September arrived, at long last.

 Waiting at the entrance, I spent what felt like countless hours waiting for my beloved. Two beautifully armored harpies flanked me as I stood at the shores of the River Styx, cold eyes sharply trained towards the dim light at the end of the black, damp tunnel. The only other furs in my presence were the souls stepping off Charon’s boat nearby. None of them dared to acknowledge my presence though. Instead, they fearfully kept their various ears, muzzles and tails downward while sullenly being led by centaur guards to the diamond gates.

 “Welcome to the realm of Hades, mortals!” three booming voices barked nearby. “Do not despair or cry pitiful tears, for you are now the loyal subjects of our King and Queen!”

 Standing at two meters in height and composed of metallic black fur along his naked body, Cerberus wore only a simple necklace given to him by my Queen. Each of the hellhound’s three heads focused on a mortal entering (all of whom couldn’t help but marvel at his sheath and well-trained muscles), but any who stalled or tried turning away would witness Cerberus’ ruby eyes dig into the pits of their soul, as well as the angry hellfire spitting from his three maws. That alone was always enough to scare them back.

 Finally, my nose twitched at the smell of his pine and spring scent.

 A smaller boat came into view down the tunnel, with two passengers sitting as a skeletal ferryman guided them across the river of the dead. The eager happiness from before soured slightly when the eldest traveler locked eyes with me. She was a beautiful red-furred doe wearing the brightest of green dresses, her hair ordained in flowered that seemed to shine in the dimness of the underworld. Normally, the mortals would be familiar with her loving smile and kind grace as she blessed their harvests, but none of them saw her current expression.

 Bitterness. Complete bitterness directed at me.

 Sitting beside her was my beloved however, and that reinvigorated my joy. When our eyes trailed to each other, the spark of love that’d begun to fade since March began to grow. It did not matter if he wore a snow-white dress or carried only a pair of small and trimmed antlers thanks to his mother, it was still him. My beloved mate. My prince. My queen.

 My husband, Philos.

 “We have arrived in Hades,” the substitute ferryman, a recognizable brown-furred hare in a tunic with wings on his footpaws, slowed their boat beside the private dock. “Welcome back home, My Prince.”

 “Queen,” he commented. “I keep remind you that it is ‘Queen’, Hermes…”

 “Apologies, Your Highness…” he half-laughed.

 “You are forgiven.” The red deer stood up and promptly hugged the elder deer beside him. “See you in six months, Mother…”

 Demeter held him tightly in her arms. “I will miss you, my precious daughter.”

 It took everything in me not to groan at the sight of my mother-in-law acting so…well, motherly. Stoically, I walked over to the dock and helped my husband off the boat, fully aware of Demeter’s deadly glare. Without another word—though a curt nod between us—Hermes pulled away from the dock and began to drift down the dark tunnel once more. All while Philos held my paw tightly.

 As soon as the boat disappeared downriver, I leaned down to nuzzle his cheek.

 “I have missed you, my beloved,” I whispered into his ears, holding the lithe deer lovingly and close to my bare chest. “I am sorry you must depart from Demeter…”

 “I am saddened, King Hades,” he whimpered, then slowly looked up to me and softly smiled, as did I, “but words still cannot describe how much I have missed you, my dear husband.”

 We leaned forward and melted into the other’s lips. Parting away, I simply held the young man in my arms for what felt like an eternity, even though the morning remained youthful.

 The souls from before suddenly lifted their heads up to admire at their Queen walking beside their King, our paws clasping together. Those bold enough to step forward would introduce themselves and welcome Philos back, but not for very long. They knew the months had made me impatient. Or rather, made us impatient, having spent another six months apart once more.

 “Welcome home, Queen Philos,” Cerberus bowed proudly, his arrow-shaped tail swishing behind him. His three heads spoke in unison, “It has been a long year without you.”

 They formally shook paws. “It is good to be back, Spots.” The shorter deer laughed, and I couldn’t help but chuckle too.

 Cerberus even blushed lightly across his three cheeks, then returned to observation as we passed him.

 Past the diamond gates leading into the Underworld, a mortal would not miss the towering palace that loomed over the vast caverns and chambers. It seemed the same color as coal from a distance, but if one walked past the gardens and courtyard leading inside, they would know the palace to be made of silvery and shining obsidian ore. However, those unwelcome in my palace would only walk for eternity without ever reaching it unless I gave them express permission to enter.

 After lifting and carrying Philos into our spacious marble bedchamber at the base of the tallest tower, the handsome red deer and I would make love. We ravished into each other’s lips, inhaling our musks while pulling at our clothing until they lay adorned on the polished floor. I obtained the annual honor of delicately peeling away the dress my husband wore, revealing a young buck underneath as opposed to the doe maiden Demeter always yearned to raise.

 However, it did not matter what the Goddess of Fertility and the Harvest desired.

 All I desired in that gorgeous moment was my Queen. My husband, whose supple body squirmed as I kissed along his warm chest, stroking his neglected manhood. Mine—though not as impressive as Priapus’—still ached to feel Philos touch it. There existed no haste though, since we now possessed half a year together.

 We explored for hours, caressing our heated bodies and erect sexualities while inhaling the musks surrounding us. His composed of fresh rain and lavender mixing with my earthly scent. My fingers could barely stop feeling Philos’ sprightly nipples and toned limbs, let alone the area beneath his teardrop tail, which already raised itself for me when I dipped my free paw into a nearby vase of warm massage oil.

 Later, Philos rested his back against our silk bed, gripping the sheets as I deflowered him once more. I nibbled his neck without restraint, the deer’s cries and boyish moans chorused with my grunts each time I thrust my hips into him. driving me mad in our mutual pleasure.

 That day, we were reunited as one passion. One eros.

 In our immortal afterglow, Philos and I lay entwined together in our radiant warmth. His arms clung to my torso in a vice while I nibbled on his neck, eyes locked together. No words needed to be conveyed, but I told him anyway.

 “I love you, Philos.”

 His smile alone could brighten the darkness of my realm.

 “And I love you, Hades. My King…”

 Curling my tail around our legs like a fleece blanket, I kissed him once more and let us sleep amidst the wonderful sounds of our heartbeats.

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 Every six months, I allowed my subjects and newly arrived souls the opportunity to attend the banquet welcoming their Queen back to Hades. Each year would be more extravagant than the last, and all the recently deceased mortals who entered my domain would have one final chance to celebrate living. Those who caused disruptions or insult would be immediately cast into the dark abyss of Tartarus without a second thought.

 As the fallen mortals danced to undead music and eagerly consumed the undead foods provided, Philos and I sat dignified, observing the banquet from our ivory and ebony thrones.

 I could not help but marvel once again at the divine craftsmanship my tailors provided us, especially for the red deer by my side. Normally, I wore my osmium chest piece beneath a himation and cloak painted in the darkest colors. Yet for tonight, I commissioned the tailors to create a velvet robe composed of purple and green colors that matched a twilit forest.

 Philos had been crafted a chlamys sewn with every perceivable color, and a midnight blue lining that shimmered each time he moved. With the clothes came a bronze brooch in the shape of a blood red pomegranate. The lad also proudly sported a flower wreath of roses and lilies as a crown (mine was made of pure silver atop my headfur) beneath his antlers.

 Any soul brave enough to approach greeted us with either false smiles or pleading gazes.

 “And who might you be, mortal?” I asked the elderly lion kneeling before me, gripping my iron scepter. “Speak up.”

 “M-My name is H-Hypeirochus, Eubuleus One,” he nervously raised his greyed muzzle.

 “Greetings to you, Hypeirochus,” Philos smiled softly. ““Oh, Great King and Queen of the Underworld, I was never able to tell my wife I loved her a final time before death. I h-humbly request I be allowed to visit her only once. Afterward, I shall accept my fate, w-wherever you decide to place me…”

 Philos and I exchanged a silent conversation, and after little deliberation, the deer had convinced me.

 “Very well.” I replied, announced with some reluctance, “You will be allowed to visit her for just tonight, but then you will be returned to the Asphodel Meadows by dawn tomorrow.”

 No longer nervous or melancholy, the feline happily followed one of my psychopomps to the tunnel of the River Styx. Although cold and stern, as the mortals have often viewed me, I knew of all gods how powerful true love could be.

 The next soul to kneel was a disheveled, twitching young wolf with a desperate glare in his eye. “H-Hades, you must let me go back!” he whined. “I need to go back! I can’t be here! I was robbed while trying to court a beautiful woman!”

 “You are dead, mortal.” Frowning at this mere wolf, I replied, “Enjoy the festivities—”

 “Please, Hades!” he now stood begging. “I am I cannot be dead! I have so much to do! Y-You let that cat go, so why not me?!”

 “He had respect, unlike you.” Philos spoke for me, his eyes as cold as mine as we stared down at this mortal. “He understood that no soul can escape death, and accepted his fate, unlike you. If you wish to—”

 “You must send me back to the land of the living!” He stomped forward until he was only at arm’s length from my Philos. My Queen. “You must understand! I cannot be dead!”

 “I do understand,” he did not falter. “You are the one who is in denial.”

 “P-Please, I beg of you! You will let me go!”

 “Cerberus!” I commanded him nearby. “Bring him to Minos to be judged at once!”

 Hulking forward, the three-headed hound proceeded to drag the howling mess away out of the palace courtyard, resuming the awkward silence to the rhythm of chatter and undead music. Several souls line up to praise us before Cerberus returned and knelt before us.

 “My King, my Queen, I apologize for his insolence,” he folded his six ears downward. “I promise you that Minos will not be kind towards his cowardice of death.”

 “There is nothing to apologize for, Spots,” Philos smiled down at the muscular hound. “I am simply glad you removed that foolish mortal from our sights.”

 “Some of them think they are beyond the rule of the gods,” I grumbled in my throne. “They believe they are simply entitled to live longer because they wasted a lifetime.”

 “It cannot be helped, Hades,” my husband stated solemnly. “It is cruel, but every mortal fur all must die eventually. It is the balance of life and death.”

 The banquet would be continue onward as planned. Between the dancing and food, mortals would line up to greet us, praise us or simply ask favors from us. Sometimes, we’d be obliged to hear their queries, but never if it meant for asking to be returned to above.

 Like Philos said, it was the balance of life and death. No matter how hard they struggled or tried to defy their final fates, mortals lived and then died before becoming subjects of Hades.