

CALLIOPE: True to her word, Aphrodite *did* meet with Artemis within the next few days. Less true to his word, Ares *did* ditch this outing to spend time with Hermes.

Welcome, dear listeners, to Forged Bonds.

We first follow after Aphrodite and Artemis (and Apollo, I suppose) as they sit down for tea in Artemis and Apollo's apartment.

ARTEMIS: I still can't believe you're getting married, Dite. And to *Ares*, no less! I truly never thought I'd see the day.

APHRODITE: He's not that bad, Arte.

ARTEMIS: (snorting dismissively)

APHRODITE: Really, he's not! You just don't like him because... Why don't you like him again?

ARTEMIS: Hmmm maybe because he's all over you even though you don't like him romantically and now you're being forced to marry him?

APOLLO: I'm not sure that's a fair depiction of what's happening.

ARTEMIS: Oh come on, Apollo. You don't *seriously* think she's just... Fallen in love with him out of nowhere do you? It's more likely that she just got sick of him asking and said yes to shut him up.

APHRODITE: Wait, wait, back up a second. Arte is the *whole* reason you don't like Ares because you think he's been chasing after me this entire time?

ARTEMIS: Well, hasn't he?

APHRODITE: No! No, of course not! You know better than anyone that I wouldn't let that shit fly. Ares has been my friend for *years*, and he took me turning him down really well. We're really, truly, genuinely best friends. I thought you knew that and didn't like him for other reasons. Gods if I had known *this* was why you didn't like him, I would've forced the two of you to get drinks with me way sooner than this.

APOLLO: Wait, Dite, what did you think was Arte's problem with Ares then?

APHRODITE: The same problem that the rest of Olympus has with him, I guess. Thinking he's hot headed and arrogant and craves violence just because of the domain he has control over. Either that or he managed to say something stupid in front of you and you took it to heart. Like what happened with you and Poseidon.

ARTEMIS: And I will never forgive Poseidon. Ever. (pause) I guess I owe Ares an apology then.

APHRODITE: He just thinks the two of you don't cross paths often. Definitely doesn't think you've hated him for years.

APOLLO: Centuries, actually.

ARTEMIS: Still, I shouldn't have misjudged him so heavily without talking to you about it more. I would just get so angry thinking about it and I didn't want you to think I was yelling at *you*.

APHRODITE: Well, now I'm kind of glad he didn't come with today.

ARTEMIS: You invited him here?

APHRODITE: I thought he could keep Apollo entertained while we caught up.

APOLLO: I can leave, I guess—

APHRODITE: No, Pollo, you don't have to leave I just— I do think you two would get along. And I know you feel a little left out when me and Artemis hang out, so I thought “Well if I'm going to have to marry Ares at least he can hang out with Apollo.”

ARTEMIS: Let's circle back to that, actually. Why *are* you marrying Ares then? If it isn't to secure your safety against an angry man—

APHRODITE: I seriously can't believe this has what you've thought—

ARTEMIS: Then why marry him at all?

APOLLO: Because it's not love, right? That's the one thing I've picked up from all of this, unless Artemis is fully wrong, but it doesn't seem like you're in love.

APHRODITE: Not romantically, at least. It's... complicated. And possibly secret? But also fuck Zeus so—

APOLLO: Ah. That explains it.

ARTEMIS: We've all become Zeus's coverup at some point or another but this feels a little bit extreme even for him. Usually it's just "Artemis caught a massive boar, look at that" or "Apollo seen around Olympus with a mystery man"—

APOLLO: They weren't even a man, they were nonbinary—

ARTEMIS: —Or "Athena seen with a mystery woman"—

APOLLO: Again, they were nonbinary.

ARTEMIS: This all just feels like... A lot. A massive wedding to cover up a small affair?

APHRODITE: I don't think it was a small one this time. Hera has been... Cagey about the details but I think it was something more than just 'Zeus sleeps with another Nymph'. I didn't even see the headlines before everything was plastered with me and Ares' faces.

APOLLO: Either way, I don't think anything he could've done warrants making you marry Ares. There has to be something more in it for *you* to make you agree.

APHRODITE: Something could be in it for Ares too, you know.

ARTEMIS: He may have taken you turning him down well but that doesn't mean he's *not* in love with you. Even if it's not romantically anymore, you said the two of you are best friends so I doubt he'd be able to say no to you even if he wanted to.

APHRODITE: ...It's just a good way to get everyone off my back, is all. 'Goddess of love marries best friend' is a much better and shorter story than 'Goddess of love, never married, is she even good at her job?' Maybe if I get married they'll finally shut up.

ARTEMIS: Makes sense to me.

APOLLO: What— Really? Marrying your best friend to get the papers off your back makes sense to you?

ARTEMIS: Do I have to make the aroace arrow ace joke again, Pollo, or do you get it?

APOLLO: Point taken. But Aph, are you *sure* about this? There has to be some other way to get people to leave you alone that doesn't involve marriage.

APHRODITE: It's a little late to be unsure about it. Weddings in just over two weeks; if I call it off now—

APOLLO: Then that's an even bigger story than anything else. Likely forever since these paparazzi just don't know how to quit. Okay, fine. I guess this makes sense considering all the variables you've presented but I'm still worried about you, Aph.

ARTEMIS: If there's one thing I know about Aphrodite it's that she can take care of herself. She doesn't always do that, but she can. If she thinks this is the best way forward for her, then we have to respect her wishes, Pollo.

APOLLO: I can respect her and worry at the same time.

APHRODITE: I'll be alright, really. If I was going to have to be married to someone I'm not in love with, I'm glad it's Ares. At least I can genuinely say that I love him, even if it's not a romantic sort of love. And to have a husband that I love is more than I ever thought I'd get to have.

APOLLO: You do understand that saying shit like this is why I worry about you, right? Like, you get that, yeah?

ARTEMIS: Spoken like a true older brother.

APOLLO: You're older than I am—

ARTEMIS: So worried, so caring.

APOLLO: You helped mom give birth to me—

APHRODITE: You don't have to worry about me, Apollo. Seriously, you don't. Even if we aren't in love, Ares and I know how to take care of each other. Always have, always will.

CALLIOPE: Speaking of Ares, our dear god of war is currently out on a hike with Hermes and Dipper. You didn't think we'd introduce a bear only to have the bear disappear after one episode, did you? We join them now as they stop for a brief rest at the mouth of a waterfall in the human realm.

ARES: Thank you for inviting me out here, Hermes. It's good to get away from it all, even if it's just for the day.

HERMES: (teasing) What, planning the wedding of the century isn't fun for you?

ARES: Haha. You know I'm barely involved in the planning. That's pretty much all Zeus if I'm being honest; it's a small miracle me and Aph got a say on the rings. If he could do everything himself, he definitely would.

HERMES: He does know that it's *not* his wedding, right? Please tell me he knows that and isn't making everything about him. (pause) What am I saying, it's Zeus. Of *course* he's making everything about him.

ARES: I've actually fallen asleep in a couple of the planning sessions and 'wedding rehearsals'. Dite spends most of those texting Hephaestus and Hera... She would've been a much better choice for the planning.

HERMES: (soft and understanding) How's Hera doing?

ARES: I've never seen Hera be anything other than formidable before. Being this close to her... She's upset, and rightfully so. With all of this wedding nonsense going on, the sadness of it for her really jumps out. (pause) I saw her cry, Herm. I've never seen Hera cry before in my *life*, but she was crying and I just... Part of me regrets saying yes to Zeus's stupid plan now that I see the toll it's taking on Hera. She doesn't deserve that. Doesn't deserve *him*.

HERMES: No one deserves him. The things he's done... No one deserves that, least of all Hera. Do you think....

ARES: That they were ever in love? It's hard to say. Zeus... He was being an ass, as is his normal prerogative I guess, and said that he loved Hera once upon a time but always 'wanted more'. I'm not sure if he even knows what love is, honestly. Or if he does, I don't think he knows how to express it in any way that matters.

HERMES: You make him sound so tortured.

ARES: Nah, he knows what he's doing. He's admitted to hurting Hera and he doesn't even seem to care enough to stop. Has fully said that he'd do it again, even. He's just... He's the worst. And if Aph hadn't asked me to, I'd tell him where he could stick his plan.

HERMES: ...Why did Aphrodite want to go through with this? I know, I know, there's the whole thing with the press, but is that really all? It seems like a lot for both of you to go through just to get people to stop talking for a bit.

ARES: I... It's not really my story to tell, Hermes.

HERMES: No, of course not, sorry I... It must be personal to her, whatever the reasons are. Of course you'd- I shouldn't have asked-

ARES: Hey, no, it's not- that's not- You have every right to ask, Herm, I just... I just can't give an answer that doesn't feel like I'm betraying my best friend's trust. I don't blame you for being curious- I would be, too, in your position. There's just... There's no answer to the question that doesn't rip right into Aphrodite's heart and that isn't fair to her.

HERMES: (lightly joking) You make her sound so tortured. (pause) I'm sorry for ruining the day.

ARES: You haven't ruined anything, I promise. This might honestly be the best day I've had since this whole wedding thing started; it's definitely the first day I've felt fully like myself in a while.

HERMES: It must be so weird to have all of Olympus looking your way- Well, looking your way more than usual, I guess. You've always commanded a presence wherever you went.

ARES: People are looking your way too, you know.

HERMES: (scoffing) Please. I just deliver the mail and they turn their attention back to whatever caught it before. I may be one of the 'big twelve' as the mortals like to say, but Olympus has never truly cared for me.

ARES: Well that's because they're idiots.

HERMES: Air-

ARES: No, really, Hermes, they're idiots. Me and Aph are literally getting married because Olympus is full of idiots. You are smart and you're kind and you do so much for Olympus- If they're not seeing you as you should be seen then they're idiots.

HERMES: ...Thank you, Ares. It means a lot to hear that from you.

ARES: You're one of my best friends, Herm. Easily one of my favorite people ever. If Olympus can't see how great you are then I'll be here to tell you how great you are.

HERMES: (slightly pained) You're one of my best friends too. And one of my favorite people. (pause) (Overcorrecting the pain) But I've made this all about me when we were meant to be talking about you and your wedding.

ARES: I feel like all I ever do is talk about the wedding and I know you've got to be sick of hearing about it since you deliver the papers and have to see our faces all the time.

DIPPER: (exhausted bear noises)

ARES: See, even Dip is sick of it.

HERMES: (laughing) Well if *Dipper* is sick of it... What should we talk about instead, then?

ARES: Whatever you want. Seriously, *whatever*. You could talk at me about sheep for all I care and I would listen to every word.

HERMES: Well lucky for you I *am* considered a shepherd god to the mortals here and actually can talk about sheep for hours. If it's alright with Dipper, of course. Wouldn't want him getting bored.

DIPPER: (happy bear noises)

ARES: That means he wants to hear you talk about sheep. Come on, messenger boy, share your sheep facts.

CALLIOPE: As fascinating as sheep facts assuredly are, I would *love* to draw your attention elsewhere, listeners. Somewhere more interesting. Somewhere like... The Underworld. We rejoin our king and queen of the underground in their domain.

PERSEPHONE: Did you get a chance to see Hephaestus last week, lovely?

HADES: I did not. Did you?

PERSEPHONE: Got a little hung up talking with Aphrodite and then you called about Hera and— All this is to say *no*, I didn't get a chance to. I think it would be good for us to go back up and see her soon. If you're up to going back up, of course, I know it can be taxing for you.

HADES: It's only as taxing as my brother makes it. And even if it can be taxing, it's worth it to see Phae; it's been far too long as it is. Perhaps early next week before everything really starts getting into wedding mode.

PERSEPHONE: And will you be attending the wedding with me, my love?

HADES: If you wish for me to be there, darling, you know I would be. I'm not sure that Aphrodite would want me there, though.

PERSEPHONE: She rather admires you, you know.

HADES: (deadpan) Yes, I'm sure.

PERSEPHONE: (laughing) She *does*, darling. I know that your perception of her is rather... Warped, due to Olympus's perception of her, but she's truly lovely. (pause) She likes that you care for me. Even as young as she was when we married, she was still our biggest champion.

HADES: ...If you're sure she wouldn't oppose me being there. Her *or* Ares.

PERSEPHONE: Neither of them would, my love. I promise. Aph admires you and Ares admires Aph; he wouldn't stand in the way of you coming to the wedding.

HADES: Even if the rest of Olympus would?

PERSEPHONE: Darling if I cared what the rest of Olympus thought I never would've married you. And if *you* truly cared what the rest of Olympus thought, you never would've married *me*. They have never once deserved either of us.

HADES: (remarkably fond) What did I ever do to deserve you?

PERSEPHONE: You loved me. And that's more than enough.

HADES: I do love you. More than anything else in this world.

PERSEPHONE: I know, darling. I love you too. (pause) So early next week then to see Phae?

HADES: Yes, I think that should work. I'll message ahead to let her know we'll be stopping by.

PERSEPHONE: You could just text her, you know. No need to use a miscellaneous corvid. Or a Hermes. I suppose in a way Hermes is kind of like a corvid...

HADES: (laughing) Fine, fine, my love. I'll text her. But if she complains about the lack of dramatism when we next see each other, that's on *you*.

CALLIOPE: And with that, my dear listeners, I shall set you free to your lives away from the gods. Until next time, and as always, thank you for listening.