

CALLIOPE: Changes were coming to Olympus, this much was clear from the end of the last episode. One such change is about to unfold, right before your very ears.

Welcome, dear listeners, to Forged Bonds.

We join our story in a familiar home with familiar faces, though not ones that are usually together.

ARES: Thanks for having me over Dionysus.

DIONYSUS: Of course! (teasing) Given that your best friend is stealing my best friend, I figured we could at least get to know each other a little better.

ARES: (laughing) I suppose that's true, yeah. I, for one, didn't realize you had so many cats. I feel like every time I look down there's a different cat at your feet.

DIONYSUS: They're not all *mine*, really. A lot of them are strays that come and go as they please. Cider and Bourbon are the two that I actually adopted, the rest... They seem to have adopted me. Honestly I don't even know how they get into the house half the time– I think Cider lets them in. They don't seem to use the catflap I added after more of them started appearing...

ARES: Truly a mystery for the ages. (pause) It's weird doing this without Aph. Don't get me wrong, it's not like we're attached at the hip or anything but–

DIONYSUS: We're firmly in friend of a friend territory. I get you, I do kind of wish Phae was here too. But now that we've addressed this out loud, we can move past the awkwardness of not acknowledging it.

ARES: (laughing) That's one way to do it. I'm glad I'm not the only one feeling a little bit of the awkwardness. I feel like I know a fair bit about you just from what Hermes has told me–

DIONYSUS: Hermes has told me a lot about you too! Gods, isn't he just the best?

ARES: Yeah. Yeah he is. He's my best friend– other than Aph, of course. But he's... He's wonderful, really. Nicest guy I've ever met.

DIONYSUS: (lightly scheming) Oh really? I didn't realize you two were that close. I mean, he talks about you from time to time but... Well, I suppose it was kind of surprising.

ARES: What was?

DIONYSUS: That the two of you would be friends.

ARES: Really? I mean, he and I have been friends since we were kids.

DIONYSUS: Yeah, I guess that's true but... I don't know. I guess I just didn't expect it. He's so... And you're so...

ARES: (slightly hurt) Was this all some weird trick so you could just... What, make fun of me? In private?

DIONYSUS: (emphatic) No! No, of course not, I— I'm sorry. I wanted to get to know you a bit better, genuinely. I guess I just... Let a little bit of information I had run ahead of me. Though I could glean a bit of insight from you... You're a good guy, Ares. And I know Hermes really values your friendship. (pause) I would too, you know.

ARES: (skeptical) You would?

DIONYSUS: Look, I know I went about this the wrong way I just... (sigh) Hermes is one of the only friends I have. I get a little wary of others, especially where my friends are involved. But I shouldn't have taken that out on you. I know you treat him well, he only ever speaks highly of you. I guess I just... Wanted to know if there was something more there. If there was something I needed to be worried about. But that doesn't mean that I wouldn't want to be your friend, Ares.

ARES: Something to be worried about? Did you worry I was courting him? Are you— No, you've loudly declared your aromanticism, I know you're not into him or anything... And it's not like Hermes is into *me*, we're friends!

DIONYSUS: (remarkably sincere) I guess I just worry sometimes. That people will get so caught up in their romantic lives that I'll just be... Left behind. People always put a caveat on things to say that they're 'just friends' as if friendship is somehow lesser. I haven't been friends with Hermes for as long as you have, what if he *was* into you or if you were into him and you two decided to get together? Would I lose him? Would he disappear from my life as quickly as he entered because someone means *more* to him than I ever could?

ARES: Look, Di. If there's one thing I know about Hermes, it's that he loves with his whole heart. And that's with *everything*. Friends, dogs, my pet bear Dipper— he loves with everything he has. And that wouldn't change if he entered a romantic relationship. I... I've had the same worry before. That one day he'd find someone and that... Well. That I would lose him. But trust

me when I say that unless you did something truly terrible, you're not going to lose him as a friend. I don't think he would have the heart to do that.

DIONYSUS: You worry about losing him too?

ARES: Oh, all the time! I mean, he's a catch, anyone would be lucky to have him. He's kind and considerate and funny and a delight to talk to. He's what anyone would want in a partner! Whoever ends up with him will be a very lucky person.

DIONYSUS: (internally screaming) You're absolutely right. But if what you said is true, then he wouldn't leave you behind, right?

ARES: Nah, he wouldn't. And I know he wouldn't, I just... Have to remind myself of that sometimes. It's a lot easier now that his workload has calmed down and we're able to hang out more. He even asked me to teach him how to fight, can you believe that?

DIONYSUS: Like with weapons or...

ARES: We're going to start with boxing and see if he wants to continue on from there.

DIONYSUS: Didn't he... Invent wrestling?

ARES: Wrestling and boxing are very different forms of fighting. It's a bit harder to wrestle for self-defense— not that I'm certain why he's insisting on learning stuff *for* self-defense. I think— Well, I *know* we're both just using it as an excuse to hang out more.

DIONYSUS: (back to scheming) You don't say... Well, I think that's wonderful. And it should definitely quiet those doubts of yours, don't you think?

ARES: Yeah... In the meantime, though, we have to work on those doubts of *yours*.

DIONYSUS: (slightly flustered) Oh, I— I mean—

ARES: Look, I'm not just gonna let my *friend* worry that people are going to abandon him. Especially when no one would ever do that.

DIONYSUS: Thank you, Ares.

ARES: Of course. What else are friends for?

CALLIOPE: It's funny that they spent so long talking about Hermes, as he is actually who we shall be following now. Our dear messenger god has just arrived at the home of Hephaestus, eager to complete his mission at hand.

HEPHAESTUS: Oh, hey, Hermes. What're you doing here? Not that I'm not happy to see you or anything like that but I just... Wasn't expecting company.

HERMES: I'm here on official business, actually! You've been requested in the Underworld, right away. No time to waste.

HEPHAESTUS: You truly are my uncle's favorite carrier pigeon, aren't you?

HERMES: (spluttering) What—

HEPHAESTUS: I'm joking, Hermes. Come on, let's get going on whatever cryptic quest this is. It must be important if my uncle sent you instead of an easy to ignore crow.

HERMES: You've clearly never tried to ignore those crows, then. I thought it was just a bird blocking my path and tried to go around it and you'd swear I insulted the crow's mother the way it started pecking at me.

HEPHAESTUS: (teasing) They can sense your fear.

HERMES: I'm not afraid of birds! (pause) At least, not *all* birds.

HEPHAESTUS: Don't worry, feather feet, your secret is safe with me. Wait, is this the entrance already? Has there always been one this close by? I thought the nearest one was in the city.

HERMES: There are entrances to the Underworld all over the place, actually. Gotta have them easily accessible in case any souls need collecting. You should see the map of entrances in the mortal realm, it feels like you can't go five feet without finding another entrance.

HEPHAESTUS: That's... That's actually kind of cool, if you think about it.

HERMES: You think it's cool that death is just... Constantly lurking by mortals?

HEPHAESTUS: Death is cool when you can't die!

HERMES: You are truly your uncle's niece.

PERSEPHONE: Hephaestus! There you are, it's so good to see you darling. Thank you for bringing her down, Hermes. We would've gone ourselves but...

HERMES: Don't worry, Sephie, I was told about the surprise. I think they'll both be excited.

HEPHAESTUS: And who is the 'they' in this situation? Is part of that me?

PERSEPHONE: Now, spoilers wouldn't be very fun, would they, darling? Come with me. Your surprise awaits. Would you care to stay, Hermes? I'm sure whatever nonsense Zeus has tasked you with can wait.

HERMES: I'd love to stay for a bit, Sephie. Thank you.

PERSEPHONE: Wonderful. Just through here, both of you. Hades should be finished setting everything up by now. (calling out) Hades?

HADES: We're ready!

HEPHAESTUS: This is truly the most suspicious thing you have ever had me do.

HERMES: You'll love it.

HADES: Hephaestus! And how is my favorite niece? It's been too long since I've seen you, look how much you've grown.

HEPHAESTUS: It's good to see you too, Hades. Even if we both know that I haven't grown in over a century at this point.

HADES: Pedantics, dear, pedantics. Take a seat, please! I just need to go grab one last thing.

PERSEPHONE: You didn't—

HADES: Silencing magic, dearest. I would never ruin the surprise like this.

HEPHAESTUS: You all have me a bit worried with all this talk of surprises. The last time something surprised me, I shoved Zeus into a fountain.

PERSEPHONE: I can assure you that won't be necessary this time. In fact—

HERA: So, what was all the secrecy— Phae!

HEPHAESTUS: Mom? What are you—

HERA: I live here now. It's... It's a story to be certain but Hades has welcomed me into his home.

HEPHAESTUS: Does this mean... Am I actually able to come visit you now?

HADES: Whenever you want. You know you are always welcome down here, Hephaestus. Even more so now that Hera is here.

HEPHAESTUS: Gods, mom, I— (they hug) I can't believe you're finally out of there! Oh, I'm so happy for you— it's so good to *see* you and to be able to talk away from a crowd.

(phone buzzing)

HERMES: Ah. I should actually take this. I hope you enjoyed the surprise, Phae. See you around.

CALLIOPE: As touching as Hephaestus and Hera's reunion away from prying eyes might be, we will be taking your prying ears elsewhere to follow Hermes.

ZEUS: You're late.

HERMES: I have other things to do, you know. I'm not your personal messenger.

ZEUS: And yet you came anyway. How is my wife doing, then?

HERMES: How did you—

ZEUS: I know what my brother's domain feels like. It radiates off of you and there's no way in hell you didn't see her while you were down there. I'll tell you now, though: don't ask questions to things you don't need an answer for.

HERMES: Fine then. What do you want? Your cryptic text wasn't particularly helpful, you know.

ZEUS: I have a delivery to request. And I'm afraid it's quite urgent.

HERMES: If this is too Demeter—

ZEUS: Relax, Hermes. I'm not making you run another trinket of romance for me. After how you reacted last time, I've decided to find a better way to handle *those* kinds of deliveries. No. Quite simply, I need you to deliver something to Circe. Unfortunately my other methods aren't good for that kind of range; Aeaea is rather far out, you understand.

HERMES: What could you *possibly* need Circe for?

ZEUS: You may recall what I said about questions and not needing the answers to them. If you could also head back into the Underworld and deliver a letter for Hecate, it would be greatly appreciated. And don't look so dour, Hermes, I will be compensating you fairly as I always do.

HERMES: You can compensate me by going through official channels for requesting deliveries next time.

ZEUS: Next time? So you'll do these deliveries, then?

HERMES: I have a feeling I don't have much of a choice in the matter.

ZEUS: You would be correct. However, I *can* agree to those terms and will refrain from contacting you for deliveries outside of official means. Now, off you go. And say hello to Ares for me the next time you see him, won't you?

HERMES: I don't know what you're up to, but I swear to all of Olympus if it harms my friends in anyway—

ZEUS: You'll kill me. Yes, yes, I know. Honestly, you would think that you all would learn to be a little more *original* in your threats— it's hardly as though my brother would allow me to die. He doesn't want to have to deal with me.

HERMES: How's this for originality then: You harm my friends, I tell everyone where your wife is. How does that sound?

ZEUS: (icily) You've made your point.

HERMES: Have I? Because I fear that you think I'm not being serious.

ZEUS: I know you're being serious. Only a man who hasn't thought of all the consequences could be as serious as you're being right now. I can assure you that no harm will come to your

friends over this, just as I can assure you there are consequences for *everyone* if the news about Hera gets out. Do with that what you will.

HERMES: Do you ever think about being a better person?

ZEUS: Do you ever think about being worse?

CALLIOPE: And that, my dear listeners, is where we shall leave things for today. There is much that is growing beneath the surface, change ready to erupt and capture our dear gods whole. But before we can get there, we have to sow the seeds. I hope you will join us as we tend to these seeds to see what grows from them. Until next time, and as always, thank you for listening.