered the laugh that erupted from her throat with a cough. Ganymedes jaw clenched and the sight brought a smile to Charis' face.

"You have made your point, girl," King Zeus looked deflated as his posture slumped. He waved his hand as a sign of dismissal even as Ganymedes threw him an incredulous look.

Charis and Thalia bent their knees in quick curtsies, all too happy to make their exit. They turned to find the prince already retreating into the hall, his cane clicking against the floor as he moved. When they were clear of the council chamber, Charis rounded on the prince, feeling as though she might cry with relief.

"Thank you for your assistance, my lord." A soft smile parted the prince's beard.

"I meant what I said; you both are under my protection. Do not let anyone in the palace bully you," the prince advised, "Least of all my wife."

•

Thalia dipped her hands in the basin, splashing water over her face and neck. The droplets did little to cool her anger. Rage still boiled within her after the events of the morning, her skin feeling as though it were on fire. She silently thanked Mother Gaia for Prince Hephaestus' timely intervention, shuddering to think what she might have done before the council in her anger, no matter how righteous.

Though the king's other children had seemed reluctant to simply swallow Ganymedes' accusations, it still could have gone very poorly for the sisters. Thalia was acutely aware of the fact she might be languishing in the palace dungeons, if not already divested of her head. The hearing had made it very clear to Thalia just how vulnerable she and her sister were.

It was imperative for their survival that Thalia and Charis find some way to cement their positions at court. They would need to make powerful friends with the clout to protect them when conflict arose.

Once, Thalia might have relied on Prince Apollo, but the longer she remained at court the more she came to believe he no longer cared for her. Yet, even as his continued absence supplied daily proof of his apathy, Thalia could not quiet the small voice within that whispered to cling to hope. If his love truly matched her own as he claimed, he could not have forgotten her so easily.

The sound of a muffled groan reached Thalia's ears, dragging her from the mire of her thought. Charis had gone out to the gardens to collect their mistress' flowered. Normally, the task took her at least an hour. Perhaps the hearing had worked her up into a frenzy. Thalia wished her emotions would make her more productive.

"Charis?" Thalia called, cocking her head to listen for her answer.

Peeking out of the doorway of their shared bedroom, Thalia saw a flash of sapphire blue silk before it disappeared around the corner into the princess' apartment.

Charis was not wearing blue. And she would certainly not wear silk to root around for flowers in the dirt.

Stepping out into the dining room, Thalia saw a trail of blood leading to the princess' bedchamber, the door slightly ajar. Dread filled Thalia stomach as the blood thickened the closer she came to the door. She gently pushed it aside, what she found within freezing her in place.

Princess Aphrodite lay huddled at the foot of her canopied bed. Small pools of crimson marred the once pristine marble floor and white linen bedsheets. Thalia could see the silken skirts crumpled up around the princess' waist were just as spoiled. Her legs were bared, revealing

the source of the bleed at the apex of her thighs. Looking up at the princess' face, Thalia saw the terror written there.

Thalia rushed to her mistress' side, fear overriding her dislike of the woman who had taken Charis' husband.

“What is it? What can I do?” Thalia asked.

“I am losing my child,” Aphrodite replied, burying her face in Thalia's arms as she wept. Thalia held her, panic rising. The princess was bleeding far too heavily for Thalia's liking. She knew how badly these things could go when a woman did not have proper care.

“Help!” Thalia shouted, hoping her sister or a servant was nearby.

The main door of the apartment slammed open, the sight of Charis striding through the dining room filling Thalia with relief. Charis would know what to do. Approaching the bed and taking in the situation, Charis hiked up her skirts and crawled onto the bed beside the princess. She brought her hand to Aphrodite's temple before dropping it to her neck.

“Her skin is clammy. We must keep her warm. Help me get her out of this gown,” Charis ordered, fingers expertly plucking the knotted laces that held their mistress' gown up around her shoulders.

Thalia wriggled the bodice down her mistress's torso as the princess fell back against the pillows, listless and sobbing. Charis made quick work of the of the rest of the garment, freeing the princess' legs from the silk trappings with a few sharp tugs. She dropped the bloody mess of it to the floor in a pile.

“Go fetch a maid,” Charis commanded, “We will need hot water and plenty of rags.”

With a short nod, Thalia ran from the room, glad of an excuse to leave. The metallic smell of gore was cloying and the sound of weeping inspired anxiety rather than sympathy. Thalia wondered what would happen to her and Charis if the princess died. Surely the king would find some way to dispose of them. It was a wonder he had not already, regardless of Prince Hephaestus' reservations. His Majesty had been curiously cowed by his son's appearance in the council chamber, but Thalia would have to save pondering why for later.

Coming to the end of the corridor, Thalia practically flung herself down the servants' staircase to reach the kitchens below. When Thalia arrived, the cooks and maids stopped their activities preparing food.

"I need basins of boiling water and rags," Thalia announced carefully, unsure of what she was allowed to divulge. "For cleaning, of course."

"Right away, my lady," a young maid said, abandoning her work chopping vegetable. She turned to reach for the pots stacked behind her, dunking them in barrels of well water before suspending them over the blazing hearth. One of the cooks brought a basket of cloths, silently thrusting it into Thalia's hands. The maid lifted the pair of pots with a bar supported on her shoulders when the watered reached a boil.

When Thalia returned, it was clear Charis had the situation in hand though they had not been apart long. Though Aphrodite lay atop the mattress and her bloodied underdress clung to her sweaty skin, she seemed to be at rest. The ruined sheets had been stripped away, joining the princess' discarded dress on the floor. It seemed the worst of it was over.

“We will need to bathe the princess and bring new bedding. Work quickly and return below. Say nothing,” Charis warned, her expression stern. The young maid nodded quickly even as her skin turned a sickly green and her eyes widened in fright.

Charis tore the delicate, sheer material of Aphrodite’s underdress, gently prizing it from the princess’ prone form. The maid got to work, dipping the rags in the pots of water and wiping the carnage from the princess’ smooth skin.

“Thalia,” Charis spoke quietly, “toss the clothes into the fire. The princess does not want the palace gossiping.”

Thalia nodded, bending to pick up the heap at the foot of the bed. As Thalia walked to the lit brazier, she caught sight of something bundled in one of the sheets. A twinge of trepidation gave Thalia momentary pause before she continued, casting aside part of the sheet.

An impossibly small, barely-formed face stared up at Thalia. She estimated the underdeveloped infant to be about three months old. After all, it had been far along enough to create any noticeable changes to its mother’s figure yet. The skin was translucent, revealing the soft beginnings of bones beneath the surface. Its body was folded in on itself, limbs tightly curled against the torso. Thalia felt tears wet her cheeks as she dropped the entirety of her burden into the fire, watching the flames consume the life that had been snuffed out before it could begin.

The sound of Prince Hephaestus’ crutch clicking against the stone threatened to undo Thalia. Who was to tell him his wife might have been carrying his heir and lost it? Thalia needed to find a place to hide. Surely, her face would give away her thoughts and suspicions if the prince were to look at her.

Thankfully, the prince seemed unaware of anything except his wife. Word must have gotten to him somehow. He limped to his wife's side, clutching at her hand where it rested against the linens. Aphrodite's eyes fluttered open.

"My darling," Hephaestus greeted, his smile showing him as the lovestruck fool he certainly was. "Forgive me for being away. I had no idea."

The princess wept anew at this, but it was not the mournful crying Thalia heard earlier. It was the cry she used when she was being pettish or attempting to get her way.

"How could you know? You spend all of your time in that damned forge, I am surprised you know I exist," she choked out between dramatic sobs.

Thalia had to keep herself from groaning at the absurdity. Here the princess had just lost a child mere hours ago and was already twisting it to her advantage. Prince Hephaestus had no idea what was happening, pleading his wife's forgiveness for something that was not his fault and giving her exactly what she wanted.

Unable to stand it any longer, Thalia numbly wandered into the dining room. She caught sight of an overturned cup on the table. Scooping it up, curiosity piqued, Thalia caught the acrid scent of its contents. Despite it being mixed with wine, the remnant of the liquid smelled of an herbal tea Thalia was all too familiar with. She had been a frequent partaker of it, swallowing cupfuls until she was ill after her trysts with Apollo to ensure his seed did not take.

Thalia felt Charis approach, sending her sister a pointed look over her shoulder as the maid scurried away, having discharged her duty. Charis frowned, drawing closer and catching sight of what was in Thalia's hands.

"What is it?" Charis asked.

“It is a tea that is used to flush out anything that takes root in the womb,” Thalia replied, her voice little more than a whisper. Charis’ eyes narrowed.

“How do you know this?” Charis questioned, though her shaky voice betrayed the truth that she did not really want an answer. Thalia simply looked at her, offering no explanation.

“I do not believe what happened here today was an accident,” Thalia ventured.

Charis did not look surprised at Thalia’s conjecture, only sad.

## Chapter 7

Ganymedes waited for King Perses in a cheerless sitting room, wondering why the Titans seemed so adverse to comfort. Two roughly hewn stools sat before a hearth, every leg and seat uneven. A single bear hide lay spread out before them. After so many days of hard travel, Ganymedes would rather stand than sit on something liable to give him splinters on his backside.

Removing his leather gloves, Ganymedes held his hands over the flames, warming his aching fingers. He hated that he was at the beck and call of not one, but two immortal kings he absolutely hated. It was getting more difficult to swallow his hatred as the days dragged on. Ganymedes needed to keep his head about him if wanted to see his decades of scheming come to fruition. The Titans and Olympians each thought themselves infallible, utterly oblivious to how Ganymedes outmaneuvered them all as he assumed the posture of everyone's humble servant.

The door to the sitting room opened, a pair of Titan guards entering. Despite his many visits, Ganymedes had yet to become accustomed to the sight of their obsidian armor. Adorned with as many razor-sharp spikes as possible, the armor would prove deadly to anyone who got too close. If they prevailed to defend themselves against the broadswords and spears the men brandished to engage them in close combat, that is. Ganymedes would certainly not want to meet one of them on the battlefield.

Standing aside to flank the doorway, the guards revealed a woman standing between them Ganymedes had not seen before. Although, perhaps woman was not quite accurate. With her small stature and brown doe-eyes, she looked to be little more than a girl. A gown of deep green hugged her willowy frame, accentuating her slender waist and the flare of her hips. Auburn curls



were piled high atop her head, wound around a golden circlet. Whoever she was, she was important and commanded authority if she was here to greet him.

“Lord Ganymedes, Your Majesty,” one of the guards introduced.

Ganymedes dropped to his knees, realization donning. This was Helios’ youngest daughter and Perses’ new queen. If memory served, her name was Euphrosyne.

“It is an honor to finally meet you, Your Majesty,” Ganymedes did his upmost to sound charming.

“And you, my lord. You may rise,” Queen Euphrosyne replied. Her voice was pleasant, but her tone held no warmth.

Standing, Ganymedes met her gaze and truly assessed her. Though she appeared innocent, wariness lurked in her eyes. This was was not some scared child. It would take more than a few honeyed words to win the queen’s approval. Fortunately, Ganymedes had yet to meet a challenge he was not equal to.

The details of the queen’s arrival in Othrys and betrothal were unknown to him. If she happened to be an unwilling barraging chip for her house, as so many young girls were, she would be in desperate need of a friend. Ganymedes intended to take full advantage of the possibility and do everything in his power to ingratiate himself.

“Congratulations on your nuptials, Your Majesty,” Ganymedes offered, gauging the young queen’s reaction. All he was rewarded with was a slight flicker in her eyes. Her face remained controlled, a practiced smile lifting the corners of her mouth.

“Thank you, my lord. I am quite blessed in having the king for my husband,” the queen replied, the platitude sounding sincere enough even if her smile did not reach her eyes. She was

not exactly the image of a joyous new bride, but she did not seem troubled either. Ganymedes would need to spend time in her company to determine the best way to gain her confidence.

The Titan witch princess materialized beside the queen in a puff of emerald smoke. Ganymedes leapt back reflexively in shock. Princess Perseis' smile was shining with all the enthusiasm her stepmother's lacked, though her good humor stemmed from witnessing Ganymedes' discomfort.

"Welcome back, my lord," the princess greeted, her unsettling pale green eyes seeming to glow with laughter.

"Your Highness," Ganymedes replied with a slight bow. He would not give the hateful witch anymore respect than what was due to someone of her position. When she was not mocking him, she was frustrating his efforts to curry favor with her father.

"My Queen, I see you have met our informant," Perseis observed, something sly in her face Ganymedes did not like.

"You," Queen Euphrosyne regarded him with something akin to disgust. "My father spoke of you. How you poisoned King Zeus against him."

"Stirring up trouble in the pretender's court is my duty as a subject of the true king," Ganymedes returned, attempting to be diplomatic. The direction the conversation was headed in boded ill.

"You ensured my house would never know peace. You destroyed my family," the queen grit out, her voice holding surprising venom for one so young.

“I did not order your brother’s death,” Ganymedes retorted. He was quickly losing any ground he had when he entered the room. The queen would be calling for his execution if he did not diffuse the situation.

“No, but you incited the Olympian who gave it, though you will not take credit for it now that it does not serve you,” Queen Euphrosyne practically growled, passive facade abandoned as her temper flared.

“I did nothing of the sort—”

“Where is my father?” the queen demanded, cutting off Ganymedes’ protest.

“I do not know, Your Majesty,” Ganymedes answered honestly for the first time in quite a while. It did nothing to mollify the queen who only grew angrier the more he spoke. Queen Euphrosyne stepped toward him, standing on the balls of her feet to whisper in his ear.

“The price for your lies will be your tongue,” the queen seethed, her breath tickling his ear. She fell back on her heels, her expression instantly softening as the side of her mouth quirked up. Before Ganymedes could supply some rejoinder, the queen was sweeping from the room, leaving him to the company of the princess and the guards.

Ganymedes knew her threat was far from empty. It seemed Perses had found himself a queen and it would fall to Ganymedes to cow her like all the rest.

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Euphrosyne sucked in a fortifying breath before she nodded to Korax, one of her personal guards Perses assigned to her after their wedding. Korax rapped his iron-plated knuckles against the sturdy panel of the door, the sound echoing in the empty corridor.

“Enter,” came Perses’ voice from within. If Euphrosyne had any second thoughts, it was too late to take heed of them now. Plastering the warmest smile she could muster on her face, Euphrosyne crossed the threshold into her husband’s war room.

“My love,” Perses welcomed her, extending his arms to her. Euphrosyne threw herself into his embrace, hoping he thought her overzealousness a product of passion and not anxiety. She kissed his weathered cheek, her lips meeting with the beginnings of a beard that told Euphrosyne her husband had not tended to himself in days.

“Leave us,” Perses ordered Korax. The guard bowed and shut the door behind him.

“When is the last time you slept, my love?” Euphrosyne asked, staying in his arms as she took a step back to examine him. Fatigue darkened the bottoms of his eyes, dragging down the skin. The frown lines about his mouth and between his eyebrows were more pronounced, undoubtedly exacerbated by the scowl he adopted whenever he was lost in thought.

“I was in your bed just last night,” Perses said playfully, snaking a hand around her waist in an attempt to pull her back to him.

“That is not the same as sleep,” Euphrosyne chided, pushing against his chest in half-hearted resistance.

“There is far too much to do,” Perses told her simply, gesturing to the war table before him. Its entire surface was an intricately carved map of the world. Or the parts the Titans and Olympians were fighting over, at least. Small carved statues marked territories the Titans controlled and where their forces were stationed. They reminded Euphrosyne of game pieces on a board, moved about by a master player. Euphrosyne was struck anew at Perses skill as a strategist, though his ruthlessness concerned her at times.

“An army halts when its commander falters,” Euphrosyne cautioned, hoping her voice was gentle and caring, rather than commanding.

“I will not falter,” Perses ground out. He balled the hand resting against the table into a fist, squeezing so hard his knuckles turned white. Euphrosyne splayed her hand over his, gliding her fingers over the skin of his wrist. She felt him relax under her touch.

“You are a balm,” the king declared, bringing her fingers to his lips and softly kissing each knuckle. Euphrosyne felt her cheeks warm with pleasure, but she knew the moment was tragically fleeting.

“I must speak with you. It is important,” Euphrosyne spoke quietly. Bile rose in her throat as she considered the hypocrisy of what she was about to do. She had come to persuade her husband that Ganymedes was only manipulating him . . . by manipulating him herself.

“The lord I met. The mortal,” Euphrosyne began, letting her words linger a moment as Perses looked at her with concern. “He scares me.”

“Has he threatened you?” Perses interrogated, his expression turning murderous.

“No, but I do not trust him,” Euphrosyne quickly explained. Perses barked out a laugh, turning away from her to pace the room.

“Is that all, my dear?” he asked, the question dissolving into more laughter. Euphrosyne frowned in confusion. Of all the reactions she had anticipated, this was not one of them.

“Of course, he is untrustworthy, wife. He betrayed his king, who, I am told, is also his lover,” Perses informed her, waving his hand in a dismissive gesture. “He serves a purpose and he will be easy enough to dispose of when he has fulfilled it.”

“But what of the damage wrought in the meantime?” Euphrosyne asked, “My brother is dead, my father is missing, and my sisters are trapped with the enemy.”

“And what of my family?” Perses demanded, all levity vanishing as he looked at Euphrosyne so coldly a chill went down her spine.

Long ago, Perses was wed to Princess Demeter, the daughter of King Cronus. When Zeus killed his father and claimed the throne, Perses had initially bent the knee to keep the peace. His brother, Prometheus, was imprisoned for treason, though a formal charge was never levied against him. Perses’ called for justice and Zeus had answered him by sending soldiers to ransack the family estate. Demeter and Perses’ elder daughter had been taken hostage with Perses escaping to the wilderness with Perseis, his younger daughter. Heaping insult upon insult, Zeus declared Perses and Demeter’s marriage void and kept the princess around as a trophy. Though Demeter still lived, the daughter was never to be heard from again with rumors abounding that Zeus killed her a fit of rage.

If anyone had a right to hate the Olympians, it was Perses. Even so, it stung Euphrosyne to know just how little she mattered when measured against the past.

“Am I not your family now?” Euphrosyne asked, indulging herself and allowing the pettish question to fall from her lips. Perses’ shoulders dropped, his frustration fading, but his silence spoke volumes.

“You still long for them. For her,” Euphrosyne realized allowed. It was not an accusation, just a statement of fact that would not be ignored as it was laid bare between them.

“Well, I hope you can find it in your heart to make room for the new family you have started seeing as there will be one more of us,” Euphrosyne did not bother to hide the bitterness

she felt. She straightened her spine and smoothed her skirts, preparing to make her exit. Perses gaze followed her as she moved, the shock written in his expression giving Euphrosyne a moment of satisfaction.

“Are you . . .?” Perses asked, the hopefulness lifting his voice sending another pang through Euphrosyne’s chest.

“Yes,” Euphrosyne said simply. She did not stay to watch the grin that lit Perses’ countenance or listen to his exclamations of joy.

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Charis sat on her bed, her back propped up against the wall. A scroll she had borrowed from the royal library lay in her lap. The sun poured in through the window, enveloping her in a comforting warmth that set her to dozing at intervals. Prince Hephaestus had granted Charis and Thalia a reprieve from their duties, instructing his wife to allow them their liberty for a day. While Thalia had taken the opportunity to go riding and tour the city, Charis sat alone in the quiet of her bedchamber as she pondered everything that occurred over the last several weeks.

Father was still in the wind and Mother had not attempted to write again. Supposedly, Mother had returned home, leaving Euphrosyne in Othrys by herself with her new husband. Ganymedes had been vocal about his desire to use Mother to set an example. Charis guessed the crown had far too many examples to strike fear into the hearts of Zeus’ enemies. As for Euphrosyne, Charis only hoped she was safe and happy enough to find goodness in the day. She wondered if Euphrosyne had chosen her match in the Titan king or if a betrothal was foisted on her as it had been for Charis.

Though, after being in Aphrodite's service for a few months, Charis thought she much preferred the prospect of marrying a stranger. Despite her best efforts, she just could not seem to please her mistress. Every day came with a fresh set of demands more taxing and ludicrous than the last. The princess required her entire apartment to be cleaned every two days. Her gowns needed to be aired and washed and all of her jewelry shined. Charis could not imagine who all the extra effort was for. There were no grand celebrations to attend or guests to entertain. Of course, it was not Charis' place to question her mistress' wishes. She was merely to keep her mouth shut and do as she was told.

How different life would be for everyone had the prince honored his agreement with Father and married Charis instead of Aphrodite. Phaethon might still be alive, Father would not have disappeared, and Euphrosyne would not be wed to an old man. Their family would be whole. Charis did not exactly have regrets, but mourning the loss of things that could have been came with the same heaviness.

The sound of feminine giggles drew Charis' attention away from the scroll she had given up trying to read hours ago. Perhaps Thalia had decided to stay in after all.

Charis pushed herself off of her bed, bare feet landing on the cool stone floor. Her mistress would admonish her for doing something so savage as foregoing slippers, but Charis did not have to listen today. Stepping out into the dining hall, Charis looked to the connecting parlor and found it empty. Turning to look behind her, Charis found a trail of discarded clothing leading to the princess' bedchamber.

It was not unusual for the princess to leave something of a mess for Charis and Thalia to pick up, but the princess knew she was to have no help today. What was more unusual was the



obviously male articles of clothing intermixed with the princess'. Charis knew what occurred in her mistress' chambers and it was no great secret Prince Hephaestus had not visited the princess' chambers since she lost the baby. The court had been abuzz with gossip about the marriage having gone cold for a few weeks now.

Charis' stomach dropped as the laughter coming from the bedroom faded into moaning.

Creeping closer, Charis was careful to keep her footsteps light so as to not announce her presence as she looked through the door. Figures undulated atop the bed through the thin veils of the canopy of her mistress' bed, leaving no question as to what they were doing. Though Charis could only see the back of the man, it was obvious the figure rutting atop the princess like an animal was not Prince Hephaestus. Charis froze where she stood, unable to flee, yet not daring to venture any closer.

Her mistress' face appeared through a gap in the curtains. The princess met Charis' gaze, her eyes widening in shock.

"Get off!" Aphrodite shouted at her lover who was too engrossed in taking his own pleasure to notice her distress. A sharp slap to the shoulder finally made him still over her. When he turned and revealed his face, a gasp ripped from Charis' throat.

Prince Ares stared smirked at her shamelessly.

"Care to join us, my lady?" he asked. The predatory look in his eye snapped Charis out of her trance. She turned and fled from the room as fast as her legs could carry her, ignoring her mistress' shrill scream for her to stop. Flinging open the door to her mistress' chambers, Charis barreled into the corridor, nearly knocking the queen off her feet.

The queen caught Charis in her arms, doing her best to keep the both of them upright.

“Forgive me, Your Majesty,” Charis managed to say between pants.

“Forgiven, my dear,” the queen replied graciously enough, still holding Charis’ shoulders. Charis could feel the queen’s keen green eyes trained on her, keeping her face down so the queen could not see the horror undoubtedly written there.

“Charis!” Aphrodite cried, chasing Charis to the doorway. The princess clutched a sheet about her, barely covering her modesty. Glancing back over her shoulder, Charis watched as Aphrodite’s expression of abject fury transformed into fear.

Prince Ares appeared behind her, oblivious to the disaster he just stepped into. The queen’s eyes swept over her daughter-in-law before shifting to her son, her stony expression giving nothing away as the pieces fell together in her head.

“What have you done?”

*TO BE CONTINUED*

## Annotated Bibliography

Bulfinch, Thomas. *Bulfinch's Mythology*. Barnes & Noble, Inc., 2013.

Originally published in 1890, classical scholar Thomas Bulfinch's mythological anthology embodies the desire to breathe new life into the tales of the Greeks in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Bulfinch reveals his purpose in his preface, writing "mythology is the handmaid of literature; and literature is one of the best allies of virtue and promoters of happiness" (Bulfinch 1). His interpretation provides a unique perspective that feels slightly playful, presenting a stark departure from the conventional retellings of myths.

Emerson, David L. "Mythology in Children's Animation." *Mythlore*, vol. 38, no. 1 (135), 2019, pp. 259–66. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26809403>.

Scholar David Emerson analyzes the presence of Greek mythology in popular culture, particularly in regard to media geared towards children. Examples like Walt Disney's animated *Hercules* serve as the focus of Emerson's article, deriding the film as "[fulfilling] a function of introducing at least some concepts and characters of Greek mythology to children via an amusing adventure-comedy" (Emerson 259). Greek mythology is reduced from its revered pantheon to the childish musings of producers seeking an easy enough payout.

Fairbanks, Arthur. "The Message of Greek Religion to Christianity Today." *The Biblical World*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1907, pp. 111–20. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3140620>.

Arthur Fairbanks makes a case for the religiosity of Greek mythology, revealing the true nature of Greek belief that is often analyzed through the lens of Judeo-

Christian values in modern academia. In fact, not only is “the conception [of] Greek religion [. . .] identical with Greek mythology,” but the heart of all Greek worship is “the worship of beauty” (Fairbanks 111). Fairbanks challenges the puritanical ideology that renders the ancient Greek hedonistic, pagan boogeyman, highlighting the simplicity of chasing pleasure in all its forms.

Fry, Stephen. *Mythos: The Greek Myths Reimagined*. Chronicle Books, 2017.

Renowned British philosopher Stephen Fry retells the myths with a reverence and excitement reminiscent of a father lovingly recounting memories of his children. Asserting a lifelong fascination with the Greek pantheon, Fry expresses the “energy, humor, passion, particularity, and believable detail of their world held [him] enthralled from the very first,” hoping “they will do the same for [readers]” (Fry 10). Fry joyfully seeks to do ancient stories justice in a modern world.

Frauenfelder, David. “Popular Culture and Classical Mythology.” *The Classical World*, vol. 98, no. 2, 2005, pp. 210–13. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4352933>.

Similar to David Emerson, David Frauenfelder examines the foothold ancient Greek mythology has in the modern world, particularly in regard to its sharing common motifs with major blockbusters. For Frauenfelder, drawing parallels between hits like 1987’s *Predator* with stories of the hero Hercules “[uses] American popular culture to energize the study of ancient stories” (Frauenfelder 210). With a simple push in a modern direction, the face of mythology can change to restore interest without sacrificing the essence of the tales.

Graves, Robert. “Discoveries in Greek Mythology.” *The Hudson Review*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1954, pp.

167–81. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3847166>.

Robert Graves works to establish the true intent behind Greek mythology, explaining the purpose behind the famously overdramatized tales. He draws connections between minute details such as Narcissus' name being tied to the word 'narcotic' with Narcissus becoming addicted to his own appearance (Graves 169). Each element of the myths come together to contribute to both an explicit and subliminal narrative, using drama to impart valuable lessons.

Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*. 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ed., Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 1942.

Edith Hamilton provides an entirely different perspective on the myths that smacks of romanticism that some might say is distinctly feminine. Hamilton describes ancient Greece as a time in which “imagination was vividly alive and not checked by the reason, so that anyone in the woods might see through the trees a fleeing nymph, or bending over a clear pond to drink, behold in the depths a naiad's face” (Hamilton 1). She emphasizes the inherent fantasy and beauty of mythos as she takes readers on a tour of historical ideology.

Hansen, William. “Greek Mythology and the Study of the Ancient Greek Oral Story.” *Journal of Folklore Research*, vol. 20, no. 2/3, 1983, pp. 101–12. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814523>.

In an article, William Hansen expresses the same sentiment of his book in a more succinct piece, lauding the superiority of Greek storytelling and the lack of modern ingenuity. Rather than recounting the myths from his intriguing

philosophical perspective, Hansen analyzes how “many motifs and stories known from modern oral tradition were already in oral circulation in ancient Greece” (Hansen 101). Modern perspectives on the Greeks in academia do not present anything new, but rather echo the ideals of the ancients that have fallen by the wayside.

---. *The Book of Greek & Roman Folktales, Legends, & Myths*. Princeton University Press, 2017.

Contemporary academic William Hansen pens a narrative entirely devoted to the craft of storytelling the ancient Greek were so famous for. Hansen reminds readers “the great majority of these stories are set not in the distant mythological past, but in the historical period, the so-called human era, and their gaze is accordingly not upon the feats of gods and heroes but upon the doings of human beings of different sorts” (Hansen xxv). His narrative draws attention to the humanity of mythology, pointing out the commonalities between mortal and immortal figures.

Katz, Marilyn. “Ideology and ‘The Status of Women’ in Ancient Greece.” *History and Theory*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1992, pp. 70–97. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2505416>.

Marilyn Katz brings feminism to the study of Greek mythology, using the goddesses as case studies of how women are truly regarded in ancient Greece. Katz goes on to ponder the evolution of women’s rights from ancient cultures to more recent times, “with the example of women in ancient Athens providing the basis for eighteenth-century views on women’s exclusion from society” (Katz 70). While Katz acknowledges other factors like race and sexuality, the discussion of

gender bias puts a new spin on mythology and the sociological basis of the age-old underlying tension between the sexes.

Kirk, G. S. "Greek Mythology: Some New Perspectives." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 92, 1972, pp. 74–85. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/629974>.

G. S. Kirk discusses the importance of fresh academic perspectives in old fields with new generations adding new dimensions. In order for fresh minds to contribute anything of value, they must abandon "the reluctance of the individual observer to surrender the exemplary qualities of his own special areas" (Kirk 76). Scholars should focus on the material rather than trying to self-aggrandize, particularly in regard to Greek mythology which can easily be manipulated.

Martin, Richard P. *Myths of the Ancient Greeks*. New American Library, 2003.

Richard P. Martin takes the academic approach, focusing on the social developmental implications of mythos on Greek civilization. To Martin, the myths "reflect the thoughts of a complex civilization and at the same time allow us to enter the vibrant private spaces of an archaic culture" (Martin 1). Each myth serves as a case study for Martin's philosophical and historical commentary.

Schwab, Gustav. *Gods and Heroes of Ancient Greece*. Pantheon Books, 1946.

Gustav Schwab's narratives shirks the usual structure of mythological anthologies by dividing chapters into individual gods and heroes, rather than chronological stories. He purports an intention of putting together a book of myths that would appeal to his young daughter by focusing on the "unity through the majesty and spiritual force which myths exerted on all stages of inner development of the

individual” (Schwab 16). Schwab’s choice of organization allows readers to connect more closely with each mythological figure.

Walcot, P. “Greek Attitudes towards Women: The Mythological Evidence.” *Greece & Rome*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1984, pp. 37–47. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/642368>.

P. Walcot mirrors the ideology of Marilyn Katz, focusing on the role of feminine figures of Greek mythology. Walcot argues women are the beginning of civilization as mothers who unofficially head up families, meaning there is nothing more “socially relevant than the role of women in society” (Walcot 37). Using the ancient Greeks’ focusing on beauty as the source of divinity, Walcot explains the somewhat misogynistic place women occupy in mythology as objectified figures.

Zwerdling, Alex. “The Mythographers and the Romantic Revival of Greek Myth.” *PMLA*, vol. 79, no. 4, 1964, pp. 447–56. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/460750>.

Alex Zwerdling discusses the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century’s need to acknowledge the entirety of Greek mythology as a culturally, rather than censoring aspects of it to fit a more puritanical ideal. Great works by writers like Homer and Virgil are taken out of context and abridged for fear of encouraging ‘pagan theology,’ a practice, Zwerdling demands come to an end (Zwerdling 447). While Greek mythology is certainly an immortalization of a pagan faith, it has inherent academic value that outweighs any supposed danger it poses.