

Eternal Hyacinth

Years and years ago when I was still a small and naïve goddess, I remember a hill. A hill that had the smoothest grass ever, like the fleece of a newborn lamb. I loved to lace my fingers through each blade, each embrace made me smile. I also remember the ancient tree atop the hill. The elder laurel tree draped shade around the summit of the hill. Underneath the ashy gray boughs lay my best friends, the nymphs. Nature spirits with green tinted skin and luscious dresses made out of elegant flower petals and woven reeds. And in the center of them sat my mother, Demeter. The Goddess of Harvest wore a woven crown of flowers made by some of the nymphs and placed it in her hair, golden as waves of wheat. I remember this day fondly, I challenged my dryad friend, Krinos, to a foot race from the bottom of the hill to the very top, knowing very well I was no match for those flee from the gods every other week.

“Alright Persephone, I accept your challenge. I just hope you can tolerate losing for the tenth time in row.” The nature spirit answered, stretching her legs in preparation, pulling off a cheeky grin in my direction, an expression I shot right back at her.

“On your marks... Get set set... Go!” I began bolt up the hill, but it was far too late. Krinos became a rush of green, I was being left behind. I didn’t mind it however because when I got up the tree, panting all the way, Krinos gave me a friendly pat on the back and my mother offered me her smile. I closed my eyes and I began to laugh. This laughter is by far the most important thing I felt about this memory; just the joy of being alive and on the surface was Something I did every day, however I took this for granted. The jovial laughs soon turned into echoes In my mind fading in the distance.

“Persephone? Persephone... Persephone!” A loud and demanding voice shook me out of my state. I blinked my eyes and looked around. I sadly realized that the memory I was reliving mentally was many moons ago and that I was in the pit of despair known as the underworld, ruled by my despicable husband, Hades.

“What is wrong my dear? You seem rather out of it lately.” His raspy reply only increased my fear and inner contempt for the Underworld God, but I forced a smile and had to think of something quickly.

“I was just thinking of my garden. Trees and flowers made of metals and precious stones. They are an elegant substitute since real plants fail to thrive here beneath the surface.”

Hades nodded in agreement. “Yes, well I apologize again that the garden is not like your former home above, but it is the best I can do here, my dear.” Those last words crept down into my soul as the god quietly said while on his ebony throne.

I leaned on the arm of my throne, made up of luscious jewels, carved into petals of a divine garden, crawling up the back. The view from my area wasn’t much better. To the right lay the

paradise known as the Elysium Fields, the place where heroes and the morally good get to live out eternity. If I squinted, I could see the faint outlines of people running about and laughing, not a care in the world. I wish I could feel that way sometimes. To my left, the Fields of Punishment. A place so horrendously built, only the worst of the worst are allowed eternal torment. I dare not describe these punishments, for the wails of the tormented ring through my mind. Finally, in the center of my view, the Aspdosel Fields. Wandering souls, who were neither good nor evil, walked about, trying to remember who they were before. A faint tune caught my ears. I quickly turned to my husband, who was stuck gazing at something in the Asphodel Meadows.

"My lord? What is that sound?" I asked rather confused about the melody echoing throughout the hallowed halls of the underground.

"I do not know, this sound. It's charming and thoughtful. I feel... happy for once." Hades spoke with an odd sort of awe.

I looked around the entire Underworld to see if others were experiencing the same disposition as us and I was truly amazed at what I saw. Spirits of Asphodel began to glow with color, the torturers and prisoners of the Fields of Punishment stopped to listen, and even the Elysium Field denizens were star struck at this newfound noise.

A youth appeared in simple garb, his only tool was a mere lyre.

My husband was quick to snap back into reality and began to speak with a booming voice.

"Who dares to serenade my domain? A mortal no less. You may rise, so that you can state your business of why a being of the living as decided to come down to the place fit only for the dead."

The youth rose to his feet, lyre clutched with his hands, yet he did not tremble in the presence of two deities.

"My name is Orpheus. Son of Oeagrus and Calliope." He said with his tender and lively voice.

Calliope... I thought for a moment. One of the nine muses, and Zeus's daughter by Mnesynome which made him my nephew. I stared at him, looking up and down and I pondered about what his intentions were.

"I come here to ask you for another chance for life, for love even. You see, my wife, Eurydice was cruelly taken from by Thanatos. Through my sorrow I saw a chance to prevail against the odds. With my voice and my lyre, I melted the hearts of those in your kingdom to get to you, my lord. And for you I shall play a soothing aria. An aria of nature."

Before My husband or myself could react, Orpheus strummed his lyre and began to sing loudly about the blue sky, Helios's warm rays, and about the abundance of life, everlasting on the

surface of the earth. His warbles brought tears to my eyes as memories upon memories flooded back into my mind. The taste of fruit, racing and laughing with my friends, my wonderful mother. My drive to get to the surface broke any mental barriers suggesting that I stay down here in this pit. No, I shall go to the surface and reclaim my place as the Goddess of Springtime.

I looked to my husband as the bard continued his cherished song, seeing it had affected him less than I, but enough for him to consider the possibility of returning Eurydice's soul to Orpheus. As his song drew to a close, I wiped the tear away and turned to my husband. And spoke.

"Oh my Lord Hades. We must make an exception here. Surely you felt something, you must have. Tell me that you feel the same way that I do." I expressed, presenting my plea. Hades scratched his beard for a moment before nodding his head.

"Very well, your song has moved me to consider this, on one condition. You must not look back at her or she shall be stuck in the underworld forever."

Hades snapped his fingers and a pink mist began to form before transforming into a young girl holding a ball of blue light. The young girl wore a pure white chiton and had rose gold hair, flowing in locks that draped over her shoulders. On her back rested a pair of dove-like white wings that were folded back.

"My daughter Macaria will escort your wife's soul to Charon's ferry where you will travel across the River Styx and back into the mortal world." Hades said firmly.

"My lord, if I may do so, Orpheus is my nephew and it would only be right if I accompanied him to the banks of Styx." I announced.

Hades thought for a moment before whispering something to Macaria who seemed to nod, agreeing with what the Underworld God seemed to say.

The Death Goddess walked over and presented the orb to me. It tingled in my hands, so lively and full of warmth.

"Here mother, I wish you good luck." Macaria said softly before going back to stand at Hades's side.

I stepped down to where Orpheus was and gave him a smile which he gladly reciprocated and we began our walk, him in front of me as to not see the soul in my hands. After some time had passed and songs were sung, we arrived at the entrance to the Halls of Judgement and in front of us was the red-black river of the Styx, the River of Hate. In the corner of my eyes I could see

the heads Cerberus snoozing, all except his snake of a tail, keeping a constant lookout for souls attempting to escape.

"Well Aunt Persephone, I guess this is good-bye for now. Thank you for convincing Hades to release my wife's soul. I will build a shrine in honor of both of you." Orpheus said, a gracious smile across his face, yet I had other goals.

"Actually Orpheus, this is only part of the deal. I'm coming with you." I spoke softly.

"But my lady, he'll send everyone after us if we do that. You can't leave."

"I've been here longer than you can realize. I'm a Springtime Goddess trapped within a place where Spring doesn't even exist. I know I can get my mother and Zeus to help me of this awful marriage, so just trust me on this." I pleaded to Orpheus who gave a simple nod.

"Then we will go down or rise together. Charon, we are ready."

The ferryman nodded and began to paddle down the River Styx. Things were going well until the snake headed tail of Cerberus saw them, making the whole dog bark in alarm. These barks alerted Hades who noticed that the goddess had not returned. Hades became livid as his eyes were transformed into pitch black fire.

"How dare she defy me! Her husband! And now she's trying to escape! Sound the alarm and send our forces to stop them at once!" Hades screamed as the Erinyes, bat winged hags equipped with flaming whips flew towards the river. Macaria heard her father's screams and thought for a moment before vanishing in a pink light.

"I can hear the barks of Cerberus, they know that I have escaped. They'll be sending people here to recapture me." I said, my voice quaking in fear. I was beginning to lose faith in myself until Orpheus put a hand on my shoulder.

"Stay strong, my queen. We will get you to the surface. Then Zeus can fix this mess."

I began to smile until the boat violently lurched to side. I fell to the ground, clutching Eurydice's soul in my arms. I groaned and placed my hand upon my head until I saw the color draining from Orpheus's face. In front of us was a cyclone of war, thick as tar and hot as fire. Atop the spire stood half the body of a woman who was clad in a dark gray robe, her body hidden, but glowing red eyes appeared underneath her hood.

"Styx. Let us pass. As your queen, I command you." I yelled, my confidence coming back to me.

"Are you truly our queen? One who is running away from the very kingdom that you have run for thousands of years? Do I address you as your majesty or traitor?" The River Goddess hissed

before raising her hand in the air causing several spouts of water to appear from both sides of the boat. I became paralyzed with fear. She was feeding off my hate of the underworld to grow stronger. I was completely useless. My closed on instinct and braced for impact until a soothing song rang out throughout the riverway, resonating with the top of the cavern. My eyes opened up and there I saw Orpheus lulling Styx to sleep. The goddess wailed and began to clutch her head, thrashing about.

"No! How dare you defy me, mortal. Stop this at once!" But her attempt at ambush failed as her form began to slowly melt into the river until the only thing seen were the bubbles at the spot where she rose up. Orpheus smiled and offered me hand which I thankfully took, his gaze still looking away from Eurydice.

"I had to do that once to stop the sirens. Now I know it works on deities." He said with a light chuckle as Charon began to row to the opposite side of the river. "That should keep her down in a slumber long enough for use to pass."

"I don't know what to say other than thank you, I thought we were goners. Lady Styx is a very powerful goddess."

"Well that's the past. Look! There's the bank. Let us run before his other minions catch up." I nodded and thanked Charon for his service and began to bolt with Orpheus to the staircase to the surface realm. We began to jump, flight after flight until Orpheus collapsed against the wall.

"Orpheus! Come on! Don't give up, we're almost there." I pleaded to get him going. We wheezed loudly.

"How do you immortals do it? You can run for ages, but here I am out of breath." He joked before taking a sharp inhale.

"This is no time for jokes, hurry!" In my haste I failed to listen to the bat wings that were slowly creeping up the stairs until Orpheus quickly picked up his lyre and yelled.

"Duck!" I don't know what compelled me to do it, but I managed to fall to the stairs. Orpheus had strummed his lyre to produce a piercing sound wave that managed to incapacitate an Erinye.

"Twice so soon? I guess I should be a good body---" I cut him off as I waved my hand, summoning a misty orb, full of nature's power and lobbing it another Erinye near Orpheus, causing him to jump up in a sweat.

"I guess I spoke too soon." This comment earned him a laugh from me and he laughed back. We never did the third one coming until she was right above, swooping in with her bladed talons and scorching hot whip. I quickly leapt above Orpheus to save him from the attack until a

heavenly light shot the demon down the stairs. Orpheus and I both blinked as we saw a figure walking down the flight of stairs, smiling at the fact her attack hit the mark.

“Macaria!” I exclaimed, rushing to hug my daughter who hugged me right back. “What are you doing here?”

“I overheard father’s plan against you so I came to stop those demonic creatures from attacking you both.” Orpheus rose and rubbed the back of his head.

“I thank you, my lady.” Was all Orpheus could say. “Now we may finally proceed to the surface.” Persephone nodded and walked up the stairs with the lyrist and turned to her daughter.

“Thank you, my daughter. I will never forget you.” I was elated, my skin tingled with excitement as I felt the light from the surface on my skin. We we’re almost there. Macaria cleared her throat and crossed her arms.

“Mother, are you truly leaving the Underworld? For good?” She asked solemnly.

“Yes daughter.” I replied a bit confused at the statement. Macaria sighed and opened her eyes.

“Then please forgive me for this.” Macaria opened up her palm and Eurydice’s soul glowed with a pink aura as the Death Goddess began to shift the soul towards Orpheus’s eyes. Knowing what was going to happen, I had two options, let Orpheus and Eurydice die and flee to the surface, or stop my daughter and let them live in eternal paradise.

“Mother, I hope you know what I must do...” I thought before I tackled Macaria down the cobblestone steps, breaking her control over Eurydice’s soul.

“Persephone!” Orpheus cried out in sorrow as I fell down, deeper and deeper into my eternal hell. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I had come to realize that my sacrifice may not be in vain. Perhaps Orpheus could explain to Zeus what had happened.

“Tell me, my “wife”. Did you ever love me? After all the things I did to please you, was it enough to win your favor?” He asked, hoping that I would accept my throne in the Underworld once more, but I was finished.

“I never loved you, Hades. You kidnapped me and almost caused humanity to die due to your selfish actions, I hate you.”

Hades sighed and the fire in eyes died down. “That is all I needed to hear. Tie her up in the garden.” The Erinyes grabbed me off the floor and flew me over to my prized and fake garden. There I was trapped forever as my punishment. To make me suffer more, Hades asked Helios and Selene for a fraction of their glory. He placed their powers above me and by day I was

burned to my flesh and at night the moon froze my body to my very soul. Yet the Dawn Goddess Eos felt pity over me and the time between Selene's rest and Helios's arrival, she healed me of my wounds to provide a never ending cycle of torment, just because I was forced to marry someone I hated. All I can do now is pray that Orpheus and Eurydice talk to Demeter and Zeus so that I may be freed. If not, then I shall forever be the eternal flower, never dying and never living.

*Purple Hyacinths are flowers that symbolize regret or sorrow for a wrongdoing.