~~Otrera~~

Otrera looked down at herself, and sighed.

She was naked, laying down in the grass, and staring up at the moonlit sky. Her head rested upon the lap of a nymph that was combing her long black hair. Another nymph was massaging her legs and working her fingers into the tight muscles. They never said anything, the beautiful women touching her, but they smiled, and giggled — so they had voices at least — and traced her many scars with their fingertips. She had much darker skin than the typical Greek; perhaps they found the pink scar tissue on her dark skin interesting? Not a one of them had a scar, not Perseus or the nymphs.

The nymph combing her hair was a taller, curvy creature with heavy breasts that nudged against Otrera’s forehead every so often. The one who’d been having anal sex with Perseus only a couple hours ago was the one working her legs. The little woman had some strength to her, and Otrera groaned when her fingers managed to wear down the tightness in her quads. Her noises earned some more giggles, but she didn’t care, she was being pampered and gods damn it, she deserved some pampering.

Andromeda and Perseus were a good ways down the river. The hidden garden was large enough that anyone could have their privacy, and from what Otrera could hear, Andromeda was enjoying her privacy a lot. The water carried her husky moans along the river and around the Hesperides’ garden, enough so the nymphs smiled at each other, and more than once got a little frisky with Otrera’s body.

She let them. How many years had it been since a man or woman had touched her? Hard body, short, thin, lean, small breasts, she was a tiny warrior and that didn’t make for many sexual opportunities. Was it so much to ask for some sexual relief? After hearing the moans of Andromeda, it was starting to get to her too. A minute later, she reached up, took one of the busty nymph’s hands, and set it on Otrera’s breasts.

The nymph giggled, got the idea, and instead of combing the Amazon’s hair, started to massage her breasts with both hands. And Otrera melted into it. Hands, on her body, kneading her pert breasts and caressing her nipples in circles with thumbs. Fingertips teasing along their undersides. Gods, she needed—

“Otrera.”

Quirking a brow, she looked between the two nymphs. They smiled at her, but otherwise continued to caress and spoil her. Could have just been her mind?

“Otrera.”

No, definitely not her mind. She stood up, glanced around, and then looked at the nymphs. “Hear that?”

They shook their heads.

“This… is your garden, right? If someone was here, you’d know?”

They nodded. Of course they’d know, they were nymphs, the Hesperides.

She frowned, reached down to pick up her scabbard, and started walking toward the noise. With a hand on the sword grip, ready to draw at a moment’s notice, she stepped into the garden with slow steps on bare feet.

It wasn’t that she didn’t realize she was investigating a mysterious voice whispering her name, alone, in the middle of the night, in a secret garden. It wasn’t that she didn’t understand how stupid she was being, going alone into the middle of the garden where the trees were dense, to pursue the voice the nymphs did not hear or sense. But….

“Otrera.”

But the voice called to her, like a shadowy caress on her spine. It danced on her skin, worked up her toes where they touched the soft grass, ran up along her naked body until it tingled on her neck. It was quiet whisper, and she could taste its depth, like smoke. Even smell it.

The moonlight broke a trace of light through the canopy. It glimmered along the golden apples of the center tree, and over the mask that sat upon the boulder next to it.

Like a scene straight out of a poem. She walked over to the boulder, naked as a bird, sheathed sword in hand, and a beam of moonlight shining down on both her, and the mask. The black mask, with its weird, swirling lines of silver. Eye-holes, a parted mouth, and a thick body of obsidian; not a material she recognized. She wanted to say rock or some weird metal, but neither rock nor metal could carry black that deep.

And the world came to a stop. The breeze silenced, the leaves stopped rustling, and all was quiet. Her breathing slowed, but each breath was shallow and hard. Cold, but not cold. Like a heavy fog pressed down on her, but she could not see or feel it. Like someone was covering her mouth with icy fingers. But a fool she was, and she took another step toward the mask.

“Otrera.” It spoke. Faint shimmers of white glowed from its eyes and mouth when the quiet voice slipped from its black frame.

“… who are you?”

It laughed, a dark and covered sound, like someone speaking from underneath layers of rock. “Does it matter?”

“Of course it fucking matters. You’re a mask.” She was whispering. She didn’t know why she was whispering, but it felt like the right thing to do. It’s not like what she was doing was wrong, or that it would matter if Perseus or Andromeda caught her; and yet, she whispered, like it was a dark, dirty secret. “Does Andromeda know you can talk?”

“No,” it said. Again, more laughter, raspy and layered. “Are you… enjoying my gift?”

She froze. “Gift. Being a Fate’s Child?”

“Many lives… to make, Amazon Queen. Do indulge,” it said. It talked well, for a mask, but its voice was smoke and death. The sort of voice she imagined the darkness held, when wolves and lions prowled within, hungry. A voice of teeth and bloodlust, harsh and filled with rasp, alongside deep waves of power like a rumbling earthquake, but all spoken through layers of earth and metal, as if from a prison.

“Indulge? I took the gift so I can — the fuck am I telling you for?” She stepped closer to the mask, and stared down at its unmoving form. For all she knew, she’d gone crazy and was hearing voices.

“Ares’s favor will not come, little Amazon.”

She growled. “Fuck you.”

“And while… god of war cares not… for Amazons’ failures, I am… intrigued… by your stubbornness.”

“Yeah well, it runs in the family.”

“Ah… family.” The mask chuckled, and for a while, the white glow ceased. But it returned as a gentle mist once more, and the verbose mask began again. “My sisters… not be kind to one… obtained the gift… unsanctioned means.”

“Sisters… gift….” She took a step back. “W-what are—”

“Hush… little Amazon. The gift… yours to use, and use freely. The strength of many lives… bless your vessel. You are powerful… hard to kill, and glory… drawn to you as you it. But Ares will not care. And your life… eternal torment… Fates capture you.”

“That won’t happen. Not if Andromeda succeeds.” Stop talking to the mask. Stop talking to the mask.

The laughter returned, hushed and deep. “Only when… sea runs red with blood… will the sorceress’s ambitions be met.”

“But—”

“And when all your hopes… and dreams… come crashing down around you, Otrera… Amazon Queen, I’ll be there… help you. With me… can make something of the mess of bone and blood Andromeda… will create.”

She took another step back. Her sword was shaking in her hand, and fingers were turning pale.

“H-how?”

“A Fate’s Child can wear a… Moirai mask… and live.” Its voice faded like dying mist, but just on the edge of her hearing, she could hear its call. The glowing of its eyes disappeared, and the darkness that closed in around her along with it. But the coldness remained on her spine.

She brought a hand up to her lips. “Wear—”

“Wear what?”

Otrera jumped, spun around, drew her sword, and landed with the blade pointing in front of her.

Andromeda stood there, face calm, steady, and just as naked as Otrera. Even with the Amazon’s sword only inches from her chest, Andromeda didn’t move or flinch. Hard as stone, her new leader was.

“Did I startle you?”

“You uh… you did.” Otrera sighed, relaxed, and sheathed her sword. It was the first time she’d ever seen the sorceress nude. A tall woman, with tawny skin like Perseus, and just as smooth. Smooth except for one grand scar across the center of her chest. How had she received such a nasty thing? Still, it did nothing to detract from her beauty, her lean and tall frame, her long and wavy blonde hair, and her breasts. They didn’t have the weight or mass of the curvy nymph’s breasts, but they were still plentiful, and Otrera licked the inside of her lips at the sight of them.

But Andromeda’s cold gaze and hard chin cut through the atmosphere like a killer’s knife. Whatever Perseus did to seduce such a deadly woman, Otrera could not fathom.

“You said wear,” Andromeda said. She stepped around Otrera, reached out, and picked up the mask. Otrera thought its eyes might start glowing white again, but the mask remained lifeless. “I wouldn’t advise it. I put this mask on twenty people, and twenty corpses later, it had the blood it needed to fuel your ritual.”

Otrera gulped. The mask told her she could put it on. Not after hearing about the many people killed wearing it, she likely wasn’t!

“I’m surprised you just leave this thing out. The Fates are after it, Bellerophontes is after it, and apparently so are a giant, and Medusa herself.” Otrera stuck out her free palm, and smiled.

Andromeda grinned in return, a small one more befitting a stalking lioness, and put the mask in Otrera’s hand. It had weight. For a moment, Otrera was sure it would start speaking again, but the mask remained silent while she turned it around in her fingers. Thick, black, the inside held none of the chaotic silver lines like on its face, but instead, pure obsidian night.

“My magic hides us from their eyes, while my eyes can find many things, if it were to somehow go missing,” the sorceress said. Otrera did not miss the veiled threat. “And besides, the nymphs cannot leave, they enjoy my presence — or Perseus’s at least — and he is my lover.” Andromeda leaned in a little closer, and unless Otrera’s eyes were fooling her, the sorceress was smiling. “That leaves only you.”

“You do trust me an awful lot.” She handed back the mask. When Andromeda plucked it from her, Otrera started breathing again; she hadn’t noticed she’d stopped.

“Then maybe I’m a little naive. I saved your life, and I’m the only means you have of getting what you want. Would you betray me?” Smiling, Andromeda walked back over to the large rock, and set the mask down upon it. “And besides, we are both victims of fate. I understand your plight more than you know.”

“More than I know because you won’t tell me,” Otrera said, and she frowned at the taller woman.

Andromeda nodded. On her toes, she plucked a golden apple from the night’s canopy of branches, and took a bite. Just like any normal apple, and she tossed it to Otrera after doing so.

“It’s personal. Is saving your life and giving you the power of a Fate’s Child not enough to convince you we’re aligned?”

“No, it isn’t.” She was no fool. But, the apple in her hand did look exquisite, and after turning it around a couple times, she took a bite as well. A shiver ran up her spine, not cold but excited; the apples were not for humans. When no lightning struck her dead, she smirked, and took another bite. How delightfully defiant.

“I see.” The sorceress stepped out of the wood, Otrera behind her, and she walked along the small forest patch’s edge back toward where she left Perseus. The beautiful man was laying down on the grass, naked, with a couple nymphs snuggled into his arms. Asleep; and after fucking every nymph — Andromeda too — all damn day long, she couldn’t blame him.

Andromeda smiled down at her lover. “Perseus and I are both pawns, sacrificed at the whims of others. I will have my revenge, and then I’ll make sure it never happens to another soul,” the sorceress said. “Now, I go to prepare the ritual to destroy the necklace, in case that persistent bastard can track it here. Do you wish to watch?”

A sea of blood flowed through Otrera’s mind. “N-no… I’m good.” What sort of maniac had she sworn fealty to? She wanted to help Andromeda, and she believed in her dream! But swimming through endless red to get to it wasn’t what she had expected.

“Very well.” Andromeda rotated her shoulders, sighed, and looked up at the sky. “Bellerophontes is proving most difficult to kill. I have failed once, and now you.” Chuckling, the sorceress motioned her head toward Pegasus. The beautiful, large white horse stood by a tree, sleeping. He’d fly away if he could, but for the gold ring of thorns and spikes still on his muzzle. “This time, both you and Perseus shall go. We will set the trap, lure him in, and kill him.”

“Trap? We have a trap?”

“Of course. And you — with a new necklace of course — will be the bait.”

“Lovely.”

The sorceress shrugged. “This time you will have Perseus’s aid, and more. Much more.”

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~~Medusa~~

The Chimera healed so fast, Medusa found herself staring at him. Just a couple days ago, he’d been cut open enough to have killed Darian and her twice over. But now, he walked like it hadn’t happened, like he hadn’t been stabbed a dozen times with spears, and had his side butchered. Forever a force of stone and momentum, Chimera walked forward and approached the beach.

How Darian had managed to beat such a monster, she could not comprehend. Even with the aid of a flying horse, her lover would have had to drop a mountain on him to kill him.

Her poor Darian. Chimera held him in his arms — so tiny compared to the giant — and he hadn’t managed even the smallest protest. He was sweating, coughing, and his body shivered with blood loss. He’d live, he was sure of it, Chimera was sure of it, but Medusa couldn’t help but glance his way every few minutes. The arrows she’d pulled from his body were not normal arrows; they were huge, and their tips gleamed with a metal she did not recognize.

She looked up. The sun was setting, gentle and orange, and the sea breeze smelled wonderful. Sand shifted underneath her belly scales, and she reached down to scoop some of it up before letting it fall between her fingers.

“Gallea? Pina?” she said.

No answer. She scanned the horizon. In front of her was the Myrtoan Sea, south of the Argolic Gulf they’d left. Her island was out there, and try as she might to forget it, she longed for the familiar embrace of her cage. But, she knew it was stupid, and she would not let such self-destructive desires lure her back.

“Gallea? Pina?” She slithered further down the beach. Where would a satyr couple hide?

“Who do you speak of?” Chimera said. Darian was asleep in his arms; the giant’s deep voice must have been soothing.

“I told you we came on a magical ship. Gallea and Pina are its… caretakers, I guess. I’m not sure what their role is, other than helping Darian.” It was such an odd choice, satyrs to care for a ship of the dead. “They’re satyrs. A lovely couple! And Pina is so nice.”

The giant rumbled. “Satyrs are musicians and storytellers. They must be working with the Fates to create a tale.”

“I… I… that does make sense.” And then the choice wasn’t so odd. Of course the Fates would want someone to spread the tale of Darian — Bellerophontes. She frowned, and flicked her tongue at the air. It didn’t mean they were bad, or going to betray them, but it did mean Pina hadn’t told her.

Chimera rumbled again, and took several long sniffs of the air. “I do smell them.”

“Oh? Are they near?”

“No. They passed by yesterday.” The huge brute stepped back up onto the nearby grass, and looked out over the rolling hills before down at his feet. “One has walked this path several times. The woman, only the once. To leave.”

Medusa tilted her head, slithered up to join the Chimera, and gazed at the grass. All she could see was green and dirt, but grass was all the giant needed to tell the gender of a satyr. He was such a better hunter than her.

“And if you and Bellerophontes both left from here, then the female satyr’s tracks followed you.”

“What? But I don’t understand. They should have—”

“They had to see,” Darian said, voice cracked and dry.

“Darian, you’re awake!” Medusa raised her torso up to lean over her lover, and planted several kisses on his forehead. The Chimera rolled his eyes and looked away, and she hissed at him for good measure.

“Yeah… I think.” He coughed, and shuddered a few times in the giant’s arms. “Chimera is right, they’re storytellers. I was wondering how they’d tell this tale if I didn’t share it with them. I didn’t think either of them capable, but one of them must have tracked us, tracked me, and watched from afar.”

“I… that… I don’t believe that. Pina and Gallea were nice people.” Medusa slithered in a large figure eight along the sand.

The giant grunted. “I would have seen them if they had followed me.”

“Yeah, well, they work for the Fates. This fancy armor I’m wearing isn’t the only gift they’ve given, I’m sure.” He coughed, grumbled, and shook his head like dislodging a spirit. “It doesn’t matter. We need them.”

Nodding, Chimera set Darian down onto the grass to sit, before he stepped out onto the beach and pointed his hand at the sea. The snake tattoo still had red eyes from whatever strange magic Chimera had worked when speaking to Gaia. The idea that the giant had spoken to Gaia herself still made Medusa shiver.

“… the taint in your bauble. Whatever it is, its source is out there.” He gestured to the great blue before them. “But not within Gaia’s grasp, as if afloat. Hunting this devil will be troublesome.”

Darian groaned as he shifted his weight, reached up to his neck, and lifted the necklace he was wearing. It glowed white, the same white Medusa had seen in the man’s eyes when they met. More shivers.

“The only thing Otrera had that seemed relevant. Except for the woman herself,” Darian said.

“You’ve sssssaid her name a few times now. Who is Otrera?” Medusa slithered back up the beach to Darian, and circled him in her usual coil. And with familiar comfort, Darian leaned back against her scales before letting his head relax backward onto her.

He grimaced, and clutched at the glowing pebble in his hand. “Someone, I… someone I ruined. You really wanna know?” His eyes fell to the sand. He raised the necklace over his head, and dangled it across where the sand and grass met.

“I do.” She stroked his hair, combed it with her fingers, and caressed his ear. Soon, the man leaned into her grip, and she smiled as she laid herself down along her snake half near his head. The more she could continue to touch his hair, his face, his neck and shoulders, the more she could convince herself he hadn’t just nearly died.

“It’s a pretty ugly story.”

“That’s ok.”

He chuckled, held up the glowing pebble in front of his eyes, and smirked at Medusa. “I know you’ll forgive me. But that doesn’t mean I’ve forgiven myself for it.”

“Forgive yourself?”

“Dealing with him”—the small warrior gestured to the colossus near the water—“was only the first thing King Iobates asked of me. There were others, some I’m not proud of. Like… dealing with the Amazons.” His sigh cut the air and silenced the sea breeze. All she could hear was his voice, and the weight in it. “They were causing trouble for his borders. And because I was a damn idiot who believed everything he said at the time, I defended those borders. The Amazons liked to use the woods, and Iobates’s army was useless in them. So….”

She squeezed his shoulder. Every time the man talked about his past, it was nothing but pain and misery. The best she could do was be an ear to his woes.

“So you killed them all.” Chimera chuckled, a deep rumbling sound, and walked over to stare down at the two of them.

Darian snarled. “Fuck you, how would you know? You were asleep in a hole in the ground.”

“I know you better than most. I tasted your blade.” The giant leaned down, and sneered. “I know how someone like you would fight. A fox. Sneaky, fast, and strong when he needs to be. You would have walked into that forest alone, and where an army could not go, you would have. You’d have beaten the Amazons at their own game, and used the densest trees to force them into small skirmishes, a few of them against you at a time. And only when their army was too deep in the woods to flee on horse back would you have gone on the offensive. Only when their escape was impossible would you have shown your true skills, and slaughtered them one at a time, with the trees as your shield.”

Medusa stared at the brute, mouth agape. How dare he! How could he accuse her Darian of such brutal tactics. But, when Darian lowered his head, her heart sank with it, and the heavy silence returned.

“… it was the only way,” Darian said.

Chimera nodded. “I am sure it was a glorious battle.”

Darian got up, shaking and shivering. His armor, which he refused to take off while they traveled, could not hide the wounds in his limbs. And when he approached the giant, Medusa could see the hole in the back of his armor the arrow had left. Chills ran down her snake spine each time she saw it.

“It was a slaughter,” Darian said. Clutching his side with one hand, he reached up and pressed against the towering giant’s stomach with the other. Of course, the Chimera did not move, and Darian growled at him.

The giant rumbled a laugh. “Do you feel remorse for their deaths?”

“I….”

Medusa got up, slithered over to the giant, and pushed him. Tail anchored, she pushed her hands into his chest, and forced him to take a step back.

“Leave him alone.”

“It’s ok Medusa. He knows me well. But not as well as he thinks.” The small warrior waved a hand, dismissing the giant, before he limped over to the water and stared out over the sea. “Ok, so our target is somewhere, but you can’t pinpoint them from the necklace.”

Chimera nodded, and stepped over to stand beside the small warrior. From behind, the difference in their size was insane, and it made Medusa’s jaw drop. Darian’s head reached the giant’s hip, and no higher. Even a tall man’s head would not have reached the monster’s waist. And when the giant held out his hand for the bauble, it dwarfed Darian’s, like a kitten’s paw in the hand of a lion.

The Fate’s Child handed the Chimera the glowing necklace. Chimera raised it up, sniffed it, and eyed it like a banker eying his wares. Medusa slithered over the sand to join them, and smiled when she found the giant frowning. His face was always either stern or confident in its smile; to see him frustrated like an upset child was a pleasant change.

“Magic, but it does not smell of the Fates. Your taint is not here, instead—”

The necklace shattered.

Darian jumped back, Medusa slithered away with a snap of her length, and the Chimera stepped back with a grunt.

“… what in Tartarus.” Reaching down, Darian got to a knee and scooped up the remnants of the necklace. What little white glow it had was gone, and all that remained was the shattered pieces of an ordinary pebble.

Medusa plucked a piece from his palm, then another, and frowned when her efforts to piece them together failed. But it earned a chuckle from Darian, and she smiled back at him.

“Chimera touched it last,” Medusa said. Chimera grimaced at her, and she stuck her long tongue out at him.

“I don’t think that had anything to do with it. It really did just shatter, and stop working, and… and I’m guessing whoever made this necklace doesn’t want us using it. Does it still have a scent, Chimera?”

The giant got down to a knee, and Darian poured the remains into his huge palm.

“… no. The scent is gone. The magic is gone.”

Darian collapsed onto his back, and stared up at the sky. The wind was sucked out of him, and Medusa joined him, laying down and putting her cheek on his chest. All that work for nothing. Nothing!

Chimera rumbled. “You are both children. Get up. You said Otrera is now a Fate’s Child.”

“… yeah.”

“Then it is her Gaia sensed. She is out there, somewhere. We can find her again.”

Medusa nodded. “Yeah, we can try again! And this time, we know what we’re looking for. We’ll catch this Amazon, and make her tell us where Pegasusss is!” She got back up, reached down, and scooped Darian up along with her to set him standing. “Chimera said, if they’re on Earth, he can find them. If she’s out there, she’ll have to be back on land at some point, right? We’ll catch her!” Tingles ran down her spine length. They’d succeed on this journey yet, rescue Pegasus, and meet Athena.

“Your enthusiasm is limitless,” her lover said, and he slipped a hand around her hip to hold her to him. “And Andromeda wa—”

“Who?” Medusa said.

“I… uh….” He took a small breath, looked to the sunset, and wiped away the grimace sneaking onto his lips. “Let’s build a fire. I’m awake now, I’ll tell you what happened.”

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“She killed Proetus! And Stheneboea?”

Medusa was coiled tight, her human half lying along her scales, and Darian was leaning back against it again, the fire in front of him. Chimera sat across from them, legs folded underneath him, lion pelt hanging behind him from his neck, and ancient eyes staring into the fire. The sun was gone, and the night was misty, the breeze cool and wet.

“She did, yeah. And… and… .” Reaching behind and over his shoulder, he found her hand, and pulled it to him to tuck it against his neck with her fingers trapped in his. “I don’t know. I was there, and I could have killed them both, and… and I didn’t. She did it instead, just to spread word that I’m a killer. Proetus, he… gods, he knew. He knew the whole time, about his wife, about what she did, he knew the whole thing was a lie.”

She eased her torso a little further along her scales to bring her chin to his shoulder from behind him, and rested it there on her hand where she caressed his collar.

“Just because he loved his wife,” she said.

“Yes! Yes I… I’m such a damn fool. One phrase, one sentence and it… fuck, it just wiped my anger away. Stopped me dead.”

“Darian, that is good. Good! It’s not a bad thing to let go of your rage every once in a while.” As she knew all too well.

“Yeah, I guess. I did manage to get out of there without killing anyone. Maybe even earned an ally in Patrius some day.”

“Maybe. But what of Andromeda?”

“Otrera said Andromeda was the reason she was able to get so close to Proetus. She’s someone important. But I don’t recognize her name.”

Medusa shrugged. They both looked at Chimera, and he rolled his eyes. Human names were probably as important to him as the color of silk.

“What I don’t understand is how this Amazon can be a Fate’s Child. You told me only men are Fate’s Children,” she said.

“Yeah, they are.”

“And that the Fates bless them when they are very young.”

“They do.”

Forked tongue licking the air, she nudged her hair of snakes into her man’s neck. “You said she was not so blessed when you defeated her when you were helping King Iobates. So, someone must have done this to her, and if it wasn’t the Fates, then… the person who stole the Moirai mask?”

The small warrior nodded. “That’s what I’m thinking. Whoever stole the mask, and is capable of hiding from the Fates, has to be powerful, powerful enough to maybe use the mask to do… Fate-ish things, like creating a new Fate’s Child.”

The Chimera stirred from his stillness, and reached out to poke at the fire with a stick. “Andromeda may be this person.”

“Maybe,” Darian said. “We’ll have to ask Otrera more when we catch her.”

“We have to wait for Gallea and Pina if we want to pursue her though, wherever she may be. Chimera says she’s out there,” she said, and she gestured to the sea down along the beach, “and without a ship, we aren’t going to make it far.”

“Yeah, especially now that people are looking for me… and you.”

Medusa tilted her head. “Me?”

“You let some of the soldiers escape. Word will spread that Medusa is on the mainland.”

“I… I couldn’t… I—”

“It’s ok. It doesn’t really matter, someone was going to find out sooner or later, and it’s not like it affects how people are going to react when they see you.”

Memories of every man she’d met since her transformation surfaced. “I guess not.”

“And him too.” Darian gestured to Chimera, who grunted in return. “We’ll have to try our hardest to avoid being seen unless we want a local city hunting us down like a mob.”

“A mob….” She sighed, and settled back onto her coil. A host of people, marching, screaming, torches and rocks and pitchforks. Farmers and soldiers and everything in between. For her? She shivered.

A touch on her knuckles brought her attention back, and she smiled at the small warrior pulling on her fingers. He was looking over his shoulder at her, concern painted on his face.

“You ok?” he said.

“Me? You’re the one who I had to yank arrows out of. You… were screaming, and there was blood everywhere.”

“Yeah.” He got up, crawled over her coils, and lay down across a couple rows of her snake length.

Without his armor on, and dressed in his punctured, ruined, stained tunic, he looked so… normal. In his armor, he was a grand warrior, chosen by the Fates, and invincible. He didn’t seem so invincible when he was screaming in agony when she had to push an arrow through his leg to get it out. The one in his back though, she was sure was going to kill him tearing it out of him.

But he lived. He smiled at her, and when she frowned at him, he raised his tunic to show her his back. Not even a scar.

“It’ll take more than—”

“You were lucky, Darian.” She shifted her human half across her coils and laid it atop him. With him on his back on her coils, and her head on his stomach, she looked up at the misty sky, and sighed. “And you were lucky with Chimera. Without Pegasus… if I hadn’t been there….” He’d have crushed you. “And luck won’t last forever.”

Chimera rumbled. She hissed.

His hand slipped into her snake hair, and she melted against his hard stomach as his fingertips massaged into her scalp.

“You’re right. The plan was a bad one. But at least we know something now, right?”

“Yes, that is true.”

“One step closer to rescuing my friend. A step closer to meeting Athena,” he said.

One step closer to them all getting run down by a mob, she thought.

“Hey, come on,” he said. Mind reader, the small man took her hand, and held it against his chest. “We’ll get through this. I’ll be more careful, and… we’ll come out on top. And hey, what do you want to do once we’re done?”

“Done?”

“Yeah, done. When Athena turns you back human, if we can convince her, what do you want to do?”

“I…” She brought a hand up to her lips, and looked down at the ground. The idea was so ridiculous and fantasy, she’d never really considered it. “I don’t know. And… and what if she doesn’t?”

Darian shrugged. “Either way, I’m not going anywhere.” He flashed one of his perfect, amazing smiles the sly little bastard must have been practicing since he was five, and tugged on her hand. “I was thinking we find some place secluded, live off the land, just… disappear for a good long while, maybe forever.”

She wrapped her arms around the man’s neck until he was coughing and struggling to breathe, but she didn’t let go. He always knew what to say to make all the problems seem so small, and make her heart roll right out onto her palm and into his.

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~~Darian~~

He awoke a few hours later.

Proetus and Stheneboea were dead. The reality of that was a stone in his gut. Not happy. Not sad. Not angry? Just… stopped. Revenge on the gods was a fantasy he entertained in his head, but revenge on those two was a real thing he could have taken. But he didn’t, he gave it up for Medusa. He wasn’t an idiot, he understood how self-destructive and ruinous revenge could be. Being in Medusa’s arms was better than a moment’s satisfaction in killing two fools.

But it wasn’t just their deaths. Proetus had betrayed him knowingly. It changed everything. He felt better about it, and that was just absurd. His old friend betrayed him for his wife, just because he wanted to make his wife happy, not because he believed his wife over him. It was so strange to be satisfied by that, but at the same, he could understand it. He could understand doing anything for the woman he loved.

The woman he loved. He tripped on the thought, picked it up, and held it in his mind’s eye. Love. Gods, careful Darian. Remember what happened with Philonoe?

His bed roll stirred, shifted on the grass, and roused his eyes. Weight pressed against his back, and another source clutched at his chest. A split moment of adrenaline told him to jump up, kick, attack, defend himself, but it passed when the familiar touch of Medusa pressed into his neck. Her snake hair liked to cuddle with him when she slept, like puppies in a dog pile against his shoulder. She must have sneaked in closer during the night, and decided to spoon him.

The fire was to their back, just gentle embers now, and the Chimera was up on the hill that looked over their spot where the beach met the grass.

He smirked, and raised a hand to hold hers where it rested on his stomach.

“You alright?” he said.

“Just… ssstill worried about you.” She pulled him tighter, and shifted some of her snake length so the soft snakeskin of her snake belly lay over his legs. “I was crying, you know, when I had to get those arrows out of you.”

“You were?”

“Mhmm. I was crying, and ssscreaming at you, and crying some more. And you were spitting up blood and screaming too.” Her whole body was shivering, snake half too, and her grip on his body grew tighter. “I was so ssscared.”

The whole event was a blur. He could remember muddy clouds of green and red, movement, sounds kind of like screaming mixed with thunder. Pain was normal, with how he grew up and lived, but he hadn’t been near death in a long, long time.

“… I was too.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.” He squeezed her fingers tighter, brought up to his lips, and kissed their tips. “And it’s my own damn fault. I let Otrera live, and I made everything harder by not killing anyone on the way out. But….”

“But you wanted to, for me.” Lips pressed to his neck, and he sighed happily when they traced up to his earlobe. “That means a lot to me. It may have been a stupid idea, considering the situation you were trapped in, but I… I am very happy you didn’t kill anyone.”

He rolled onto his back, and smiled at her while she got comfortable in the nook of his arm. Soon, her head was resting on his chest, her breasts pressed to his side, and his arm was hooked behind her, holding her back.

“It was pretty stupid.”

“It was. Don’t risk your life if you don’t have to.”

“I know, I… I know. I just… seeing Otrera again, all I could think about was the horribleness I’d done to her. I used to be ok with it, but now I… I agree with you. There’s got to be a better way of doing things than slaughtering everyone in my way, like I did with her clan.” And my shitty apology to her probably only made it worse.

“Good,” she said, and she relaxed into his body. “It’s good that you’re willing. I know that it won’t always be an option, but… it’s good to look.”

He nodded, closed his eyes, and set his head back against the blanket. On his back, with Medusa hooked under his arm and resting on his chest, sleep was inevitable.

But Medusa slipped her fingers out of his, where he held them against his chest, and slid them down to his waist. Without ceremony, kiss, or even a word, she wormed her fingers underneath his loincloth, and wrapped them around his testicles.

“Hey, what’re you doing?”

“Enjoying myssself. Shh. I haven’t touched you in a couple nights because you were hurt, and now I… I miss touching you. Take off your loincloth.”

There was an edge of confidence in her voice, something not usually there. He nodded, reached behind him with his other hand, and undid the knot holding the cloth there.

“Chimera will probably hear, and see from where he is,” he said.

She raised her head up off his chest, looked up the hill with her yellow snake eyes, shrugged, and put her cheek back against his torso.

“Let him see.”

It was his turn to melt. Her grip, practiced and familiar on his body, caressed the soft skin of his scrotum, massaged the sensitive bits within, and eased the weight of them back and forth in her palm. She let go for a moment, long enough to take the edge of his loincloth, pull the whole of it away, and toss it aside, before putting her hand back on him. A minute later, his member was fully erect. It lay across his tunic, raised with the occasional flex of his inner muscles, and shifting as Medusa continued to play with the most delicate part of his body.

“These are ssso soft,” she said. “Like, I could squeeze them, and you’d just break.”

“Please don’t.” Chuckling, he tickled her spine with the arm hooked behind her.

“Do you think you could fall asleep like this?” Her grip, relaxed and gentle, squeezed around the contours of his testicles with a soft palm, before she slid her fingertips up to the base of his shaft, and wrapped her fingers around it. Then, in a slow and deep motion, she began to stroke him.

“I… probably could.” He was a man, after all. Orgasms made a man tired, and he was no exception. He wasn’t ready to fall asleep again just yet, but the edge of excitement that usually filled him when sex was imminent was replaced with calm tenderness.

And that was amazing. He sighed, breathed deep, and massaged Medusa’s spine while she massaged his length. Neither in a hurry, neither rushing, Darian closed his eyes and relaxed. The gorgon’s cheek was pressed to his chest; no doubt she could hear his heartbeat, and how it was steady. But no doubt she could also feel how aroused he was, with his cock in her hand, hard, and wanting.

He raised his hand up from her spine, slid his fingertips between her shoulder blades, up along her neck, and eased them into her snake hair. There, he teased and caressed her array of snakes, but combed them like hair as well, pulling his fingers out against the length of them, before hooking his fingers back at the base of her neck and sliding them into her hair again. She murmured quiet noises, nuzzled her cheek into his chest, and squeezed the base of his member.

“You’re still hurt,” she said, “so you should relax.”

“I am very relaxed.” He was too. His eyelids were getting heavier, his breathing was getting slower, and his body was sinking into his bed roll once more. Having his lover’s head on his chest, her snake body over his legs, and her fingers wrapped around his hard girth, was comfortable. Like a warm blanket.

Love’s embrace, that’s what it was. He knew it, and it danced on his lips with taunting need. He wanted to say it, he did, but now wasn’t the time; or you’re just a coward, Darian. Bellerophon.

“How long would it take for you to cum, if I stay slow like this, and only use my hand here?” She squeezed his girth, stroked the length, but kept the motion slow and deep. From the edge of his glans, to the base of his cock above his testicles, she worked her hand in an almost circular rhythm, the same as he would if he was masturbating. But, she never increased her speed, keeping it leisurely instead until it was somewhere between sexual delight, and a deep, massaging feeling.

“You’re uh… if you stay slow like that? Probably a good long while.”

“Good.” She turned her head, leaned into his combing fingers, and flicked her forked tongue up to lick at his neck. “I don’t have one of these, so, it’s nice to get to feel it in my hand. I like how it’s kind of hard, but still soft enough I can squeeze it.” And as she did, she pointed his cock upward, and used her thumb to knead his girth. Always gentle, never hard enough to hurt him, she experimented with the various places on his veined cock she could caress and massage.

He was clay in her grip, and he let out the occasional quiet moan when her working fingers sent blissful waves of relaxation into his core, while at the same time he grew closer and closer to release. His breath started to quicken, and his cock started to twitch, as the pleasure built between his legs. Tiny, gentle tingling waves swelled underneath his testicles, above them, and up along the softer underside of his length. Glans growing more sensitive, he started to push his hips into her hand, hot cum filling him and ready to burst.

And then she stopped.

“H-hey,” he said.

“This is punishment, for nearly dying.” She let go of his cock, ran her fingers under his tunic, and caressed the lines of his abs. “You’re not allowed to do that.”

He opened his eyes, slipped his free arm under his head to prop it up, and blinked at the snake woman on his chest. She turned, put her chin on his sternum, looked up to him, and frowned.

“I’m sorry, I—”

“I know, I know. I’m not an idiot.” Sighing, she buried her face in his chest again before pushing herself up onto her hands. She leaned over him, put both hands against the ground on both sides of him, and smiled down at him. “But you will have to try harder next time.”

Try harder. The woman over him was trapped between a smile and a frown, and he couldn’t help but mimic it. It was the first time he’d ever truly had someone waiting for him, to come back to after a mission. The weight of his own life, now attached to hers, was heavy. But it was weight he wanted to bear.

“I will.” And he damn well would.

“Good.” She leaned her weight onto one arm, reached behind her back, and undid the knot of her chest wrap. It fell away, and she tossed it aside to join his loincloth. “But you’re ssstill getting punished.”

He smiled up at the gorgon. The beautiful, busty woman grinned down at him, pressed her heavy, naked breasts to his chest, and chuckled. Reaching down, she found the bottom of his tunic, and started to pull it up. He helped her slip it off over his head, laid back down, put both hands out, and held her hip with one, her back with the other.

“I’m so close, come on,” he said, pouting. It was a game, but a fun one, and he nudged his hips up against where hers were touching them.

“Nope. Punishment.” She slithered more of her weight onto his legs, and more. A couple rows of her massive snake body pinned his legs, snake skin shifting along his knees, the soft scales of her snake belly strange and gentle along his shins and quads. She reached up, pinned his hands down against the blanket, and leaned over him.

Her breasts were enormous. Hanging underneath her and pulling with their weight, they turned into massive teardrops, each ending in a large, swollen, puffy nipple of pink against her light skin. But he couldn’t touch them. He was pinned underneath her, and while he was a strong fellow, a Fate’s Child at that, Medusa could overpower him and pin him down if she wanted. And he liked being trapped by her, he was discovering.

The serpent shifted her torso up higher, brought her breasts over his head, and eased one of them down onto his face. He needed little encouragement, and opened his mouth to swallow her nipple.

Like her, he kept his play slow, gentle, and he suckled on her swollen areola. It was the sort of foreplay that would last all night if they wanted it to.

Medusa moaned, quiet and deep. She pulled away so her nipple slipped from his lips, and she dangled her breasts over his face a couple inches out of his reach.

“When I was alone, on my island, it was decadess before I learned to enjoy my body.” She winced when she said it, but her pain passed, and she nodded when she pressed her breasts down into his chest so she could nudge her nose into his. “Even then, I never really played with my breastsss. A little, sometimes a lot, but not like… not like what you do.”

“Ah, well… I’m a man, right? Can’t keep my hands off of them.” Unless they’re pinned of course. “They’re so soft, and heavy, and—”

“You try carrying them around for a hundred years. Sssee how you feel.”

“I—”

Like he weighed nothing, Medusa slipped some of her snake length under his legs, and rolled them. The boar on her island had died a similar way, wrapped in her coils and squeezed to death; he was that boar. She coiled around him one, two, three times, until her snake length had completely wrapped his legs. But the gorgon was an expert, and she had aligned the coil so her human half was pressed to him, chest to chest. And she’d made them stand up, so he was like a tree wrapped in her body. He still had room to move around and wiggle his upper body, but his legs might as well have been roots in the dirt.

She pressed her stomach to his, and nuzzled the wrap around her hips against his cock. A moment later, she’d tossed that aside too, and now the two of them were naked, with hips pressed together, and his cock pressed flat between their bellies. Her pussy’s lips, warm and wet, rested against his testicles, and soon her juices coated them. The serpent took his hands — she’d been in a sparing mood and had left them out of her coils, thankfully — and brought them to her breasts. With both of them upright, her breasts hung down against her ribs, pressed to them with their weight, and her swollen, large nipples filled his palms.

Darian tried to hide his smile; the seductress from the island was coming out again.

“Make me cum with… with my breasts.” Smiling, blushing, she pressed her hips against him, until her fluids dripped down onto his thighs. “If you do, you can cum inside me.”

“Even with Chimera so close?” he said.

“Even with.” She nodded, and pressed her fingers against the back of his hands to push them against her huge breasts. “He can watch, I don’t care. Nothing’s keeping me from ssspending any night I want with you.”

Oh, that’s what this was about. She didn’t want to let any opportunity to be with him pass her by. Ache filled his chest; gods, how horrible she must have felt, just waiting for him to return from a suicide mission. He tried to hide his frown, but Medusa raised her hand, wiped his frown away with her thumb, and smiled at him.

She raised herself a little higher, so her breasts were level with his face. Hands resting on his shoulders, she leaned in, and like a dancing snake, moved from side to side to graze her nipples in front of his lips.

He groaned. Her curvy body was glorious, and like a hungry child, he leaned in to wrap one of her puffy nipples in his lips. One hand sneaked up her back to caress her spine again, and the other traced a line up her side before cupping her free breast in his palm. The size of it overwhelmed his palm and fingers, flowed over the edge of his grip, and when he pushed his hand up against it, some of its volume spilled onto his wrist. Soft, supple, and weighty, he lowered it back down to rest against her torso, before he started to draw his fingers along its underside, where the breast’s weight pulled into a teardrop shape. All the while, he suckled on the nipple in his mouth, licked around her large, pink areola, and kissed the tip of the pink nub between suckles.

Medusa’s voice turned into mewls and whimpers. Her body wriggled and squirmed against him, pressed into him, and tightened around his legs. Her hand slid into his hair, holding tight and pulling him into her breast. The supple skin covered his face, and he closed his eyes as the heavy flesh buried his lips.

She pulled away. A thin strand of saliva ran from his lip to her nipple, and the gorgon reached to her breast with her other hand to catch it. She wiped it away from his lip with a finger, grinned at him with blushing cheeks, and rubbed the wetness into her breast. She reached down after, found where his cock was trapped against her stomach, and teased the swollen tip with her fingertips. Since she’d raised herself higher, his glans was pressed to her clitoris, and she was wriggling against him to push the engorged flesh into his cock. In the mix of her juices, his precum rose to the tip of his glans, and she wiped it away before bringing it up to his chest to draw a line of it along his muscle, warm and wet.

Before he could say anything — beg for her to let him cum, most likely — she guided his head to her other breast, and pull him in to place her nipple into his mouth.

“Closssse,” she said. Her other arm reached up, settled behind Darian’s back, and pushed the whole of him tighter to her body.

Trapped and pinned to her chest, and happy to be. He devoured her breast, suckled on it a little harder, pulled more of her big areola into his mouth, and massaged the warm flesh with his tongue. And while one arm hooked around her waist to hug her from behind, the other hand kneaded her free breast, but gently. Her breasts were sensitive, and the last thing he wanted to do was hurt the beautiful mounds pressed to him.

She started to squirm. Her voice came out in short pants, whimpers, and her body quivered. A harsh hiss and her hand tightened on his hair; she was cumming. He stopped licking, but kept her nipple in his mouth, only to caress it with a soft lip while she came. Trickling juices dripped down his length where her pussy’s lips were pressed to the head of his cock, and soon coated his balls pressed against her soft belly scales beneath her sex. Every ounce of him wanted to grab her hips and shove her down onto him to sink his cock into her, but instead, he teased his fingers up her spine while she came, and kept his touch on her breasts as gentle as possible while she writhed.

Then, with half-closed eyes, she reached down, put a shaky finger on his cock, and guided it into her. Soaked, warm flesh greeted his swollen glans, and between pulses of clenching muscles, the gorgon lowered herself down. Pressed belly to belly, she mewled and wriggled with each inch, until her lips pressed against the base of his length. Tight muscles massaged the whole of his girth, and made him grit his teeth. Every moment inside her was sending pleasure waves down his length into his thighs. Don’t thrust don’t thrust don’t thrust.

“A-again,” she said. Trembling hands took his shoulder and head, and guided him back to her breasts and her swollen nipples.

“You’re so mean!” He looked up at from between her breasts. So close to cumming, he could feel the warm liquid building underneath his testicles, but Medusa held still and kept his pleasure on a leash.

“Punishment.” She nodded, pressed his face back down, and relaxed her arms over his shoulders. Leaning against him, she put her cheek against the top of his head with arms drooping down against his back.

It was Elysium. The angle pushed her body into him and squashed his face in her breasts, demanding attention. He wrapped both in his fingers, sank his digits into the overwhelming softness of her bosom, and kissed along her sternum up to her neck. Every time his fingers grazed her nipples, her cunt squeezed on his cock hard enough to stir his juices, keeping him on the edge of orgasm.

When he placed his lips around one of her nipples again, her muscles clenched tight, and pulled a groan from him. So tight, every quiver of her muscles had his ripe, swollen glans ready to burst. Suckling pushed Medusa into another orgasm, and her relaxed arms tightened around his neck, pinning him to her breasts. But it was her squirming, wriggling and writhing, that made him cum.

Her convulsions and bucking hips were too much. She shook and trembled, and each clench of her muscles around his member milked pleasure from him. Warm cum flooded his length and gushed into her, coating him. He groaned into her body and did his best to hold still, but each twitch of his cock forced a small thrust of his hips, another gush of his cum, and a squeak from Medusa. Juices soaked his testicles, dripped down his legs, warm and inviting. Not wanting to end his climax too fast, he forced himself to hold still, and only eased himself a single inch back and forth inside the gorgon’s milking, trembling muscles. It was just enough to massage his swollen glans, fill his length with ripples of pleasure down to his balls, and squirt several more, slow gushes of warmth up his cock and into her awaiting insides, until it trickled out of her and down their bodies.

“H… hey…,” she said between whimpers. “You weren’t supposed to cum yet.”

“Sorry, I—”

She took his jaw into both hands, cupping the sides of his head in her palms, and guided it upward. Taller than him, she had to lean down to kiss him, but she did with the flexibility of a snake.

“Ok, next time, I’ll treat you,” she said.

He couldn’t wait.

They uncoiled from each other, walked down to the sea, and took a moment to clean themselves up, before returning to their sleeping rolls. Sex before bed, it was a routine they’d had back on Medusa’s island, and it was a routine he was looking forward to getting back into.

Medusa leaned over him, and put a couple kisses on his nose. “Good night.”

“Good night,” he said.

A quiet, gentle, woman’s voice cut through the dark. “That was lovely.”

He sat up with a jolt. Medusa did as well, but with her over him and facing down, foreheads collided and sent them both to the ground. Groaning and moaning, he clutched his forehead and rolled onto his knees.

“Oh sweet mother of the gods!” he said.

“Ow ow ow ow ow.” Medusa rolled — not that a snake could really roll when coiled, more like flop — and rubbed her forehead the same as him.

“Haha, startled you did I? The great Bellerophontes caught unawares in a woman’s bed. Wouldn’t that make for a fitting end?”

Pina. The satyr sat down next to the fire, smiled, and waved her fingers at him. There was a mischievous grin on her face he didn’t expect, and it made him frown.

“How long have you been watching? And how did you get so near? If I didn’t hear you, as least Chimera should have,” he said, and reached for his loincloth.

“I approached, but before I could say anything, Medusa decided to get very friendly. And… well, I’m a satyr.” Chuckling, the woman wiggled her fingers in Medusa’s direction. “I am very sorry, but seeing how comfortable you looked, and smiling and just… it was very romantic. I couldn’t help myself!” Pina, squatting down with ease, hopped around the fire like a rabbit and came up beside Medusa. “I’m sure I can convince the Fates to let us indulge and add this romance plot to the story.”

“P-plot?” Medusa said, eyes wide, one arm pulled across her heavy breasts, the other covering her sex.

The poor woman, startled and naked. Darian got his loincloth back on, stepped between the two women, and glared down at the satyr. When he did, Pina stood up straight, and frowned at him before looking around his shoulder to the gorgon.

“I’d assumed you figured it out by now,” she said.

Darian snarled. “We did.”

Pina took a step back and held up her hands. “You should know we mean you no harm, and everything we’ve told you, and the Fates have told you, is true far as I know. But, we’re here to record and tell the story.”

“You could have told me. I thought we were friends.” Medusa, slithering left and right as she slipped her wraps back on, did her best to keep Darian between her and Pina as she dressed.

“We are! We… I… I had no choice. We were told to let this first event — whatever that would be — play out without you knowing I’d be watching.”

A rumbling voice boomed in the firelight. “And how did you watch without me knowing?”

The three of them turned. Chimera stood on the edge of the grass, fangs bared, lion pelt on his skull, and one hand held out in front of him. They hadn’t heard him coming either. Knowing the ancient beast could stalk around without a sound made Darian nervous. But this time, the sight made him grin. Gallea was in the giant’s hand, held up by his horns entwined in Chimera’s fingers, and dangling with arms folded across his chest and a frown on his face.

Pina gasped. “Gallea!”

“It’s ok, ok…. I think. He found me, threatened to kill you if I made a peep.” The other satyr sighed, and tried to kick out at the giant with his hooves, to no avail. Chimera’s arm was more than long enough to hold the satyr far away and out of kicking distance.

“And!” Pina said, “I didn’t know you’d be recruiting a giant! You know giants eat people right? Satyrs too! Satyrs, and centaurs, and people. That’s who we’re using to track the thief?”

“It is.” Darian smirked. It was a nice change of pace to see the Chimera on his side. “Answer his question.”

“Ques — oh. I… um, I can’t tell you.” She winced when she said it, and she looked between Chimera and Medusa with wide eyes.

She was afraid for Gallea’s life. Afraid, but still unwilling to reveal her secret. Darian frowned, reached down for his sword, and walked toward Gallea.

“Darian, don’t kill him!” Medusa said. She slithered after him, glancing over her shoulder back to Pina as she did. Her hand found his shoulder, and tugged on it.

“I’m not, don’t worry.” Well, at least probably not. He drew the sword, and as if the giant could read his mind, Chimera lowered the satyr to the ground, but kept his hooves a few inches above it.

Dangling, arms still folded across his chest, Gallea glared at Darian. “Not going to kill me, Fate’s Child? What’s the sword for then.”

The sword was pressed to his shoulder a moment later. Darian put enough pressure onto the gleaming, sharp sword to pierce Gallea’s skin, and only the skin, but he did it fast enough to earn a gasp and yelp from the helpless satyr.

Pina was beside him in a second, fist raised and swinging at him. He turned to face her in the moment, snapped out with his free hand, and grabbed her throat. The jarring switch of momentum for the satyr made her miss her punch, and her hands squeezed his forearm. But, the satyr didn’t have the strength to even move a single one of his fingers. He raised her a few inches off the sand and grass, same as Gallea was, and held her up for her husband to see.

The gorgon had her hands up to her lips, covering them, and her snake eyes were wide and terrified. He managed only a tiny glance her way, mouthed ‘trust me,’ and looked back Pina and Gallea. Two satyrs, squirming, wriggling, and one of them now strangling to death. Good.

“Remember what I told you I’d to to her, if any harm came to Medusa?”

Gallea’s mouth dropped. “W-wait! Medusa is fine! And even if she wasn’t, we wouldn’t hurt her!”

“You were watching!” Raged poured through his arm, until the satyr started kicking him. Her face was changing color. “You were watching! How’d she do it? Chimera couldn’t see you, couldn’t smell you, couldn’t hear you, you must have done something! Tell—”

“Darian! Let her go.” The gorgon slithered up behind him, and put her hand on his arm.

Like water on fire. He sighed, relaxed his grip, and set the coughing satyr down. She fell back onto her ass, clutched her throat, and frowned at him between the gargled noises of a bruised larynx.

He sheathed his sword, threw it down against the ground near his armor, and started to pace. Knuckles cracked, teeth grinded, and his guts boiled. Something about the two satyrs set him on edge, he knew it, but he couldn’t control it. Every time he looked at the two, storytellers, poets, liars, the fire worked up his spine into his skull like a piercing migraine.

Medusa was by Pina in an instant. She reached down, helped the satyr stand, and frowned at Darian.

“Pina,” she said, and she patted the angry little satyr’s raised fist, “can you tell us how you were able to follow us?”

“No, of course I can’t. I work for the Fates. They’d have me dead if I gave up their secrets, Gallea too.” Her head lowered, her fist after, and she turned to take Medusa’s hand in one of hers.

They were trapped in the Fates’ game, same as him. Their eyes followed him as much as them, and it was not pleasant. At least he could defend himself, but the two satyrs seemed about as useful in a fight as children.

Medusa slithered over to Chimera, and raised herself to his height, nearly twelve feet tall. “And you! Put him down.”

The giant grunted, but did as she requested. Darian smirked, and when the Chimera looked his way, he shrugged at him. His lover had a bossy streak when she needed it, but he liked that about her.

Gallea hopped over to his wife, and put an arm around her shoulder before glaring at Darian. “Bastard.”

“Bastard indeed,” Pina added.

“Hey!” The serpent reached out, grabbed both satyrs by a horn each, and held them in front of her. Children by the ears. The parallel was too perfect, and it made Darian smile. “Darian’s been a pawn of the Fates for a long time, too long. So you’ll be nice to him, or I’ll turn you both into stone.”

They squeaked, eyes wide. Darian blinked a few times too. How much had not even a week on the mainland changed Medusa? Smile turned to grin, but he wiped it away before anyone could notice.

“Well, they can’t tell us how Pina managed to track us without Chimera knowing. And we need them for the boat so we can continue the pursuit and try and save Pegasus.” He got up, walked over to the two satyrs Medusa still held, and frowned down at them. Frowns everywhere. “So, we’re back to where we started. You keep helping me, I’ll keep not killing you, and when Pegasus is free, we can all go our separate ways.”

Gallea pulled away, enough that Medusa let him go. “We work for the Fates, not for you.”

“Work is a weird word for slave labor. And I know slave labor when I see it,” Darian said, and he pointed at the V etched on his forehead.

Once Medusa let go of Pina, the satyr came to stand beside her husband again. “We… it’s… ok, we’re slaves of the Fates. Ok? We’re here to help you get back the Moirai mask. And we’ll save Pegasus at the same time! Everyone’s happy, and you and Medusa can do whatever you want.”

Through all this, Chimera stood there, quiet as stone, arms folded across his chest. His eyes were on the fire pit, but when Darian glanced his way, the giant returned his gaze and nodded. It was obvious to the both of them: there was a chance they wouldn’t be doing both.

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~~Chimera~~

What was he doing with these fools?

Chimera listened to their squabbling, their yelling and growling, even some hollering, all while letting the dance of the fire soothe his soul. Or at least tried. But the satyrs whined and groaned, his old enemy was as volatile as ever, and the serpent he’d decided to serve and protect tried to calm them all like a weak-willed mother. It made him roll his eyes, and stare into the fire in search of some solace. None came.

He eyed the female satyr. Pleasing to the eye, and probably pleasing to his stomach. The thought earned some laughter; his mother had always told him to not play with his food. What intrigued him more though was trying to decipher her trick. How had she managed to follow him? No beast on hoof or paw could follow him close enough to see him, and him not see them in return. See, smell, hear, one of his senses would have found them; but this girl had avoided his eyes, nose, and ears despite that. Bound to an oath to the Fates, was she? He scratched at his chin through his beard. Would her oath hold if he tore off an arm?

He shook his head, focused on the fire, and tried to drown out the arguing beside him. Medusa had defeated him, and there was strength to her that she did not realize. He could. The way she moved, the way her eyes dripped of emotion, the way she hugged her ‘Darian’ whenever they were alone. Like a mother, standing defiant before a lion to save her child, strength would come to her in a way she would not anticipate. And he wanted to be there to see the serpent monster come to realize her power.

What would she do when she realized she was strong enough, powerful enough to destroy villages, armies, and rend entire kingdoms as dust. Or, if Darian’s stories were true, turn those within to stone? It would be a sight to behold, and he did not want to miss it.

A poor excuse, Chimera. You joined these fools because you were lonely, and it was the first time in ages that another had asked for your presence.

He frowned, clicked his teeth to the side, and sat down by the fire. Arm raised, he looked at the snake tattoo bestowed upon him so long ago. Its eyes were still red, and the smell of the Fates’ taint lingered. He was going on a journey. A journey to help the Fates, save an old enemy, help a companion, and maybe, just maybe, earn a chance at some revenge too.

Bellerophontes talked of Pegasus, but Chimera could see in the way the soldier glanced to him that he expected things to go differently. They both knew violence would come, and it would flood them both before the journey was over.

But the journey would be worthwhile either way, if only for a change of pace.

“And we’re taking him with us?” The male satyr, Gallea they said his name was, hopped over to him. Sitting as Chimera was, the standing satyr was able to look him in the eye, face to face, and frown at him. He smelled of the woods, fur, and deer. “He’s liable to eat us in our sleep!”

The giant rumbled.

“He’s proven trustworthy.” Medusa slithered toward him, took the satyr’s hand into her own, and walked him back to his wife. “I am sure he’ll leave us alone, if we leave him alone. And besides, he’s our guide. The Fates said he’d be the only one able to track this thief.”

Chimera tilted his head to the side, and smiled at the back of the snake woman’s head. Her snake hair did the same, little heads tilting, and tongues tasting the air around him. Gaia was the one able to track their thief; he was just the messenger.

“Where’s the boat?” Darian said. He gestured to the dark water of the night.

“I was going to summon her, when this bastard sneaked up on me!” Gallea kicked some sand at Chimera, but from far enough away that it didn’t reach him.

“Sneaked up on by a giant?” Pina said.

“The bastard is giant alright, but more a beast than a giant. Like the dead cat on his back. What kind of cat has horns?”

And their rambling continued. This time, they argued about where he came from, knowing full well he didn’t plan to tell them. If only they knew what giants were like, back when they prowled the hills and rivers of Greece, and hunted stupid men as much as they hunted goats, and lions, and the dead species that predated them.

He reached up to pull back the dead cat off his long dark hair, and let it fall onto his back. “Will your vessel hold me?”

They almost jumped at the sound of his voice. Like birds.

“She’ll hold you,” Bellerophontes said. “She’ll hold an army.”

Chimera quirked a brow, and looked to the two satyrs; they nodded. He nodded in return, and again, returned to silence.

“Alright then, so what’s the plan?” Gallea said.

“Chimera says he can still follow the scent of Otrera—”

“Who?”

“… Pina can tell you, I’m sure.” And the small warrior gave the female satyr a hard glare. But, to the Chimera’s hidden delight, she returned it. She had spirit. “So we’ll follow her scent as best we can. Wherever she is, she’s probably with the thief, so we keep following her. Either she leads us to the thief accidentally, or we capture her, and she leads us to the thief on a leash.”

“A lot rides on this Otrera person,” Gallea said. “Is she the only way?”

They all looked to Chimera.

“No,” he said, and he rumbled deep in his bones as he stood up. “There is another.”

“Another?” Medusa said. She slithered up to him, and settled into a coil beside him near the fire. Friendly to a fault, the serpent monster. It was, indeed, a nice change of pace.

“Wherever they are, they are a blur to Gaia, hard to track. But, she can tell there are two Fate’s Children, together… and….” He reached up, put the tattooed arm’s hand against his forehead, and listened. Blurry images, covered smells, and muffled noises filled his mind. Two sets of white eyes, and…. “And someone else. Not a Fate’s Child, but the Earth and Sky know her just as well.”

“The thief, I imagine,” Bellerophontes said.

“Then, unless we have need to sssstay, should we go?” Medusa said. “I fear Darian, Gallea, and Pina will start arguing more the longer we sit still.”

Chimera nodded. “Summon your vessel, satyr.”

Gallea and Pina frowned in unison, but after looking at each other, Gallea walked down to the beach. From his pack, he pulled out a pan flute. Chimera smirked; a fitting instrument for a mischievous creature. It was a collection of cane grass tubes, connected in assorted lengths, long to short. And when Gallea put the tubes to his mouth, the sound that came out was that of mourning. Medusa, Darian, and he as well, the three of them stepped down the beach in the dead of night, and stood behind the satyr who played his tune.

He looked down at the two lovers. Both were surprised, and moved by the lamenting sound of gentle, deep notes. For Chimera, it sounded like a time long forgotten, and it made him smile.

As the music went on, mist grew upon the dark shore. It was already misty, but mist became fog, and fog turned into a wall of gray even he could not see beyond. Soon, further than a hundred feet was beyond his gaze, blocked by the oncoming mist, cold to his scarred skin and muffling. It became hard to smell, see, or even hear. A blanket of wet cold that weighed down on him and blocked off Gaia’s breath.

He did not like it. Not at all.

He stirred, turned, and started to pace. His heavy body dug through the sand, and his thick feet spread the sand with each step. Growls escaped him, and a deep rumbling filled his chest. Nervous? How long had it been since he’d felt such a feeling?

“You ok?” Medusa said.

He snarled. “I know this feeling.” The hair on his skin stood up, and ice ran down his spine.

“You know this feeling? What? What’s that—”

“They’re here.” Pina hopped by them, gave Medusa a small pat on her arm, and joined her husband closer to the water. “Think our new friend will be ok with the crew?”

Gallea laughed, put the flute away, and snickered at Chimera over his shoulder. “I’m more worried if they’ll be ok with him. Charon’s soldiers, and a giant? Well—”

“I will be fine,” he said. Rumbling, he stepped down the beach to join them, with arms folded across his chest and teeth gritting. “The war was over hundreds of years ago.”

But maybe, just maybe, this whole journey would give him a chance at a taste of vengeance.

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He stared down at the undead beneath his feet.

The deck was strong, and the bars that served as windows to its depths were of metals not made by man. He doubted he’d be able to get down into its belly, to investigate what secrets Charon’s vessel hid, and what the undead within may have to say. Their eyes glowed with green mist, not unlike the white that befell Bellerophon, or the Amazon. The color of the Fates. It reminded him of the searing gold of Apollo, the blood red of Ares, the blue of Poseidon. Dozens of colors, each from a pair of glowing eyes. Each coming with sword and spear and a host of power at their beck and call.

Like you said, Chimera, the war is over, it has been for hundreds of years. You are the last of your kind, you lost, let it go.

No, not when a chance for revenge was delivered to his door.

But the Fates were the ones who sent Bellerophontes. And they know you’d snap up a chance to kill them as much as any god.

Then they deemed the risk of his aid worth it. How much was this Moirai mask worth to them? Why was it so important? The Fates and their masks. The metaphor was sickening.

He stepped up to the front of the ship, and stared into the veil of mist and black. More godly magic, blocking his senses and hiding the world from him, Gaia, and everything in between. It would certainly hide them, just as the thing they were pursuing was hidden.

But the Fate’s Children were not hidden to him, not completely. He had Bellerophon’s scent, and Otrera’s, and all Fate’s Children. There were others, well and far beyond the world of Greece, too far to be involved, and nothing more than wisps on the wind at that distance, untraceable. No matter. It was Greece where the Fates and the Gods played their games. It would be in Greece where the bodies would pile high.

“What in Tartarus did that?” Gallea said. “There’s a hole in the back!”

When Chimera turned around, the quartet were standing in the center of the empty, huge deck, and while gathering their packs, food, and clothes, Gallea had picked up Darian’s breastplate.

“The Amazon shot him with some arrows, in the limbs, and one got him in the back.” As she said it, Medusa leaned down, and hugged her lover from behind.

Bellerophontes nodded, and leaned back into her body. “The arrows were huge, and the tips were some kind of weird metal I’ve never seen.”

“Keep one?” Pina said.

He shook his head. “No, uh, I was a screaming mess at the time.”

“Me neither. I… just threw them away. I didn’t know.” The gorgon sighed, and hugged her lover tighter.

Chimera watched, quiet as stone, still as the Earth, and waited as always. The warrior and the serpent, they moved as one, holding each other’s hand when they talked, when they looked at each other, when they breathed. Like a school of fish. Did they know how lucky they were?

“I don’t know if we can fix this.” Gallea raised the black and silver breastplate over his head. “I’ll have to summon the Erinyes.”

Fire shot up the Chimera’s throat, and he forced it back down with a hard gulp. Not yet, the Erinyes could wait for another time.

Bellerophon grumbled as well, and Medusa hugged him tighter.

“Come on, you’re picking fights with everyone,” she said. “Pina and Gallea are trying to help as much as they’re allowed.”

Pina nodded. “We are trying to help, Darian. Medusa is my friend too! But there are rules and the Fates would have my head on a pike if I broke them. Gallea’s too.”

Bellerophontes grumbled. A surly child, and it made Chimera laugh. Bellerophon threw his glare at Chimera, but he returned it with another chuckle.

“Alright, alright. I don’t trust either of you, but I trust Medusa,” the small warrior said.

She was the only one of them trustworthy, Chimera thought.

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~~Otrera~~

Back in the arms of the nymphs.

Otrera, naked as before, and finally calm after a disturbing chat with Andromeda and the mask, stood by the two nymphs. The sun would be up soon, and damn it, she needed to relax! She wanted to relax, she tried to relax, but the voice from the mask penetrated her brain like a spike. That voice, inhuman and filled with chills. Hades would have sounded better than that voice. And Andromeda! Her new leader was bloodthirsty and prepared to kill innocents for her goals. None of it was settling in Otrera’s stomach very well.

She really needed a good lay to relax.

The two nymphs in the grass were sleeping. They never said a word, nymphs, they just played in the garden, the water, tended the trees and their golden apples, and Perseus’s cock. She needed some tending too! So she got down onto her knees, and lay down with them. Beside the taller one with curvy body and heavy breasts, she snuggled into the nook of her arm. And like an inviting blanket, the nymph hooked her arm around Otrera’s hard, lean body, and hugged her. All was silent.

But when Otrera put her lips onto the nymph’s breast, silence turned into a gasp, and a husky moan. The nymph blinked down at Otrera, her gentle eyes widened, and her arm hooked under Otrera’s neck, on her back, touching her waist. The Amazon met her eyes with a wicked grin, and sucked on busty woman’s breast.

The curvy nymph’s gentle murmurs turned into mewls when the other nymph, the tiny one, copied Otrera. The pale creatures of colorful hair and perfect lips were, as far as Otrera could tell, horny every moment of the day. All it took was the Amazon’s touch, and the curvy woman’s nipple was aroused, swollen, and filling Otrera’s mouth.

No need to waste time — and gods damn it, she couldn’t wait much longer — Otrera reached down between the nymph’s spreading legs, and massaged her already budding clitoris. More mewls, and some squeals too. The nymph across from Otrera suckled on her sister’s tit in almost perfect mirror of Otrera, and when they met eyes, the nymph winked at her, and ran her tongue around her sister’s areola, before lifting her mouth. The nipple was swollen, puffy, and coated in saliva.

Then the nymph used her hand, ran it down her sister’s belly, over Otrera’s hand and under it, before she started to stroke the rose of the curvy nymph’s ass. It only took minutes before the curvy nymph’s cunt was drooling juices all over herself, more than enough for the Amazon to sink two of her fingers into the woman’s awaiting pussy. Better, the small nymph did the same, and sank two her fingers into the now wet sphincter of the whimpering woman.

Otrera was a sexual woman, she knew that. She loved sex, she liked to masturbate regularly, she aroused easily, and she made a huge mess when she came. But these nymphs, they were ridiculous! Just a touch and they were writhing, wriggling, and mewling in orgasm. Otrera and her new friend’s lips were suckling on the bucking woman’s breasts, determined to suck her nipples off, while they fingered her quivering insides all the more. With fingers inside both her holes, Otrera could feel clenching muscles fighting her digits, as well as the small, anal-obsessed nymph’s fingers. Pressing against each other through the walls of flesh inside, sinking deeper, fighting for space, the mess grew more and more soaked.

When the Amazon started to drive her fingers up against the nymph’s g-spot, that was it. The busty woman pushed her hips up to meet Otrera’s hand, and gushed. Her warm fluids spilled over the Amazon’s fingers, squirted against her palm, and soaked everything down between her thighs. The small nymph sank her fingers in deeper, pushed her fingers up to meet Otrera’s, and massaged the wall of flesh that separated them. The poor woman between them was reduced to nothing but orgasm and mewls.

Otrera withdrew her hand. The small nymph seemed content to continue fingering the woman’s ass, and giggled at the mess of juices everywhere. But Otrera needed release. For days she’d been surrounded by nymphs, or Perseus, or a certain queen who liked to fuck her guards in an orgy. Gods she was horny. She put both her knees to either side of the woman’s head, grinned down at the panting woman, and started to lower the entrance of her snatch toward awaiting lips.

“Otrera.”

She stopped. “Perseus? I uh… hello.”

The beautiful man walked up to her, smiled, and held a hand out to her. “Come on. Andromeda says Bellerophontes is on the move. We have to leave, set up the trap.” And of course, he was already dressed in his tunic and sandals.

“I… ah….” Gods damn it! She got up, frowned down at the pouting nymphs, and turned to join Perseus. She didn’t bother with the outstretched hand. “Right now?”

“Right now.” Always smiling, Perseus. He reminded her of Bellerophontes to a degree, confident, without a scar, handsome and beautiful. The warrior was much bigger and taller than her enemy though. But, size meant little. She was proof of that.

Grumbling, she marched for her own tunic, sandals, and started to strap on her Amazon armor. The heat between her legs was still there, and it’d take a little while to pass with how many days she’d been on edge. Horny, and now grumpy. Lovely.

Perseus did the same, and strapped on armor with speed and efficiency. His face looked like it belonged on a farmer boy, not a warrior, but the ease and familiarity he showed when donning his battle clothes was telling. And it was impressive armor at that, gold and black. It looked like typical hoplite armor, but just as Bellerophon’s armor was something magical, so too must have been Perseus’s. Something crafted with the power of the Fates, like her bow, quiver, and arrows.

All gifts from their leader. Otrera frowned at the great bow as she lifted it, its white body, its gold string. The quiver looked of regular leather, but along its body was more of the gold threads that marked Perseus’s armor as well. And within, the arrow tips were white, large, and they shined with an unreal polish. She felt like they were warriors sent by the gods themselves. The thought made her chuckle, and she slung the bow and quiver onto her back.

“So what’s the plan?” she said.

“Andromeda thinks Bellerophontes can track us, or her baubles.” He pulled out a necklace, and handed it to her, a copy of the one that Bellerophontes had stolen. “Andromeda’s magic hides us here in the secret garden, but it isn’t perfect. We go where they can find us more easily, away from here. And we make sure where they find us will serve to our advantage.”

Otrera slipped the necklace on. Just a rock on a stone, but it glowed when she touched it before it settled into quiet darkness once again.

“Advantage?”

“Andromeda will summon for us reinforcements,” Perseus said. “We’ll pretend like we’re performing a ritual, and that Bellerophontes has found us, interrupting our dastardly plot.” He laughed, a warm and gentle sound. “Won’t that be enjoyable? A fake ritual. We’ll play the part of thwarted villains, and then Andromeda will cast her magic. Soldiers from the nether will come to our aid.”

“The nether….” Well, she had to hand it to Perseus, he bought into Andromeda’s style and words through and through. “Alright. But that doesn’t change the fact they have Medusa with them. She can turn people to stone with her gaze. Any idea how we’re supposed to fight that?”

“You won’t. I will.” He gestured, and she followed. A moment later, they were by Andromeda’s favorite boulder; the sorceress was nowhere to be found. But against the rock, a giant shield was laid. Gold, with black drawings on its face. The drawings Otrera did not recognize, but they spiraled inward to the center of the massive, round shield, like two whirlpools, or chaotic eyes.

And then Perseus picked it up. He slipped it onto his arm, and guarded the front of himself with it for Otrera. The damn thing was as tall as the Amazon! She could probably lift it, maybe even wear it, but it was too damn big for her to be able to use. Perseus though, he was a tall, broad-shouldered man, and he held the shield like a Spartan.

“This will stop Athena’s power, even that bestowed on Medusa.”

“I see… so you’ll deal with Medusa, I’ll deal with Bellerophontes?”

“Of course.” He set the gargantuan thing back down, and smiled at her. “Andromeda gave you her word, didn’t she?”

“Then who’s dealing with the giant? I wasn’t kidding when I said he was a giant! An actual, real giant. He—”

“He is the reason we’re laying the trap where we are.”

“Which is?”

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“A volcano!?”

The island before them rose high as a mountain. Black soot covered the ground, the rocks and the air. Heat lingered, danced in the distance, and blurred her vision.

“A volcano.” Perseus looked over his shoulder at her, smiled his typical perfect smile, and kicked his heels into the horse’s sides. Pegasus neighed, and lowered down onto the beach.

Poor horse. She couldn’t deny the sad look in his eyes, and while she tried to remind herself Pegasus worked with Bellerophontes, and was the reason her enemy had become the famous man he was today, she still felt bad. He was a beautiful horse, and he looked at her with heavy, dark, deep eyes.

She patted him on the back when she hopped off him. It was wholly inadequate. Then she remembered Bellerophontes, and how the bastard had apologized to her before running off. Did Pegasus feel the same now, as she did then? Furious to the point of delirium?

As she walked up the valley of ash, toward the black mountain, Pegasus and Perseus leading her, her thoughts drifted to the small bastard who ruined her life. He apologized to her. Apologized. Apologized! She couldn’t see much of his face then, helmet and all, but she caught a glimmer of his eyes. And the sadness she found in them was seared into her mind.

He didn’t get to feel sad, he didn’t get to feel sorry. He butchered her whole clan, slaughtered them like cattle, slaughtered her! Fire raced up her fingers into her head, until the volcano seemed a pale comparison. She’d been left alone, surrounded by dead sisters, and a hole cut through her shoulder. Had he ever felt such misery?

“Andromeda….”

“Mmm?” Perseus said.

“Andromeda, she came and rescued me from death, after Bellero… after the incident. Used her magic, healed my wounds. But she never told me why.”

Perseus raised a brow, and tugged on Pegasus’s reigns when he stopped, so the winged horse stopped beside him.

“Why she saved you? Surely she told you we had need of a skilled warrior, and one who can understand Andromeda’s mission.”

Otrera shook her head. “I understand why she saved me, but not why she was there. Maybe the better question is how. How did she know to be there?”

Perseus nodded, and resumed walking them toward the black mountain. Orange mixed into the blurring air, far in the distance, but even from so far, the Amazon could feel the heat pouring outward.

“She was looking for recruits. She still is. She—”

“Her powers, Perseus. How did she come to be a sorceress? She can see things from miles away, she can heal wounds, levitate things, call on storms, and she somehow even managed to steal from the Fates. She can even use that mask! That mask is… she can harness it. How can she do all these things?”

Well, it was bound to come out sooner or later. So much for serving her leader with faith.

Perseus didn’t seem bothered though. He shrugged, adjusted the pack on his back, and started walking toward the volcano again, pulling Pegasus along by the reigns.

“I suppose it doesn’t matter if I tell you. Andromeda doesn’t like to talk about it, but it’s not a secret. She’s the daughter of the king of Aethiopia, so she was privileged, and had access to knowledge; talked with various scholars who came and went through the kingdom. She’s never told me the details, but met some people, found some ancient texts, did a lot of reading, and… does it matter?”

Andromeda was royalty? She said she hated Aethiopia, but Otrera had no idea the sorceress was royalty there.

“Of course it matters!” She jogged up to the idiot man and walked next to him. “I’m dedicating the last shred of life I have left to this woman. I have nothing, and no one. My tribe is gone, my life is cursed, and the only way I can ever force Ares to look my way once, just once in my miserable life, is her help. And I… I didn’t know what I was agreeing to, when I said I’d accept the gift of being a Fate’s Child.”

Perseus shrugged yet again. “I love her. She loves me. Wherever she goes, I’ll follow.”

Otrera almost vomited in her mouth. Such blind devotion; it reminded her of Proetus. The things idiot men would do for love.

“And that mask,” she said, “how did she get that mask? It….” It talks. Something’s inside.

“The Fates aren’t immutable. She drew their eyes, distracted them, and sneaked into their realm on Pegasus’s wings with her magic.”

“Distracted them?”

“Yes. A war draws their attention like nothing else.”

“She caused a war?" Oh, great, more bloodshed. She was an Amazon, not a murderer. She wanted wars with meaning, value, for conquest and belief. Not to spill blood for blood’s sake.

Perseus frowned. “The city states argue over everything, Amazon Queen. All she did was place a tiny seed of desire in their midst. And they slaughtered each other over it, as they did the decade before, and the decade before.”

“… she caused the last war between Athens and Sparta?”

“She did, with only a rumor and a drop of magic.” As if that made it all good and well, Perseus nodded to himself, smiled his perfect smile, and walked toward the mountain.

Otrera was not so convinced. The Athens Sparta war was a grand tale of jealousy and hatred. It wasn’t a good war, it was a slaughter. Another one to Andromeda’s name. The more she learned of the sorceress, the more her gut sank.

Soon, the three of them were walking past rivers of lava. She’d never seen lava, only heard it described. The descriptions did not do it justice. Like flowing, thick honey, but glowing red like the eyes of a god. Against the black of the earth, it looked like the mountain was bleeding. And it was hot! So hot, she couldn’t even approach it. The heat came off it in waves, blinded her, and forced her to raise her shield to keep it from hitting her face. Even Perseus did the same.

But there was a cave. Against a harsh slope of the black mountain, a mouth of rock opened up and welcomed them into more darkness. And thank the gods it did. Whatever strange rock the cave was made of, it blocked the heat of the lava enough that its depths welcomed them with warm air, instead of scorching heat.

Perseus lit a torch, and carried on. The cave was tall, wide, its insides polished and its depths carved into huge rooms. This used to be someone’s home, someone very tall.

“… a giant’s home?” she said.

“Yes. That Chimera fellow is in for quite the surprise.”

They stopped in what much have been some sort of war room. The walls were decorated with carvings of creatures, of places, of land and sea and gods and teeth. But it was the skeletons that drew her attention. The skeletons of giants, bones thick, bodies tall, each of them standing against the walls, defiant against the ages and weight alike. How did they not crumble, or at least collapse?

Perseus grinned at the colossal dead, and then the same to her. “You are in for a surprise as well, dear Amazon.”