

Goddess of Vengeance

I kneel beside the flowers flooding my garden, the skirts of my peplos flow behind me, a purple river in a sea of green. The magic hums under my skin, begging to be released as I brush my hand across the wolfsbane blossoming in front of me. A smile escapes my lips as I gently pick a lilac flower and crush it in my palm. Harmless to a Goddess, but one drop into a man's wine would have him writhing on the floor gasping for air, before collapsing, dead within a few hours. Pulling the basket in front of me, I collect as many as I can carry, heaving it onto my arm. My voice lifts high into the night air as I sing softly, my only audience, the flowers and creatures that watch my every step. As I sing of vengeful brides and unfaithful lovers, the moon overhead glitters, granting me a beam of light, a halo for her Goddess of the night. The spotlight follows me as I weave in and out of my garden, allowing me a stage to enjoy my solitude.

"And here I thought you were a powerful Goddess, when you are only a witch who sings to her plants" a male voice spoke from behind me. My song ends abruptly, the words drifting off into the now fractured night as I feel my power begin to course through my veins, ready to avenge my broken peace. My face stilled as I saw Hermes, the magic remaining close. He grinned widely at me, his winged cap sitting jauntily on his head as he leaned forward on his staff.

"Hello Hecate," he purred. His youthful face held a sense of childlike wonder yet his eyes followed my every move, just as a lion assesses his prey before the pounce. I turned away, avoiding his gaze as I retrieved my fallen basket. Walking ahead, I ignored the flutter of his shoes as he flew to land in front of my path. My power hummed stronger than ever, sensing the danger that Hermes brings,

"Whatever you are here for, I want no part of it." My voice was defiant, unfaltering, still Hermes laughed, a loud chuckle that could shake the earth.

"Darling, why do you assume I want something? Can I not simply visit my favourite witch?" He reached forward to grab my hand but I evaded his grasp, walking further into the forest. I could hear my magic screaming to be free of its bonds. A yew tree stood in front of me and I stopped, gently picking the red berries that hung as if placed there by an admirer, trying to ignore the pounding of my heart. Hermes sighed behind me, "How is this the life you chose?"

My brows furrow as I answer him, "I chose this life because it suits me, just as you chose yours." He scoffs, picking at a leaf above his head before letting it fall carelessly to the floor.

"I am an Olympian, my life was picked out for me long before my birth. But you," He pointed his staff in my direction. "You are a Goddess - men fear you, yet you choose plants over people." He laughs.

I pause, picking the berries and turning to him, "My life may not be the exciting one you were expecting, but it is my life and I shall do as I please." Moving past him, he grabbed my arm and leant close so I could feel his breath on my face. It smelt as sweet as ambrosia. Refusing to use my magic, I try to pull away, but he holds firm,

"I will never understand you, Hecate," His smile turns wolfish, "which is why you are so intriguing." There is a predatory gleam in his eyes as he pulls me closer, he is his father's son after all. His eyes rove over me as my face pales.

“Come on Hecate, you should feel lucky that an Olympian wants you.” My eyes go cold, the iris pupils turning to obsidian, as I finally release my magic. Whispering a quiet incantation, Hermes is dragged into the air. His handprint stains my arm, a red tattoo against my pale skin. Tendrils of my magic reach up to the God, snatching his winged cap and staff. They clatter to the forest floor, he was powerless. My magic pins him high above me, unable to move, as my speech comes fast.

“Listen to my words, son of Zeus, you Olympians see yourself as the higher powers. Gods who will never have to watch the ichor flowing from their veins in their final moments. Gods who can do as they please, uncaring of anyone in their way. You may laugh upon Mount Olympus at the Goddess who prefers the company of animals and flowers over people, but hear me when I say that you have no idea what true people or indeed Gods are like.” Tears prick at the back of my eyes like daggers digging into a chest. “I watch everyday as women pray to Gods like you. Women harmed by men - mortal and God alike - in the worst ways imaginable, begging for help from those they so readily believe in. And do you know what I see?” Hermes struggles against the binds, which tighten with every word, “I see those women being punished by you Olympians. How can you justify punishing a woman who will do anything to reverse the pain she has been inflicted?” I circle below him, the outpour of my emotions darkening the sky as each tear falls. “I am not the first to be pursued, no, there have been so many before me.”

Hermes gasps for air as he speaks,

“But we are Gods, we bring life and hope to mortals! They should be grateful.”

I laugh mirthlessly,

“Grateful? What of Medusa, Hermes? Was she grateful?” An image of the gorgon appeared in my mind's eye, fuelling my anger. “No. She was raped, assaulted, scarred by Poseidon. And what happened to her?” I pause; whether for an answer or to catch my breath I do not know. “She was cursed, cursed to never be able to look into the loving eyes of her sisters again for fear of harming them. And that so-called hero Perseus killed her! She was a child! A child who would never grow up but would be used as a weapon. And she was not grateful, no, she wished she was dead after Poseidon assaulted her.” Above me Hermes continues to struggle, I stare into his eyes, looking for any warmth, any regrets. But all I see is the mind of a God, free of torment from the screams of so many. I sigh, emotions bottled up inside me for so many years finally being released. “My own mother, Asteria, she-”. My voice catches, memories from years earlier resurfacing. “She was pursued by your father. My own mother had to flee, leaving me, her only child. Zeus cornered her and she dived into the sea, the only safe haven from his lecherous gaze. I never saw her again, all those years, and I grew up with no mother.” I turn and point behind me, “And then I hear from a passing seabird that an island by the name of Delos rose from the embrace of the sea, in the exact place she fell.”

I hold Hermes' gaze, my eyes brimming with tears as my voice quietens the chatter of the forest. “You Olympians laugh at women, they are simply used as competition between you, pawns and prizes in a game of your own devisement where Gods are the only victors.” My smile turns vicious as I bring Hermes down to match eye level, my face close to his so I could see the fear in his eyes. “But you should be careful. Those women you harm pray to me for I answer their calls with poisons and potions. I am a powerful Goddess and I will gladly

bring the fires of hell down upon Olympus.” I hold my fingernail to Hermes’ cheek, tracing a thin line down his face, “Do you think you could survive me?” A trail of gold ichor flowed from the wound, “Everything bleeds, Hermes, even Gods.” The howl of wolves surrounds us, and I turn away, tasting his blood on my lips. His voice trembles across the silent night, “But you are only a single witch with nothing but flowers and plants, there is no way you could destroy us.” My laughter mirrors that of the messenger God’s earlier, “ You may see me as a witch, a sorceress, an enchantress who is so insignificant you should not worry. But you are wrong. I am no witch.” Hermes stared at me, his eyes wide,

“What are you then?”

I pause to greet my wolves, standing like sentries beside me, before answering him,

“I am death.”

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