

CALLIOPE: Olympus is full of fascinating gods— and many that are *not* fascinating, but they are at least easy to ignore. The most fascinating, at least at this particular moment in our story, is our dearest Hera, hard at work on the planning for Aphrodite’s wedding.

Welcome, dear listeners, to Forged Bonds.

HERA: Can’t seat Leto too close to Zeus... Or Metis... Or Themis... Or Mnemosyne... Or half of the nymphs... Gods, why does this have to be so exhausting?

(knocking)

Come in.

APHRODITE: Hi, Hera. Everything going okay?

HERA: Seating arrangements are a little difficult when your husband has fucked half the guest list. I suppose you won’t have to deal with that particular issue, though. Ares... He’s a good man. Much better than my husband has ever been.

APHRODITE: You *can* leave him, you know.

HERA: (snort) Please. The goddess of marriage abandoning hers? If you think the rumors and scandals are slanderous now, imagine if I actually *left* the bastard. No, as much as it pains me to admit, it’s easier for me to stay. I can’t... I can’t deal with that level of attention and ridicule— though, I suppose you know what I’m talking about. Goddess of love, never married; those tabloid nymphs can be *vicious*, especially about a beautiful lady in a position of power such as yourself. I stay with Zeus for the same reason you’re marrying Ares: so everyone else will shut their mouths.

APHRODITE: ...I suppose that’s fair. Well, not *fair*, but you know what I mean. The rest of Olympus loves to dictate what we can and can’t do; who we can and can’t be. I don’t think I’ll ever be able to stand it.

HERA: Sometimes I think about following in my daughter’s footsteps and just leaving. Moving to the edge of Olympus, rarely contacting anyone, starting a life away from this place and the prison it’s become for me. Would it be easier if I had left when Hephaestus did? Or would the scandal just have followed both of us.

APHRODITE: Is it truly better to be forgotten than slandered?

HERA: (sighing) I don't even know anymore.

APHRODITE: We could always just... not invite Zeus. It is my wedding after all, who says I have to invite him?

HERA: Gods, imagine his face if he found out he wasn't invited. He's insisting upon performing the ceremony, won't listen to a godsdamn thing I have to say about what you and Ares would want for that. If he wasn't performing the ceremony, I'm sure he'd insist upon giving you away.

APHRODITE: As if I'd ever allow him to do that. Does he truly not understand how little he means to me?

HERA: Knowing Zeus: Yes. Have you thought about that, though? Who will give you away— if you even *want* to be given away. It's a little dicey, this idea of someone giving you over to your husband, but I know it can be important to people.

APHRODITE: I think I'll likely just walk myself down the aisle honestly. The only person I could ever picture doing that for me was Ares and, well... It's not really acceptable for a future husband to walk his future wife down the aisle, is it?

HERA: Did you and Ares ever...

APHRODITE: No. He... I love Ares, I do. But not like that. He's my oldest friend, the person who means the most to me, just not romantically. There's never been that... spark between us, at least not to me. He handled it well when I told him, though; we wouldn't be friends still if he hadn't. Ares cares for me, I know he does. And that's the only reason I think this could— this *will* work. Because at the end of the day, we're friends and we love each other even if it isn't romantically. And eventually the excitement around it will die down and people will stop caring and maybe Ares will meet someone else and we'll 'go our separate ways' in terms of our marriage.

HERA: And if you meet someone?

APHRODITE: No one will ever covet me as much as they covet the *idea* of me. The goddess of love, of beauty, of all of these things they think I need to be for them. Things I will never be for them. Ares at least knew the me beneath the image the public has placed upon me— he's always known and seen me for me and I still don't love him like that. I just don't think it's in the cards for me, not how I want it to be.

HERA: I didn't want to pass too much judgement on your decision to follow my husband's request as I figured you'd have a reason. I could tell you that you're wrong, that there will be someone who makes you feel the way you want to feel, that if this is truly something you *want* there will be someone for you. But, if I had to guess, this is something you've been told before. If Ares is as good a friend as you say he is, this is something you have heard over and over again and never believed, so I hardly think my thoughts on the subject will change your mind. What I *will* say is that I understand why you've decided to go along with Zeus's plan. And while I think you're incorrect and that no plan of his should ever be taken seriously, I support your decision. If this is what you need to do, then this is what you need to do and as long as Ares also supports you in this, then I do too.

APHRODITE: Thank you, Hera. Really, truly, thank you. Air does support this, I had a little freak out about it yesterday but... Gods, he truly is my best friend. In better circumstances I might even like being married to him.

(pause)

Hera?

HERA: Yes, Aph?

APHRODITE: Did... Did you ever *like* being married to Zeus?

HERA: He was... sweet, once upon a time. There was a time where he only had eyes for me and we loved each other fiercely and deeply. I'll never know what changed between us; it's possible it was all in my head anyway. It's been so long since I believed he loved *me* more than what I represent for him; a queen to rule by his side, a family to save face in Olympus. He was never my best friend, that honor always belonged to Hades; sometimes I like to think of what my life might've been like if I had married him instead. (pause) But those are foolish thoughts for an even more foolish queen.

APHRODITE: I don't think it's foolish.

HERA: I know it is, my dear. We cannot change the past, and even if we did, I don't know that it would've been for the better.

APHRODITE: ...What about Hephaestus?

HERA: I never cheated on my husband if that's what you're asking. I wanted a family, more than I had ever wanted anything in this world. Somewhere between wanting and wishing,

Hephaestus was born. She just... Appeared in me; a surprise pregnancy in so many ways. I wish I could do more for her, could leave all of this behind and love her the way she deserves.

APHRODITE: But then the scandal would follow.

HERA: And we're back where we started. Sometimes it feels like it will never end, Aphrodite. Sometimes it feels like it will never end.

CALLIOPE: As unfortunate as this is for everyone involved, Zeus *was* attempting to help prepare for the wedding. Also unfortunate for you, my dear listener, is the fact that he is one of the most interesting gods at this point in our story. I am, at heart, a storyteller, which means we will have to follow Zeus as he goes to talk to Ares about a few wedding details.

ZEUS: Ah, Ares! Good morning, good morning.

ARES: Oh gods why are you here.

ZEUS: We have a wedding to plan, Ares, you know this. Come on, let me in so we can discuss color schemes and other things Hera has deemed 'impossible for me to fuck up'.

ARES: Don't say that like it's a point of pride, Zeus. It's not a point of pride. Why am I even bothering to tell you this, you'll do what you want. Fine, yes, come in.

ZEUS: This is the kind of thing you'll have to get used to, you know. Wives rarely trust that their husbands will be able to do anything— they're often nagging and nitpicking. 'Don't forget the wine for the party, Zeus.' 'Wear a shirt, Zeus.' 'Stop fucking the nymphs, Zeus.' On and on and on. You grow numb to it after a while but gods does it take a bit to get there.

ARES: Do you always say the quiet part loud or is this your attempt at bonding? I genuinely can't tell if you're this stupid—

ZEUS: Rude.

ARES: Or if you think I'll relate to this somehow. Because I can promise you this, Zeus, I will never be the kind of husband you are. Never.

HERMES: (knocking) Air? I've got a delivery for you.

ARES: Oh! Hermes, it's good to see you. Here, let me just— Thanks, Hermes.

HERMES: No problem. It's part of the job and all that. I... Congrats on your engagement, by the way. I don't think I said that the last time I was here.

ARES: Oh, yeah. Uh... Thank you. It's—

ZEUS: Going to be the highlight of his life, I'm sure.

HERMES: Right, of course. They always say that about weddings, don't they? I should get going—

ARES: Maybe you can stop by again? After work? I feel like it's been so long since we've hung out, Herm, and—

HERMES: I'd love to, Ares. I've got a few more deliveries to make and then I told Asclepius I'd help him and Apollo at the clinic— what about at the end of the week? Friday, maybe?

ARES: Sounds great! I'll see you then.

(door)

ZEUS: (snorting) Never going to be the kind of husband I am, huh.

ARES: It's not like that.

ZEUS: That's what they always say, but we all know it's not true. You can love your wife— gods knows I loved Hera once upon a time— and still want *more* from life. You can love your wife and still love someone else more, want someone else more, want *something* else more. That's the thing about me, Ares: at least I'm honest about who I am. I've cheated on my wife— I'll probably cheat on her again. But at least I have the balls to say that I've done this and will do this instead of pretending I have a moral high ground when lusting over another god.

ARES: I think it's best if you leave.

ZEUS: Struck a nerve, did I? Well, if that's the case—

(sound of Zeus getting punched)

ARES: Get out of my house.

ZEUS: ...I'll let this slide, just this once. Try anything like this again and—

ARES: And what? You'll tell all of Olympus that the forced wedding you're putting together to get the press off of *your scandals* that me and Aph may not be as in love as your pretty little press release says? Don't forget that we're doing you a favor, *your majesty*. Aph is putting a lot on the line for you and can make this blow up in your face just as quickly as you can try to make it blow up in mine.

Me and Hermes are just friends, and that's the gods honest truth. Unlike you, I'm able to separate aesthetic attraction from romantic feelings and can be friends with people without wanting to fuck them. Now *leave*.

(dialing sound)

Hey, Dite. Yeah, he was here. May have punched him, just a bit. Not sure if he'll head home or to the clinic so I thought I'd give you and Hera a warning. ...No, no, it was nothing important. Don't worry about it. Yeah, I'll see you tomorrow.

(click)

CALLIOPE: There is one more thing that requires your attention at this moment of our story, dear listeners. Come, this way, to see the King of the Underworld.

HADES: He's making them do *what*?

HERMES: I didn't hear the full extent of things, was trying not to be too obvious in my hovering, but yes. It sounds like the marriage between Ares and Aphrodite may have been arranged for... less than savory means.

PERSEPHONE: If I may ask, Hermes: why bring it to us?

HERMES: Bringing it to the papers sounds like it will make it worse for Ares and Aphrodite. Can't bring it to Hera since she already knows and can't really do much. But the two of you... At the very least you can talk to Aphrodite. She's more likely to listen to you than to me.

HADES: Does anyone else know of the true nature of this wedding?

HERMES: ...I think Hephaestus does. She had a bunch of materials in for wedding rings and I doubt Hera would employ her for this without telling her the truth.

HADES: Which means Dionysus likely knows, or at least suspects. Thank you, Hermes. This is very helpful information.

PERSEPHONE: We'll arrange to speak with Aphrodite. I can't say for certain that we can stop this from happening, but we can at least make sure that it's more consensual than it seems so far.

CALLIOPE: That conversation will have to wait for another day, I'm afraid. More gods entering the fold mean more annoying logistics to our story and, well, it hardly serves us to overload you with information. I hope to see you again soon, dear listeners. Until next time, and as always, thank you for listening.