

Echoes of Olympus - Prologue

They did not name rivers after the men who drowned in them.

Unlike the mortal world, the Underworld had no use for such sentiment. Here, the rivers did not mourn those they consumed, nor did they carve names into stone to honor the lost. The Styx had swallowed warlords and beggars alike, dragging their bodies through waters thick with the weight of unkept oaths. The Lethe lapped hungrily at the edges of oblivion, stealing memories from the lips of poets before they could weave them into song.

The Acheron, a restless tide of sorrow, carried the wails of the newly dead, their despair clinging to the air like mist. The Cocytus froze the cries of traitors in its icy depths, their voices trapped forever beneath an unyielding surface. And the Phlegethon, ever-burning, ran red with the agony of those who had defied death itself, its flames licking hungrily at the souls condemned to suffer.

They were simply rivers. They flowed, they devoured, they endured.

Tonight, the rivers bore witness to a battle. Not one of swords or blood, but something far more brutal.

"You cannot ask this of me." Her voice, sharp and trembling, cut through the thick air. She stood before him, barely a breath away, and yet the chasm between them had never felt wider. A storm curled at her feet, shadows drawn to her rage, seething in silent fury. The very air in the underworld seemed to still, as if it, too, feared what would come next.

He did not flinch, though he knew better than to mistake her fury for something small. It could level mountains. It could turn the sky black. And yet, still, she was *pleading*.

"I do not ask," he said, his voice quiet. "I tell you what I must do."

"Must," she spat, stepping closer. "No, you chose this. You choose them."

The name of the Olympians did not touch her tongue. It never would. It was poison, and she had long since sworn to purge it from this world. Above them, in the hollow of Erebus' great domain, four figures stood in the shadows of the cliffs, watching. Hades, silent and still as the stone beneath his throne. Persephone, her arms folded, pomegranate seeds crushed between her fingers. Erebus, wreathed in the deep, waiting dark. And Hecate, impassive, though her eyes flickered with something else.

Below, where the river met the shore, the fight raged on.

"You would go to war for them?" she asked, voice unsteady. "For the gods who never looked upon you as more than a shadow?"

His jaw tensed. "It is not their war alone."

She laughed, a bitter, hollow thing. "Everything they touch is theirs alone. Their victories, their losses. Their war. And yet you would throw yourself into it. Leave the underworld. Leave me."

His hands clenched at his sides. "You think this is easy for me?"

She knew it wasn't an easy decision, that he didn't want to hurt her. And still, it was not enough. She could break him here. She knew she could. With a thought, a whisper of magic, she could stop him from ever leaving. He would have no war, no cause but her. The power curled in her hands, in the tips of her fingers, ready to weave a binding so strong not even the Fates could unravel it.

But she did not. Because it would not be him if she had to force him to stay.

Instead, she let the fury take her, let it bloom in her chest, let it consume her like a fire she did not care to put out.

"You once told me you hated them," she whispered, each word like a blade drawn across her own skin. "You said they had no claim to us. No power over what we chose to be."

His throat bobbed, his expression flickering with something she could not bear to name.

"Our love was never about them," he said, his voice thick with something raw. "It was ours."

And it had been. The stolen moments in the dark corners of the underworld, the whispered dreams, the nights spent in tangled sheets, seeking refuge in each other's arms. They had never needed Olympus, had never needed anything but the quiet certainty that they understood each other in a way no one else ever had.

And now, he would leave. Not because he was forced. Not because the gods had demanded it. But because he had chosen them over her. "You were everything," she whispered, and for the first time, her voice trembled with something other than rage. "I would have given you the world if you had asked for it."

"I never wanted the world," he said, stepping closer. He reached for her, but she did not let him touch her. "I only ever wanted you."

"Then stay," she breathed, the words almost lost to the river's roar. "Stay with me. Let them destroy themselves."

A long silence stretched between them. Then, he shook his head. And just like that, it was over.

She let out a sharp, bitter breath, nodding to herself. He had made his choice. And she would make hers. "I will never forgive you for this," she said, and there was no softness in her voice now. "When you return, if you return, you will not find the woman you left behind."

Above them, Persephone exhaled, closing her eyes. The war would take him. She saw it as surely as the rivers carved through the underworld. It would take him from these halls, from this love, from everything that he had ever known. And when it did, the woman he left behind would not be the same.

Hecate's voice was the first to break the silence.

"When he returns," she murmured, "if he returns... she will not forgive him."

Persephone said nothing.

Hades only watched.

Erebus, who had seen this before, turned his gaze to the waters below.

The river had no answers. It did not weep for gods. It only *took*.