

## A Grapevine Grows

Two men - in fact, one man, one god. They say their souls were so closely intertwined they mimicked the tendrils of a grapevine in its youth, seeking each other with a desperation reserved only for starving men at a banquet. Their love bloomed with rich, luxurious bursts of pleasure and ecstasy, ripening with every stolen glance and tender touch, so much so, they say that nights spent in each others embrace sent whispers dancing through the trees and haunting the very hills they wandered. Ampelos belonged to Dionysus, and Dionysus belonged to him. An exchange of possession sung by the divine chorus, daring to challenge the very foundations of the cosmos.

Perhaps it was a crime for a deity and a mortal to entwine their fates so intimately, challenging the ode crafted by the hands of Fate themselves. Or, perhaps it was some sadistic joke. So as the two lovers danced their intricate waltz of hands-skin-lips, one-two-three, they were blissfully unaware to the overture of the divine orchestra playing in dissonance. Just two bodies fermenting in each others embrace.

The sun golden as ambrosia dipped beneath the horizon, casting his final glow upon the sprawling vineyards. Their love, like a fine wine, reached its inebriating peak founded in ecstasy. It was a pause in time. The universe itself seemed to linger, eager for a taste of the same vinous intoxication. But not even the sweetest nectar can forego the bitterness of Fate. Jealousy. It infects all, clouding every sense of reason or composure. It's a disease that plagues Olympus like the kingdom of Thebes, latching on to the hubristic vessels of divinity who revel in their supposed immunity. The moon, a silent witness to the tragedies and trivialities of gods and mortals alike, emerged; opposing her brothers throne in the sky. She draped the hillsides with the silver and indigo hues of her radiance, awaiting the silence that typically accompanied her arrival. She, in all her divine beauty, was instead greeted with a chorus of noise. The hills were alive with the dances of the Nymphs and Naiads. Each one different from the next but equal in their immortal beauty; their melodies staining the air like blood on snow.

Selene bathed in the radiance of divine beauty, observed the unfolding tragedy. Her heart, usually tranquil in the celestial dance, succumbed to the poison of jealousy. She watched Ampelos and Dionysus, their love an affront to the order of the gods. In that moment, Selene became a silent orchestrator of doom, her envy staining the very essence of her moonlit glow.

The night prevailed, but as the two lovers continued their waltz of intimacy, so did the threads of fate tighten. Ampelos, oblivious to the stained threads being woven into their tapestry, boasted of his love and pleasure. "Dio, I wonder if any other mortal shall ever taste divinity so closely as I have. If any shall feel the rich flow of your pleasure running through their veins. You feed and satiate my starvation, and urge my addiction to your intoxicating touch: you are the blood that runs through my very being. I am all but immortal!" vibrant words to ears gasping to hear them but, to the infected Selene, these only spurred her wretched composition to darken, to pull on all the creatures that drank in her light. To call on me.

Settled at last, the entities of the forest quiet their raucous tune to watch the enchanted two lay down to rest. The devoted god had taken the form of a bull, spurred by innocent whimsy, anything to appease his sweet lover, and was blanketed in the very same embrace. But even innocence can be dirtied.

“Take him.” she ordered me. It was my obligation, I am as Hermes is for the gods.

I, the messenger of doom, strike the bull, the god, weaving their tragic tapestry. My razor-like teeth plunging into its thick earthy hide and watch as madness corrupts its senses, thrashing wildly; thoughts untamed as the poison pollutes. The divine brain temporarily overcome by instinct. It’s rather beautiful, the corruption; there’s an art to the mad shift from tamed to wild: a fury unearthed from the very core of your instincts, the acceptance of what is intrinsically natural. It’s ecstasy. It’s irony.

In realisation of my bite, the god awoke to see the result of his discourse: his arduous lover leaking into the willing soil they laid on only moments before. Those hills, once alive with the dances of immortal beings, fell silent. Selene, in the cold light of her envy, witnessed the aftermath of her twisted machinations. Then noise erupted from the usually rigid god: raw pain ripping from the very depth of his soul. His anguish flooded from his eyes fertilising the crimson soil oozing around his crumpled form and, in a moment of masochistic metamorphosis, he called upon his divine essence. A single grapevine breached the surface of the earth, birthed from the wandering soul of his lost lover.

The suffering and dying god they say, I never understood that, not until I had to bear the fate so cruelly weaved into their corrupted tapestry. Not until I had to watch, painstakingly, as the first grapevine grows.

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