~~Darian~~

Darian growled, louder than he wanted to, and when he glanced at Medusa, she was looking at him with a confused expression. No luck there, she'd heard them, and she lowered her human half down next to him. She kept looking at him through the corner of her eye, but the monsters before them weren't the sort you took your eyes off of.

“It's Darian now. Fuck off,” he said.

The three winged women glared at him, exposed their shark teeth, and scowled. But they said nothing; the masks that dangled from thread did all the talking.

“You try our patience, Bellerophontes. And we have been patient with you.”

“Yeah, thanks for that.” Worthless god-things. “So if it wasn't you or the gods trying to shit down my throat, who was it? Who attacked that ship?”

“That is what we wish for you to discover.”

“... you don't know. The Fates don't know?” he said, and Medusa gasped behind him. Her whole body started to shake when she realized who they were. He gave Medusa's worried hand a small pat, stepped toward the three creatures, their masters, and glared at each mask in close proximity. He even snickered. “You're pathetic.”

That was too much for the she-demons. One of the winged bitches reached out with their free hand, fast enough he couldn't react, and grabbed his shoulder. Their grip was absolute, like a titan with a hangover, and they scowled at him while they screeched and forced him to his knees.

“D-Darian!” Medusa slithered his way and readied to pounce, but Darian held up his hand.

“They won't kill me. They won't even injure me. Wouldn't want to hurt their precious merchandise.”

The Erinyes growled inhuman noises and shoved him away, hard enough to knock him on his ass.

“Stubborn child. Our need is for both of our sake's, not ours alone,” one of the masks said.

He got up, dusted off his naked butt, and folded his arms across his chest. “I can take care of myself. I don't need you.”

“They will come for you again, once they learn you are still alive, child. And your new friend will suffer for your stubbornness.”

He tightened his fists, but looked back at Medusa behind him. She looked worried, even petrified, but her worry was pointed at him. He really didn't want to drag her into this shit show.

“That... that will be up to her. I won't endanger her, but it's her choice. I’ll leave if she asks it of me.”

Medusa tilted her head to the side, maybe a little shocked at his words. Perhaps she thought he'd give some speech about how he wouldn't risk her life, and he'd run away at the first sign of danger so she'd come to no harm. He was far too selfish for that. He didn't want her out of his life, and he knew it.

“Bellerophontes, someone has stolen one of the Moirai masks.”

Their blend of anger and frustration in their inhuman voices earned more laughter from Darian than he'd hoped for. If he kept pushing it though, one of those winged demons was liable to hurt him just for the sport of shutting him up, no matter what their masters said.

“And what does this have to do with me?” he said once the laughter had passed.

“Whoever this person is, they are using the mask to hunt down all the children, including you, Bellerophontes. It is they who attacked you.”

“Of course they are.” He gripped his head and ran his fingers through his hair, complete with groans of frustration. “And what—”

“Enough questions!” One of the masks said, and the creature holding it stepped closer to aim the speaking slab of metal and glowing white at his face. “As we said, this is for both our sake's, but if that is not enough to convince a stubborn fool like yourself, know that this enemy has captured your beloved Pegasus.”

Darian froze. They had Pegasus? “How... how do you know that, if you don't know who stole the mask?”

“And we have not come to reveal all our secrets to you, fool.”

The Erinyes started to circle him in a slow walk, each pointing their thread-bound masks at him. Medusa wanted to jump in, in fact his new friend seemed anxious to battle for him, but he shook his head when they made eye contact.

“... so... I help you, and I get to save Pegasus....” He watched the demons circle him in the corner of his eye, but he didn't turn with them. His exposed back was no worry; they needed him.

He gritted his teeth and took a moment to think. Pegasus was alive. That was good. Very good. Memories of his old friend carrying him through the sky earned a slow sigh from Darian. He could remember the cold rain, the blowing wind, the exhilaration as they flew skyward. He could remember the lightning that sent them both plummeting. Pegasus would never betray him.

A thought, like a spark in the dark, hit the back of his eyes when he glanced Medusa’s way. And then a slight grin.

“Alright, on one condition.”

The Erinyes stopped circling him, and glared with more rage on their face. He really did enjoy pissing them off.

“You have nerve, child,” one of the masks said.

“Speak,” said another.

“I... I help you, I kill whoever it is that stole one of your masks, return it to you, and in return, you help her.” He motioned to Medusa with a nod of his head.

The gorgon blinked at him, shock blatant on her face, and she brought her hands up to her lips to bite on a nail. The Erinyes looked at her, and if Darian didn't know better, he'd think they were jealous.

“... Athena's curse is not ours to undo.”

“You're not going to undo the curse, you're going to arrange a meeting. Myself and Athena. Medusa too if she wishes to be there.”

The masks had no facial expressions, they were just solid slabs of metal with glowing white mist dripping from their eyes and mouths. But the silence carried more than enough weight to make up for their expressionless faces.

Medusa slithered a little closer, and the Erinyes did not stop her. “Darian, you....”

He cracked a smile her way, a quick one, and gave her a sneaky wink to go with it before he donned his stern glare again for the masks. They stared at him, still and lifeless, and he stared right back, arms across his chest and his bare foot tapping the stone beneath them.

“... we cannot guarantee your life, or hers, young Bellerophontes.”

Ooh, so courteous now that he was willing to help them. Predictable.

“I know.”

The winged demons looked at each other, and slurred more of their inhuman growls. The noises rose to a roar of anger, and they shoved at each other with their free hands, like squabbling birds.

“Enough!” one of the masks said. The winged creatures stopped bickering, and stood beside each other wing to wing, their harsh glares on Darian and their masters held out at arm's length in front of them. Apparently, even their attack dogs weren't always so perfectly obedient. “It is a deal, Bellerophontes. We have your aid then?”

“You do.” He had to bite his tongue to keep the bile in his throat down.

“Excellent. We will send a ship for you in seven days time. You will know its approach by the death's hands and the step of hooves.”

Death's hands, step of hooves? He squinted and tried to hide his confusion.

“It's a deal then. Now go away.”

The monsters gritted their teeth the same way he did, and they growled at him between clenched jaws.

The masks weren't done though. “You will need help, Bellerophontes, to find this devious entity.”

“And I suppose you have one lined up for me.”

“In a manner of speaking. You know this person well, and you know where they have gone.”

He raised a brow. “I do?”

“Indeed. You crushed their face with a rock.”

He took a step back. “... he's alive?”

It was the Erinyes' turn to laugh. They flapped their wings, kicked up dirt and water with their huge wingspans, and lifted into the air, all the while cackling. The masks did not answer him. In fact, they went deathly silent, and the white mist that glowed in their orifices faded away. The skulls that the masks were strapped to fell to dust caught in the wind of wings, leaving the masks to dangle from thread with no voice.

And they left. As quickly as they came, the wicked monsters were gone, high into the sky and nothing but a blur against the sun.

The silence that followed was painful. He looked down at the stones beneath him for a while, and listened to the little stream that flowed from the mountain into the large rock basin beside him. He looked to the sky, to the water, to anywhere but Medusa.

The gorgon didn't move either, he’d have heard it. She stood there, still as a snake, and watched him. When he glanced her way in the corner of his eye, he could see she was still holding her hands up to her lips, and was biting a knuckle. Her eyes were wide, shocked.

And why wouldn't they be? Shit just showed up and dumped itself all over the two of them.

He might as well talk first. It was his fault. “I... I'm sorry.”

“Why are you sorry?” She took his voice as a queue, and slithered over to him. She'd even brought his loincloth, and he chuckled half-heartedly when she handed it to him.

“For this,” he said, and gestured to the sky where the demons were dots on the blue. “For... not telling you my real name.” He tied on the loincloth, and did his best to avoid eye contact as he did so. He didn't need her to see the guilt he was sure he was radiating. “For—”

She picked him up, and hugged him. He knew he was a light guy, but the gorgon literally picked him up and raised him several feet in the air, just so she could hug him while slithering about with her human half hovering high above the ground. Damn she was strong when she wanted to be.

“You have nothing to be sorry for,” she said, and she slithered around in a circle like a dance. After a few minutes of holding him like a doll, she set him down, but she kept one of his hands in hers, and she squeezed it while smiling at him. It was one of those smiles, the confident and happy kind he was the one usually wielding.

“I don't?”

“No.”

“I thought for sure I did.”

“No.” She giggled, and tugged on his hand like a young, excited girl. “I knew you had secretsss, Darian, I just didn't know they'd be so huge. The Fatess?”

“Uh, yeah, it's... it's a long story, but the short of it? I'm just a pawn in their game.”

“Game?”

“Yeah, they like to... they....” They like to ruin lives. “They orchestrate events, big things, anything that could get spun into a tale, and throw someone like me into it.”

“Oh... oh! Your eyes, they glowed white like... those masks....”

The reality was starting to hit her, he could see it on her face. The last thing he wanted was for her to look at him differently.

She tugged on his hand again, closer, until she was able to lean down and put her forehead to his. “And you gave me a choice... to stay by your side. And even more, you said you... you'd do this to help me.”

He nodded, and let her snake hair poke at his shoulders. “Yeah, I... I didn't want you involved if you didn't want to be. And I saw a chance to help you. I couldn't waste it, right?”

A tinge of guilt crept up his back. He wanted to help her, he did. But he also saw an opportunity. Him, Athena, and a host of ways he could take advantage of that. A step closer to revenge.

But not until Medusa's curse was fixed. Control yourself Darian, even if you get the chance, control yourself. Medusa came first.

“You couldn't waste it.” Medusa chuckled, and she started to slither around him again. This time though, she kept close to him, very close, so close he couldn't raise his arms. Bit by bit, she coiled around him until he couldn't move, and she held him like a meal ready to be devoured.

He really didn't mind. It was even comforting, trapped in her embrace, her smooth snake skin along his human skin. And when she smiled at him, he couldn't help but smile back.

“So... you're leaving soon,” she said.

He nodded, head heavy. “Yeah. I know who they were talking about, and where he's gone. It's South of Sparta.”

“That is far... I wonder if the journey will be hard on my scales.” She reached down, and patted the belly of some of her snake length.

Wait, hard on her scales? “You're coming?”

“... did... you not wish for me to?”

Arg, she had that sad, worried look on her face again that broke his will like puppy eyes.

“Of course I do. We... it's....” He tried to raise his arms to express his concern. No good, trapped at his side. “It's dangerous! You could get hurt.”

She shook her head, and squeezed him with her snake coils. He couldn't move at all anymore.

“Ssso could you! I won't... no, I won't let that happen.” She put her hands on his shoulders and shook him, but he didn't shake much trapped as he was. “You want to help me. I want to help you! And... you gave me the choice.”

“I did, I just thought... I figured I'd be a real jackass if I made those choices for you.”

She leaned over his trapped body, and put her forehead to his again. Those perfect yellow snake eyes gazed into him, and her snake hair nuzzled up against his neck and jaw when she smiled.

“I heard, in Sparta, women can exercise with the men, wear chiton robes like men, read and write, even earn money,” she said. “Is that still true?”

He nodded. “Last I was there, the women were walking around with the men, doing those things, yeah.” He really liked his visit, much as it had taken some convincing to let him in the city. Spartans were a defensive bunch.

“And you said the one who can help you is near Sparta?”

“I did.”

“Then... I would like to see that. With you,” she said.

She was nice, so damn nice. So perfectly and completely nice, nicer than anyone he'd ever known. It was going to get her killed, and it was the reason he didn't want her to go. It was also the reason he didn’t want her out of his life.

She was so close to him, with her forehead on his, her snake hair coiling around his ears and shoulders. He pushed his jaw forward, found her lips, and gave her a kiss.

She pulled back, surprised. Had he crossed a line? Last night had been a very sexual experience, and right then, it wasn't sexual. It was different.

“You kissed me,” she said. Her voice had gone quiet again, and she put her fingers on her lips to touch where he'd kissed them.

“Sorry, just... I couldn't help it. Y—”

She kissed him back. Her hands found his head and neck, held onto him, and pulled him into her kiss. Her eyes were closed, her expression was blissful, and she wasn't stopping. Her coils loosened with time, until Darian could get his arms out, but Medusa was pushing herself forward and onto him, until he was sitting on the stone and blinking up at the gorgon.

“Do... all the women... throw themselves at you, like this?” she said, and she laid her human body atop him in the center of a large ring of her snake length.

“Many do,” he said. When she raised her head and frowned at him, he snickered like a child. “But, I always said no.” That got her smiling again.

“No? Why would you say no?” She reached for his hands and netted her fingers into his while her weight pinned him to the earth. Her snake length beneath the hips rested between his legs, and her stomach was flat on his. From there, she put her lips onto his again, and moaned, just barely, into his lips.

“None of them were... kind.” He put his arms on her hips, and held on while the deadly gorgon bathed him in kisses. Not a single one of those women had been as kind as the monster in his arms.

“That is a sad story.” Satisfied, she sat up, and laid her body out across her snake length. “Now I see images of Darian – Bellerophontes – pursued by women, but always alone.”

“It wasn't... yeah, I guess I was pretty lonely.”

“Then I hope to keep you company on your journey,” she said.

“That journey is going to be a hard one, Medusa.”

“I can imagine.”

He shook his head. “People could die.”

“Probably.”

“People are going to see this,” he said, and pointed to his forehead where he carried his slave mark. “If not, they'll definitely see you.”

“We will deal with it if it happens.”

“And it will be a long journey.”

“The better for us to get to know each other? Not even ten days and you've shared my bed. I feel like a harlot.”

He laughed. She may have said that, but she was grinning like a guilty cat.

“You... really want to help me on this, don't you? You don't even know who Pegasus is, and you barely know me.” And you don't know what I'm capable of.

“I know you are also doing this to help me... and that you are the first to ever look at me with those eyes.” Again she reached out and tugged on his hand. “Am... am I to give a speech for you? Like a poem for Aphrodite, stroking your ego with talk of infatuation and attraction?” She joked, but her finger caressed his knuckle, the same as he had done for her the night before.

“I am a man. Best way to make me happy is to inflate my ego.”

“Oh, I see.” She tugged his hand again and brought him closer. “Then, you are the first to make me laugh, and smile, and feel safe in a very, very long time, Darian. Not even when I was human did I ever enjoy someone's company as much. And... and I know there is a lot about you that I don't know, but... I am hoping you'll tell me.”

“I know.” He winced at the thought of dredging up old, ugly stories. “And I will tell you, if you give me time?”

She nodded. “I will. It's a good thing it's a long journey then.”

Damn she was a treasure, and way too forgiving. How had a century of solitude and warriors come for her head – warriors she'd killed – not hardened her? He'd hate to be the one responsible for destroying her beautiful personality.

But he'd hate it more if he was responsible for her getting killed.

“Alright. If we're going to sail and trek across Greece, I'm going to need to teach you to fight.”

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~~Medusa~~

It did not take much time for Medusa to realize, she was a horrible fighter.

Darian, or was it Bellerophontes now? He had found them both some sticks to use as swords and spears, and he was trying to teach her some forms. From the dead, he'd removed their shields, one for him and one for her. Dead men's shields. She frowned each time she looked at the thing on her arm.

“One-on-one combat is a different beast, compared to phalanx combat. In a phalanx, you'd be against a wall of larger shields and spears. But when it's a duel, or maybe two on one, you need to be able to move and block.” He demonstrated by quick stepping side to side, but also keeping his sword and shield up.

Apollo's light cast down on them in the midday, and the murmurs of the sea were behind her. Out on the dock, she could stare up at the two sisters she never wanted, Sthenno and Euryale from the names carved at their feet, and wish she could lay under the shade they cast, but Darian would have none of it. Instead, he kept them out along the dock where there was little room to move, unless she wanted to fall into the sea. She considered slithering down into the water, just to help alleviate the heat. Her human half could sweat, but her snake half could not; staying cool in the sun was a problem.

She tried to emulate his quick movements. There was no chance, not with her snake body. The best she could do was hover her torso in the air from side to side. Her torso had a few bruises too; Darian took his training seriously, and had thwaped her more than thrice.

“But... I have no legs, and....”

“Yeah. I know, and — yeah.” He scratched at the back of his neck, just as confused as her. “And it could all very well be a moot point. If you try dodge me, I'll just—” he leaped in with disturbing speed, a blur, and when she tried to move her human half out of the way, she succeeded. But it didn't matter, Darian just went past her torso and attacked her snake half. He was kind enough to not smack the scales hard enough to bruise that flesh, but the point was clear nonetheless.

“I can't move the length of me with a jump or hop. Anyone with a sword has an advantage.”

“If you let them engage like that, yeah. You'll have to kill them first to prevent that scenario.”

“I....” She lowered her stick sword and looked down at the water beside her. He said the word 'kill' like it was weightless. “Do... I have to?”

He blinked at her. “Have to what?”

“Kill them first?”

“If you don't want them to kill you.”

She opened her mouth to respond, but stopped herself. Darian was the first one she had ever seen, ever, who didn't want her dead. It was a fool's hope to think others might do the same. And if she was going to come on this journey, she would be the one drawing people's ire.

But drawing the ire of people was better than letting Darian run off on some insane quest without her aid. Maybe.

“Are you still squeamish about it?” Darian said.

“About killing? Of course!” With a frustrated groan, she threw the stick into the water and turned her back to the man. The whole conversation was turning sour, and she slithered off toward the temple stairway.

Darian jogged after her. “But you've killed many.”

“Always in self defense! And always after I asked them to leave.”

Slithering up the stairway was never a fun experience. There were still many dead, worn with a century but still standing and taunting her with their horrified faces. Athena's curse had turned everyone on the island to stone when it happened, and that she did not blame on herself. It was the few warriors on the stairway that she felt guilty for, sorrowful for. Warriors that had come to the island, and she had killed herself.

She was careful not to touch any of the dead statues she slithered past, new or old. “I don't like fighting.” I don't like hearing people's final gasps.

“Then are you sure you want to come with me?” He got out in front of her on the stairway and blocked her path with arms out to his sides. “I'm going to be fighting people. It always happens when I work with the Fates, and it's always worse than I can predict.”

“I am sure. It's just... must we default to violence?”

“I don't think—”

“I’m not saying we won't fight, and I’m not saying I won't kill. It's just... can we try and avoid it first?”

Darian winced, looked to the ground, and leaned his weight onto the stick in his hand. “You think I'll just kill anyone we run across?”

“No! No, no I....” She lowered her torso until it was eye to eye with Darian, and she reached out to put a hand on his chest. “Please, I meant no offense. I just... when you saved me, that night we met, you were... very brutal.”

“That was—”

“I know. And I do not regret that it happened, just... I think people would surprise you, if you showed a little mercy.”

He winced again, when she said mercy, like it were salt in a wound.

“I....” He shook his head, took a deep breath, and took her hand into his. “Alright. I'll try. I hope you're there to remind me?”

She almost glowed with his response. “I will!”

“And if push comes to shove, can I remind you that sometimes, violence is the only answer?” With that, Darian pointed at one of the statues on the stairway, a warrior.

While the other statues on the stairway were running from the temple, a few warriors upon it were heading up to the temple. The one Darian motioned to was worn with time, like the others near it. Battles from long ago, when Medusa had been caught unawares and was forced to defend herself outside the temple, on the stairway. Despite how weather had smoothed many of the sharp edges on the dead man, the look of hate and anger on his face was unmistakable.

“... you can.” She leaned forward onto Darian, and put her forehead against his.

Darian sighed like an annoyed parent, but relented, and nudged his forehead to hers. Her snake hair, a bit distraught and weak from the sun, slithered out to rest along his shoulders and hair. Darian rolled his eyes, but when one of the little critters drifted around his cheek and along his jawline, he turned his head just enough to give it a small kiss.

How quickly the two of them had grown so comfortable with each other. Not even a full day since she had first pulled him to her bed – pile of blankets – and already they were holding each other like some sort of silly young girl's fantasy. She tried not to let it go to her head, but the handsome, lean little man before her was just so delicious, and beautiful, and warm.

So she returned his kiss, with her lips and not those of her snake hair, and rubbed her thumb along his knuckles.

“Ok, if I can't use a sssword and shield, what do you ssssssuggest?” she said.

“If they're close enough? Use the stone sight Athena gave you.”

It was her turn to wince again. “And if that isn't an option? Perhaps you are nearby and it'd put you at risk?”

“You still have your transformation. I saw what you did to that boar.”

She frowned and pulled away a few feet. “Use the... that thing?”

He nodded, and when she tried to pull further away, he didn't let go of her hand. “Last resort! Honest. And besides, I think I have a better idea. Have you ever used a bow?”

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Digging through the dead for their things a second time put Medusa in a foul mood. She hated touching the dead, and that included the statues; rooting through their things was far worse. But it was a necessary evil, and when you're trapped on an island, you make do with what you have.

The two of them had moved back up to her little home behind the temple, and this time instead of sticks and shields, Darian had found a bow for her, with a quiver and arrows.

And they fired it for two hours. When the arrows became useless, Darian routed through the dead warriors to find more. One of the large trees nearby was riddled with scratches and holes by the end of the grueling session.

“My arms are tired,” she said.

“Yeah, I'm sorry. I'm pushing you way too hard.” Darian walked over to the tree and retrieved several more arrows. “We can stop, do a bit tomorrow, and every day. You are a very good shot though.”

“Thank you.” She beamed with pride. A sword or spear were such visceral and brutal things, but a bow and arrow had a certain elegance that she preferred. Maybe she just liked being far away from the violence? But she had to admit, lining up the shot and hitting the target, even a tree, was immensely satisfying. And she was good at it, she could tell each time Darian's mouth opened she landed an arrow. Again, and again, and again.

“Must be a snake's aim,” he said, and walked up to her with the arrows.

She handed him the bow and quiver, and stretched out her arms, complete with a blissful sigh of release from the tension in her muscles. “Maybe. I am much preferring the bow. I can use it from positions others cannot as well, high and low.” She raised her torso ten feet into the air, and then to the ground to demonstrate. “But....”

“But?” He walked into their little home, bow in hand.

“My breasts prevent me from aligning things as simply as you would. I have to hold the bow away for a couple inches.” Being buxom was nothing more than a pain.

Darian reemerged from the home, laughing in that soft way he did when he teased her. She wanted to give him a bruise or two for teasing her then, but at the same time, she loved the sound of his voice when it was warm.

“The Amazons are rumored to cut off one of their breasts to deal with that, but it's nonsense. They do wear clothing that keeps their breasts tighter to their bodies though.” He walked, almost skipped up to her, and pointed up – she was hovering a few feet higher than him – at her breasts. “Those wraps you love. I know they're soft and feel nice on the skin, but maybe you could tie another one underneath around your bust, nice and tight?”

Medusa groaned. “A breast bind? I guess. It sounds uncomfortable. Will I need to wear it all the time?”

“Only when we're moving.”

More groans.

Darian reached up, took one of her hands, and pulled her down to him. “If it’s any consolation, I’d be much happier if you kept them out too.”

Medusa brought her hands up to her cheeks and shook her head side to side when the blushing started. “Darian!”

Just when she thought the man was going to take her into their little home, he let go of her hand. She opened her eyes to find Darian was squirming a little, and looking to the side. She tried to read his expression, but all she could tell was that he was conflicted. Her snake hair pointed down at where their fingers had been touching earlier, and how empty it felt now without his hand in hers.

“Sorry,” he said, “always thinking with my dick.”

Again, the man was apologizing for his sexual behavior. Why? Last night had been amazing! Just the thought of it, of him inside her, her folds spread around him, it all sent tingles from her fingertips, up into her chest and down through her snake length. And he’d said she was a seductive woman, that he’d really enjoyed it, and… and all the things that should make him want to do it again. Why did he stop?

She reached out and took his hand back. To her relief, his eyes drifted back to hers, and his smile returned.

And when she started to pull him back to the pile of blankets, his smile brightened. That smile, a beautiful thing on his trimmed beard and youthful face, must have contained some strong desires. The closer they got to the blankets, the more joyful and excited he appeared. And once he was standing in the middle of her bed, his eyes looked like they would explode with passion. Even his fingers in her hand were buzzing, and his other hand fidgeted with his tunic at his side.

He looked so happy, but refused to touch her? He… oh. Oh! The man would not touch her because of how last night had gone. She had asked him to hold still for her, for her to be the one in control. The man looked like he wanted to ravage her, but still he kept himself under control. For her.

She smiled, released his hand, and lowered both of hers to his waist. With slow hands, she undid the belt of his chiton garb, so that the loose and flowing white of the fabric hung free. Then she reached for his shoulders, undid the buttons upon its shoulders, and let the garment fall.

Darian didn’t move an inch. He smiled at her, warm, delighted, and watched her working hands. When she placed her hands on his chest though, he made a tiny sound as he inhaled sharply, and looked down to her fingers. She kneaded the hard muscle of his body, and slid her hands down further, teasing the indentations of his musculature down his sides, his abs, the Apollo’s belt of his hips, and where it disappeared into his loincloth. Licking her lips, she slid her hands into those as well, slipped her fingers behind him, and kneaded her fingers into the hardness of the warrior’s ass.

And still he did not move. With how close she had to be to reach behind him, her face was only inches from his, and she grinned like a young girl again when Darian’s breath quickened. Her heart was getting faster, and her body was starting to shiver with its own anticipation. How many times had she cum on the man she was currently undressing, last night? Three, four times? The blur of memories already had her body growing hotter, and she could feel her nipples harden under the wrap she wore.

When she finally sneaked her hands behind him and found the loop of his loincloth, she felt her cheeks turn red and her breath stop while she slowly undid the knot. The fabric fell free, and Darian was left to stand in the nude. Still he did not move.

She backed away a little, and looked at him, his array of lean muscles, and the perfect definition that almost seemed a little out of place on his smaller frame. Not a bulky man, but a slim and powerful one. She remembered some of the massive warriors that had come for her, tall and broad and brimming with bulging muscles; Darian was not that. If they were a bull, Darian was the fox.

He was certainly a confident fox! He smiled at her, that deliciously confident but also warm and gentle smile. Basking in her gaze, no doubt, by the way he almost posed for her.

And as she watched him, her body shivering with growing desire, she stared down at his member, growing longer and taller as Darian’s arousal grew right along with hers.

“I have not even touched it,” she said, “and you’re already hard.”

Darian grinned, but she could see a hint of embarrassment when he looked down. “Well you keep staring at me. I can’t help it.”

Her eyes were enough to bring the man to arousal? She hugged herself and giggled a little, but also slipped her hands higher, up behind her neck to find the knot of her wrap, and she undid it with practiced swiftness. She didn’t let it fall though, she caught it along her forearms instead, and pressed the collapsing fabric over the bottom of her breasts and over her swollen, large nipples. Darian’s erection twitched several times, and the man groaned at the sight.

She was teasing him. Again! It hadn’t even occurred to her to do it, it just came to her like fire to oil. The way he stood there, gazing at her with eyes glazed in hunger made her whole body tingle, and she could not help but indulge in those eyes by slowly letting the fabric fall from her skin. When finally her heavy breasts were exposed, pulling down against her body without the wrap to keep them supported, Darian groaned. The poor man kept his hands at his sides, but she could see his fingertips caressing the air, as if caressing her.

She undid the wrap on her hips with the same taunting slowness, and when she slid it free to expose her pink folds to Darian, his cock raised with more twitches. He wanted to be inside her, she could see it in his eyes, locked onto her body like a ravenous animal.

Still he did not move. She slithered a little closer, and made sure to lean forward so her teardrop breasts could sway with their weight. Once again only a foot from him, and still he did not move.

There was still an hour of sunlight left, and it filled the little home with enough light for her to see everything clearly, far more clearly than the night before. Looking down, she could see his shaft straining against its own tightness, lined with subtle veins. His pubic hair was trim, but the dark hair was a huge contrast to her hairless skin. She wanted touch him.

With a shy smile, she eased herself down further and further. With her body low to the ground, she found a height similar to a woman on her knees, and reached up with bold hands to take Darian’s hips and align him with her.

He blinked at her, and the surprise on his face was delicious. He even tried to take a small step back, but her hands would not let him.

“Medusa? You su—”

“I want to.” No doubt the man was still worried for her, given her past. But looking up at him, catching his hungry eyes from below? She was getting wet. “I want to explore! And… touch and… see everything.”

Darian gulped, but nodded, and his mouth parted with quiet pants when she put her lips only inches from his raised length.

She gulped too. Last night, the member in front of her had been well below her, and the whole process of sex had hidden much of what was going on, despite her attempts to see everything. Staring at his cock from only inches away though? It made her nervous. She could smell his musk. She could see his muscles tighten when he flexed his pelvic floor and caused his length to stand straight up. She could see the soft parts of it that ran underneath it, from his scrotum to the swollen tip.

With quivering fingers, she touched the softness underneath his member, and ran their tips up and down in a slow, loving caress. The reaction was instant, his cock springing upward with another flex of Darian’s muscle, accompanied by a gentle moan from the man.

“You’ll, um… you’ll have to tell me… what feelssss good,” she said. “I’ve never done… thissss.”

“You seemed quite skilled last night.”

She frowned at him. “Hey! I’m… it….” Her head lowered, and she looked to the side as more blush radiated across her face and body. “I know what I like. A hundred yearsss alone, and….” Confessing to a masturbation habit was not what she had in mind! “Ssssso I… did what I liked. And you ssseemed to like what I liked.”

“I did, very much.” Darian sighed, one of those deep and relaxing sighs, and he reached down with his hands to graze his fingers along her snake hair. “Here, let me lie down.”

Medusa slid a little further away and spread her snake self about. She coiled around the pile of blankets with her long body, left enough room for Darian to lay on his back, head propped up on some of her scaled side. She lowered her torso to put her herself on her belly between his legs, elbows on the blankets and her chin in her palms with her face a few inches from the phallus beneath it. Just a young girl studying something intriguing. Very, very intriguing.

He reached down with one of his hands, and wrapped his fingers around the base of his cock. Seeing his fingers circle his girth made Medusa’s heart rate double, until she started to pant to keep air in her lungs. “Around the base here, you can squeeze and massage it however you want. But….” He reached out with his other hand, and pulled down his foreskin. The head of his shaft was swollen, ripe, tinted red, and it looked very soft. And with how Darian grew extremely gentle when he touched it, it must have been. “This is… very sensitive. I don’t like to touch it unless it’s something soft, and wet.”

Wet. She leaned in a little closer, let out her long snake tongue, and ran its forked tip up the underside of his glans. Darian trembled under the sensation, and let out the tiniest moan. The look of pleasure on his face, and the little noises he made when she touched the head of his member, sent more tingles down her spine. She could feel herself getting wetter already, and her silky flesh between her hips was certainly soft enough for his cock.

But her lips and tongue were also wet, and soft. She was not as sweet as Darian as sometimes thought she was. She worshiped Aphrodite and Eros. She remembered what the young men and women did in the temple garden after dark!

With a gulp, she lowered one of her hands to his thigh, and the other to his member. Darian removed his hands for her, and she slipped one of hers about his girth. Warm, and the texture of his soft skin wrapped tight against the hardness of his arousal was such a pleasant contrast. She squeezed him, lightly of course, and she grinned up at the man laying down before her when he squirmed a little under her touch.

She stroked him, and eased her hand up and down his skin with a light grip. The hand on his thigh grazed along his skin before finding his balls, and she caressed them with curious digits. Such a strange sensation, the soft skin, the things it held within. She’d seen a man get kicked in the crotch once, and then him vomiting in pain after; testicles were meant to be treated gently!

Weight on her elbows between his legs, one hand caressing his soft flesh beneath his shaft, the other massaging the hard girth of his cock, she leaned forward, and placed a sweet kiss on the swollen tip. Darian trembled a little under her touch, his face was starting to blush, and his confident smile he always wore started to fade. Instead, his eyebrows relaxed upward, and his mouth hung open enough so she could see a bit of his tongue. He was enjoying her touch.

He was enjoying her touch! She kissed the tip of his member again, and this time, bolstered by a swelling pride and joy, she did more than kiss. She knew sensitive places on her own body, and she knew what she wanted — what she thought she’d never get — from someone. Soft, warm, and massaging touches. Slow, but powerful. Grinning, she slid her lips down over his ripe glans, and made sure to bury it in her soft, warm, massaging touch. She kept him there, and with her lips wrapped suckling on the edge of the head of his cock, she pushed her tongue against it, along its sides and underneath it.

Darian groaned, and reached one hand out to find her hair. She thought maybe he was going to stop her, maybe she was doing it wrong? But he slid his fingers into her air, let the snakes intertwine with his digits, and rested his hand on her head.

“Slower,” he said. She almost didn’t hear him, with how his voice had become nothing but a soft whisper.

Hearing him struggle in what she was doing to him was making her whole body shiver. Heat poured through her, made her eyes half-close in the haze of need, and she could feel her juices wetting the blanket where she was laying her hips down. She tried to focus, but seeing Darian getting closer and closer to climax from her touch, and feeling his fingers cuddling her hair before gliding along her scalp, it was making it very, very hard to not start grinding her hips down to rub her swollen clit against the blankets. Anything to relieve the growing ache inside her.

But she didn’t give in. Focusing on Darian was too good. She experimented, toyed with him, squeezed his shaft harder before easing her grip, and suckled on his glans hard enough to make him gasp before she let up on the pressure. Darian didn’t need to tell her what to do; everything she was doing, she did on her own, and she could see the pleasure on the man’s face.

“I’m going to cum soon.”

She smiled around his cock and started to stroke him faster. Her lips remained around his glans, suckling, kissing in slow, sensuous motions up and down the supple skin of the tip. Her hand on his balls held onto his thigh instead to balance herself while she started to stroke him faster, and faster, all while she gazed down across his body to watch the man struggle to not climax.

Darian’s cock flexed hard in her mouth, and his hips squirmed. She loosened the grip on his girth and lightened her kiss, but Darian didn’t remove his hand from her head. He wanted her to continue.

“G-gently….”

A warm fluid squirted up into her mouth, and she blinked up at Darian. But his face was absolute rapture. She tested him, gave him a slow, gentle lick of her forked tongue on his swollen cock head, and earned a groan from the man, along with another twitch of his length. More cum gushed into her mouth, and she let the thick liquid escape her lips while she coddled his cock with her tongue. Soon, the white fluid was flowing down his cock and onto her fingers; she barely noticed. She watched Darian’s face, bathed in his groans of bliss when another gush of his liquids rose up from his length, only for her to squeeze at the base of his length to try and milk more. Her tongue found his cum, licked it away as it came out, and massaged it into his cock with her gentlest caresses.

After the last drops of his fluid rose up, only to be kissed away by Medusa’s lips, Darian relaxed back against the blankets and let go of her head. He looked up at the ceiling, both hands flopped backward over her snake body, and he breathed deep. His drenched member twitched in her hand, and she gave its pulsing body more kisses. His cum tasted a little salty, and a touch bitter, but it didn’t matter, she was drinking him. She was seeing stars and heat waves and all she could think about was the exhausted man before her, and that she was drinking him.

After a couple more kisses, she licked her lips clean, and slithered over to Darian to lay her human half on the blankets beside him.

“Did you like it?” she said. She put her hand on his chest, and felt his heart beat against it; so fast.

The small warrior turned to look at her, lowered his hands down from behind him to find her hand with one, and draped the other over his forehead. “You really are a natural at this.”

She smiled, then frowned, then grinned, then sulked. “I’m no prossstitute!”

“I wasn’t thinking prostitute, more like a sexual goddess. Aphrodite and Eros, you said?” He winked, grinning his happy grin like he always did. He had the best smile in the world, and it made her melt to see it.

Before she knew what she was doing, she had both hands on him, and she was rubbing his chest, pressing her thumbs into his muscles, and feeling his heart beat once again. Feeling it thud against her touch made her head spin.

“… my turn? Please?” She gulped, rolled onto her back, and turned her head to watch Darian.

The man lit up like a bonfire. He rolled over to her, cozied up his chest against her side, hooked her nearest arm behind him on his back, and leaned toward her face. Before she knew it, he was kissing her with enough ravenous need to take her breath away. She almost squealed in surprise into his mouth. All she had to do was ask, and this was his response?

She should ask more often.

Finally he broke away, and nudged his nose against hers. “So, you tell me what you like. But let me see if I can find it.”

Ooh, a game. She managed a sheepish grin, but the crawling ice of fear crept up her back. He was going to explore her body. Him, and not her controlling him. She gulped again.

Darian leaned over her, and her snake hair reached out to meet him with prodding kisses and tiny licks. He moved further down though, until he was leaning over her breasts. They were so heavy, and they weighed down against her ribs laying down as she was, until they pulled down to either side of her body a bit under their weight. Darian slipped a hand underneath where it drifted off the side of her chest, nudged it back up toward her sternum with one hand, and brought his lips over her nipple.

Just when she thought he was going to bite her, he stopped an inch from it, and let his warm breath spread over her puffy, pink areola. Sparks of bliss worked through her breasts, just small ones, tiny tingling waves that drifted up and down her breast. She mewled. Darian’s other hand reached for her breast as well, and caressed the underside of her breast with his fingertips in slow, sensual waves. As he did, he leaned in closer for her nipple, and while looking across her body to her, enveloped it into his lips, and suckled.

She met his gaze, and whimpered. “I… like that… a lot.” Her hand on his back rubbed his spine with encouragement, and her other struggled to not intervene. She used her other arm to push against her other breast with her bicep, and guided it up onto her chest for him.

Darian smiled into her nipple, and raised his kiss from it. It was swollen even more than before, upright, hard. He leaned a little further to her other breast where she held it closer for him, and did the same. He cupped its underside in his hand, teased the tender, sensitive skin underneath it, grazed her pink areola with gentle fingers, before wrapping his lips around her nipple yet again. This time, he suckled a little harder, and she made a tiny whining sound with the feel of her body being bathed in the warm, wet kiss of lips and tongue. Her body felt like it was on fire.

Darian groaned into her breast, closed his eyes, pressed his face down into it, and opened his mouth wider to suck more of her nipple in his mouth. His tongue roamed out, licked around it, teased along its edge and out to the mound of her puffy, swollen, aching areola where he did the same. Medusa’s whimpers only grew, and she had to force herself to keep her hands from moving. When he removed his lips, her second nipple had become more swollen than the first.

“Your breasts are so soft,” he said.

“They sag.” She frowned, unhooked her arm from Darian’s back, and hugged both arms under her breasts to keep them as pert as possible.

But Darian rolled his eyes, took her hand nearest him, and hooked it back behind his neck. He leaned in again, found her breast with his hand, and let its weight overflow the cup of his fingers and palm.

“Heavy, and huge. Look at this.” His lips found her nipple again, and suckled while he pulled his head up. Medusa squeaked like a mouse at the powerful sensation, and squeaked again when his lips managed to pull much of her breast into the air a few inches before he let go. The supple flesh of her breast squashed to her body, and jiggled.

She bopped Darian’s head with her hand on his neck. “Darian! I am not a toy!”

“No, you’re an unbelievably beautiful woman.”

She blushed and squirmed and wriggled, but Darian smiled, and leaned back down to start suckling and kissing her breasts yet again. She could do nothing but lay there, and with each passing moment, whimper. His other hand found her other breast, and found a gentle rhythm to tease and caress its contours while his thumb grazed against the swollen nub. Each line his fingers traced, each lick of his tongue, each tender massage made her body hotter, and wetter, and the waves of bliss only grew the longer he went on. Her fingers found his hair, and she ran her fingertips through it while her moans grew along with her bliss.

Then she came. She mewled, held Darian’s head still with both hands, and started to spasm with jolts of pleasure she hadn’t expected. The waves coursed through her breasts and into her chest, sucking the air out of her and forcing her breath into useless panting. She shuddered, clenched on her pussy, and felt the tremors work up through her body before coursing down into her hips. More of her juices started to soak her folds, until it dripped down her side and onto Darian’s leg.

Darian, thank the gods, had stopped suckling and licking while she came. After the sharp sparks of euphoria in her engorged breasts started to fade, she managed to raise her head to look up at Darian when he lifted his head and leaned over her. He looked shocked.

“You came from your breasts?”

She brought both of her hands up to her face and hid herself from him. It wouldn’t stop her raging blush from showing through everywhere else though.

“You are an extremely sexual woman!” he said. He sounded amazed, but she dared not look. She couldn’t let him see how embarrassed she was!

She shook her head. “No no no no.”

“Medusa.”

She cracked her fingers apart to take a peek between them at the man leaning over her. He’d drifted down further, placed his hands on both sides of her hips on the blankets, and was inching his face closer and closer to her swollen sex. She was drenched, she knew it, and now Darian was only six inches above her dripping lips; she could feel his breath on them.

“You’re soaked.”

“No no no no no.” She shook her head more, and re-hid her face completely. Her snake hair had collapsed against her scalp with the bliss of orgasm, but Medusa was glowing red and squirming under Darian’s gaze.

Squirms turned into wriggling mess when Darian’s lips found her swollen clit. She reached out with her hands to find his shoulders, and gripped him tight when the tiny, sensitive nub sent overwhelming sparks into her thighs and up into her chest. She squealed when he licked it.

“Gentle! Gentle… please… I’m ssso sssssensitive….” Because I just came from having my breasts played with. The thought alone redoubled her blushing.

Darian smiled over her clit, met her gaze with his fevered, hungry eyes, and did as she asked. His kiss became gentle, his tongue as well, and he closed his eyes as he bathed her bud in a tender rhythm. He was careful to not graze her with his whiskers, and instead brought one of his hands up her hip, onto her labia, and began to massage the wet warmth into her in a perfect back and forth of loving fingers.

She melted into the blankets. Royal embarrassment from how easily she surrendered to sexual bliss faded again, replaced with the haze of rising pleasure. The building waves of sparks, like sweet torture, grew and spread out from her center into her body, earning more whimpers and shudders from her. It was not long before another orgasm took her, her clitoris sending almost painful shocks through her system. Darian knew women, she could tell, because each time she came, he eased his kiss into the gentlest thing, and let her ride out the waves that made her body give off light spasms, and more juices.

Darian raised his face and smiled at her, but she could barely see it. Everything was blurry with orgasm aftershocks making her tremble, covered her eyes in a light glaze of tears, and robbed her of breath. She did manage to see Darian wipe away some of her overflowing juices from his lips though. She couldn’t get anymore embarrassed than she already was.

“I have never met a woman as sexual as you.”

“Don’t say that!” She raised one of her hands to her lips, covering her mouth, but Darian kept the other in his hand, and he kissed her knuckles.

Damn him, he was too smooth, too confident. He smiled at her and she gave up, like a young girl just swept off her feet. She was supposed to be older than him, damn it.

He gave her knuckle another kiss, but his other hand found her folds, and with his palm upturned, he eased his second and third finger into her aching muscles. She groaned, loudly, and squeezed his hand when he curled his fingers upward against the curves of her insides.

Her body was shaped a little differently than human women, she was sure. Her opening faced outward, instead of between legs, and curved upward into her body. That didn’t stop the beautiful, lean creature leaning over her waist though. He gave the spot inside her a couple more gentle caresses, and then started to press up on it, pressuring it, pushing it outward from her body.

She twisted, mewled, and pushed her hips up to meet his hand, but Darian forced herself to lay her scaly butt back down with his other hand on her belly. Darian chuckled at her, and resumed pumping her g-spot in a rough-but-not-too-rough rhythm.

“D-D-D-Darian!” She reached out and grabbed his wrists, and tried to say something. He started pumping her pussy harder, faster, and she couldn’t breathe. When she opened her mouth, all that came out was rapid fire panting filled with weak mewls and moans.

And then the orgasm started to work through her. Powerful, deep, it flowed out from her center and filled her chest, sparked into her breasts, before coursing down through her snake body. Her mouth hung open, her long forked tongue fell out between her lips, and her eyes welled with tears. Again she tried to speak, to tell Darian to stop, but no words came out. She could only hold on, and stare at the man with begging eyes; he was too focused on his hand to see them though. He pumped her harder, made her bounce against the blankets, and forced her juices from her trembling flesh. She soaked him all the more. Her cum splashed against his fingers and her pink, swollen muscles, only to be renewed with more juices when her muscles squeezed down, and forced more of her fluids out of her.

“Sss… ssstop.” She couldn’t get her voice to work; the best she could manage was a tiny whisper. She was seeing stars, her pussy’s muscles were trembling in painful pleasure, and her grip on his wrists loosened as she found the last bits of her strength robbed.

Darian stopped the moment she said the word. He blinked down at her pink flesh, the copious amount of fluids it had produced under his assault, and then looked up the valley of her body to her. She was a shaking, quivering mess, hyperventilating and convulsing in small, random spasms while the orgasms moved up and down her body in waves.

“T-too much,” she said. Her hands found his wrists again, and she held onto him with her trembling digits while the sparks of tingling bliss in her tender insides started to settle.

“Sorry! Sorry, just… wow. You’re so sexual, I couldn’t help myself.” Darian slid back up beside her, and laid down on the blankets. He held one of her hands in front of him, his body nestled up against her side, and stroked her knuckles. He watched her twitch in her orgasm aftershocks, and when she managed to turn to face him, he smiled. He leaned in too, and put a kiss on her cheek.

“It’ssss ok.” She tried to smile, but it didn’t last, she had to keep breathing to keep the white spots out of her eyes. She raised her free hand to her eyes, and wiped away the tears that had formed. “I’ve never… climaxed… sssso hard before.” Masturbating had never lead to blankets drenched in her juices.

“I’ll be gentler in the future. I shouldn’t have done that so hard, but… the sounds you make, seeing you cum so quickly, it’s just….” He lowered his head, and kissed her knuckle, but he didn’t meet her gaze anymore. He looked guilty.

She turned onto her hip to face him, and kissed his knuckle in return. Her snake hair did the same, bumping its many noses into the grooves of his fingers and drawing his eyes.

“I sssaid it’s ok. It felt amazing.” She slid a little closer until her breasts were against his chest, and she put her forehead to his again. “But, yesss, gentler next time please.” She shuddered a little, blissful shivers working up through her long snake body and into her chest. “… and rough again the time after that.” A small grin sneaked onto her lips, and she kissed the man in front of her.

He hooked his hand around her waist, and kissed her back.

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~~Darian~~

The two of them sat the by the dock, and watched the sun go down.

The past week had been a constant blur of sex, practice, sex, practice, until Darian was sure the gorgon had some sort of special gift of stamina. One moment, she'd be shooting arrows, and the next she'd be coiling around him and draining him dry. He never asked her for sex, still a bit afraid he might offend her, but even when he wanted to, Medusa was already on him.

Best time of his life.

His back was leaned against some of her snake body, his butt on the dock, and a piece of grass between his lips. He watched the sun tip over the horizon, until Apollo's light was just an orange blur of clouds and sparkling water. He wore a simple white chiton, left over from long ago and stored away by Medusa, and even some sandals. All the time in the quarry, and the thing he may have missed most was sandals.

Then he looked back up at Medusa, who was gazing at the sunset with the same quiet he was, and coiled into the smallest rings of length she could fit. Less than three weeks ago he was trying to not drown. Now he was neck deep back in the Fates' games, and bringing with him another innocent. Old habits die very hard.

“The Erinyes, they said we would know their approach by... hooves? And death’s hands?” Medusa said.

“Yeah. I don't understand either, but that's typical with those cryptic assholes.”

“I thought they were mostly sstraight with you, considering what few words they've ever muttered to mere mortals.”

He laughed. “That is true.”

“You said they'd provide supplies for usss as well?”

He nodded, and leaned back a little further to put his head against Medusa's scales. Stars were starting to shine above.

“They wouldn't want their prize fighters to run the gauntlet naked. They're expecting a show. It's what they want.”

“I... I know I'm not... I shouldn't....”

He sat up and turned to face her, a hand on her scales. “Yes?”

“I know I shouldn't ask, but....”

Gods, he felt like such shit, denying her answers. But it was for the better. Just the memories of memories, dancing on the edge of his mind, was enough to summon bile in his throat and get his bloodlust rising. No, this was definitely for the better.

But he could at least answer one question for now.

“We're tracking down something I was sent to kill.”

She almost gasped. “Something? Not someone?”

He offered a shrug, turned around again to put his head back up on her scales, and stared up at the sky. The stars were really starting to shine. Calming.

So he breathed deep, and started the story.

“Proetus, a king of Tiryns, wasn't very happy with me. But I was a guest at the time, so he wouldn't risk killing me himself; wouldn't want to piss off the Erinyes, killing a guest. Superstitious fool.” As if the Erinyes really cared about who killed who, for whatever reason. “So, he sent me to his wife’s father, King Iobates in Lycia, with instructions to kill me. But”—and this was the funny part—“the message was a secret, written in a note to be given to Iobates. Again, a king treated me as a guest, and it wasn't until I'd been a guest there for some time that he bothered to read the note.

“So now he's in the same boat as his son-in-law, can't kill me himself.” An edge was starting to rise in his voice. Sweet, delicious images of murder and bloodshed filled his mind, and he had to refocus on the stars above to ignore them. “Instead, he sends me to kill something, something he is sure will kill me, so he can avoid getting his hands bloody.” He leaned his head back further with a twist, just enough to see the shocked look on Medusa's face. “Worst of all, me being both ignorant of the situation, and more than willing to show off my skills like an idiot, I agree to his request like a great gift.

“So I accept his quest, and go gallivanting across Greece with Pegasus, until I'm in the deadliest fight of my life.” He sat back down again, folded his arms across his chest, and waited for the inevitable question.

“W-what did he send you to kill?”

“The Chimera.”

She did gasp this time, and brought her hands up to her mouth.

She knew of the Chimera, he was sure. Who didn't? That was the reason he accepted the quest, after all. What a glorious opportunity it was to show off how strong he was, how fast, dexterous, and smart. The irony was like poison on his tongue.

“Y-you live though! Ssssso it couldn't have gone... too badly?” Medusa said. She reached out for him, her torso in the middle of her coils, and she laid her body across rows of her snake length so she could dangle her arms over his shoulders from behind. He could feel her snake hair nuzzle against his neck and ears, and even hug around his throat.

“Yeah, I lived. Barely.” It was not a battle he wished to repeat.

“And kings... I... you sssurprise me, Darian.”

“Bellerophontes,” he said, and he couldn't avoid the sour note in his voice.

But Medusa shrugged it off and hugged him from behind. “You said you are Darian now, and I believe you.”

He chuckled and nuzzled his head back into her neck, eyes still pointed at the sky. “Thank you for that.” Maybe telling her all the dark, stupid shit from his past wouldn't be so bad.

“You said the Chimera. But from what the Fates said, it sounded like this thing we are to get help from is a person? I thought the Chimera was a massive beast, with the body of a lion, a goat head atop its back, and a snake for a tail!”

“Yeah. You'll see.” No fun to ruin the surprise now.

The wind picked up. The cool breeze of the sea overtook the land warmth, and earned a chill from Darian and Medusa when it crept up the shore onto the dock. Heavy clouds loomed overhead, filled the sky, and like a blanket, the clouds covered the stars. It grew dark, very dark, so dark Darian couldn't even see the end of the dock anymore. The moon was buried, and the last traces of dusk were long gone.

“It... perhaps... maybe the aid the Fates spoke of will arrive tomorrow morning?” Medusa said.

Darian got up and stared out into the black water. The Fates, make a mistake? Not a chance. He walked further out onto the dock, each step growing a little more cautious as he lost the ability to see. But his ears demanded he go.

He strained his hearing against the wind. Something was out there. The stirred water was hitting something, and something was hitting the water. The telltale back and forth of rowing started to rise over the howl of the air, and the splashing of water against hull became clear.

But he still couldn't see anything.

Medusa slithered out across the dock to join him, and they both came to the edge. She must have heard it too, it was loud by then. The water was hitting something right in front of them, and the sound of oars hitting water didn't stop either.

Both of them almost screamed when some rope landed on the dock.

“Hey, boy! Pull her in would you?”

Darian and Medusa looked at each other, then the rope on the dock, and then back out into the blackness.

“S-show yourself!” the gorgon said.

“Of course! Of course of course. Sorry about, just had to make sure it was the right stop after all.” A warm chuckle, bright and full carried across the waves. Whoever was talking had the voice of a singer.

A green light ten feet off the in the water appeared. A lantern, dangling from the bow of what looked to be a small boat, big enough for maybe ten or twenty men to sit comfortably. Someone was on it, and they had horns.

“... you can't be serious,” Darian said. “A satyr?”

“Problem with satyrs?” the crewman said, and grinned a sly grin at Darian.

Darian rolled his eyes and started to pull the vessel closer by the rope. The green lantern was both subtle, and yet it provided enough light for him to work by. Soon, the boat was nested against the dock, and Darian stepped past Medusa to keep himself between the stranger and her.

“Not exactly, but I've never known a satyr to be able to focus on a single job without his dick running away with him.” He gestured to the vessel. “Much less work as a servant of the Fates.”

“Yes well, my dick is well taken care of.” The Satyr chuckled, hopped out of the boat with the enthusiasm of a child, and chuckled again. Darian was already starting to hate him. “The name's Gallea.”

Gallea looked like most satyrs, standing a bit shorter than the average man – he was as tall as Darian – and he had small horns protruding from the sides of his head that curled backward around pointy ears. He looked a bit older than Darian had ever seen in a satyr, maybe in his mid-forties, long brown hair pulled back between his horns, and he boasted a jolly smile with mischievous eyes.

Darian could already see a bit of himself in the satyr; probably why he didn't like him.

The satyr was human from the waist up except for the horns, and goat from the waist down. While a leather vest of some kind covered his chest, a brown sash dangled between the front and back of his legs against the fur of his body that reached his hooves.

Hooves, of course. Darian smacked his own forehead. Now all that was left was the death's hands, whatever those would be.

“So you’re the mighty Bellerophontes, mmm?” The satyr approached him, eyed him up and down like a sculpture on display, and snickered at him. “Small thing aren’t yeah?”

“You’re one to talk.”

“Yes but I’m no fighter. You won’t see me fighting the Chimera, not in Tartarus or Elysium.” He chuckled all the more, reached out to put a hand on Darian’s shoulder, and walked past him. “Now, I heard I was also escorting a woman? Strange to be taking a lady on — whoa!”

Gallea jumped back so far he almost landed in the water, but his hooves slid on the wet wood right from under him. He landed on his ass, and then rolled backward into the black abyss with a splash.

Darian tried to help him, he really did, but the laughter stopped him like a punch to the gut. Medusa wasn’t so amused. She frowned at him, slithered past him along the dock, and reached down over the edge.

“I’m sorry!” she said. “I… um….”

She lifted the shocked Satyr into the air like he weighed nothing, and put his soaked body back onto the dock.

“I’ll be damned. Medusa the gorgon? That’s who we’re taking?” He held up a finger, coughed to the side, wiped some water from his face to the other side, and took Medusa’s hand into his. Darian tensed, but Gallea started shaking her hand like a devoted fan. “Medusa! I must say, you are quite famous among us half beasts of the wood.”

“I… I am?”

“Yes! Gods, such a horrible fate, and yet you still live after all these years, despite all those damned heroes like him” —he gestured Darian’s way— “coming to kill you.”

Darian stepped up to them, with every intention of getting between them and putting a fist into the satyr’s face, but Medusa slid a part of her tail to block the path. On purpose or because she was bathing in the worship, he couldn’t tell.

“Oh, I… well….”

“No need to be shy! Come on, Pinna will be so excited to meet you.” Gallea kept one hand on hers, and guided her to the edge of the dock where the vessel remained.

“Pinna?”

“Shipmate, and my wife. She hasn’t talked with another woman in ages. The ship really isn’t much for company.” Gallea jumped into the vessel, splashing water everywhere with his soaked clothes and fur, but he didn’t seem to care anymore. Excited like a child, he turned around again and held out a hand for Medusa. “There should be enough room for you. Just pay no mind to the mindless oafs rowing the ship.”

So this wasn’t the main ship, good. Darian followed after Medusa, and wondered what sort of vessel they’d be on after this hopefully short trip with the smaller vessel. And who was rowing it? Mindless oafs?

Medusa screamed. Darian jumped into the vessel after her.

“What have — what in Tartarus.”

Jumping onto the ship was like passing through an invisible barrier. Once on the ship, the green glow of the lantern, only a subtle shimmer in the black from outside, was quite bright, more than strong enough to light up the length of the vessel. And while the ship was long enough for Medusa’s body, it had half-a-dozen men on each side of the ship, oar shafts in hand.

Skeletons.

Their eyes glowed with the same green of the lantern — how could he not see them when not on the ship? — and their mouths leaked green mist that glowed with the same light. Their wore tattered rags that weren’t even enough to hide their arrays of ribs, and the grime of sea had built up on their bodies like rocks left in the water. They didn’t move.

“Sorry about that. Charon’s servants don’t make for much chatter. But they’re harmless.” To prove his point, the satyr hopped down from the bow of the vessel, and punched one of the skeletons in the skull so hard, the skull fell off. The skeleton, with a slow and casual movement, twisted around, picked its skull up off the boards, and put it back on. “See? Dumb as clay.”

Medusa stared at the dozen undead like a nightmare had come along and pricked her tongue with a needle.

“Charon,” Darian said, and he groaned under his breath. “The Fates are working with Hades now?”

“The Fates have their hands in many jars, Bellero—”

“Darian.”

“… Darian is it now? Alright, Darian, the Fates weave more threads than our simple mortal lives. You think a Fate’s Child is their only concern?”

Medusa, pulled away from the horror by the conversation, looked at Darian and mouthed the word ‘Fate’s Child,’ confused.

He sighed, surrendered, and nodded to her, before looking back to Gallea. “I was hoping they’d leave me be. I’d been left alone for some time.”

“To rot in a quarry, from what I hear.” The satyr pointed at Darian’s forehead. “Was it worth it?”

He almost started yelling, maybe throw a fist or two, but a little voice in his head stopped him. He looked Medusa’s way too, and she slithered closer to the bow of the ship to coil around him, what little she could with the room available.

“It was,” he said, and he took Medusa’s hand into his. She was shivering, and she kept glancing back over her shoulder at the undead. Worse, he could see her scaled length trying to find a way to grip the boat’s boards and seats enough to settle, but without touching the legs of the skeletons, or letting the back and forth of waves unsettle her.

“Oh, a couple now are we, the gorgon and the hero?” Gallea said.

Medusa blinked, looked at Darian, back at Gallea, and back at Darian.

Darian supposed he could have said nothing. Hilarious thoughts ran through his mind. Were they a couple? Were they together? What would their parents think? What would their friends think? Or something equally as idiotic as saying ‘no, it’s too dangerous for us to be together.’ For just a moment, he imagined the long, drawn out romantic tragedy that was the two of them trying to get over their personal fears and accept that they wanted to be together; it would of course end in the death of both of them, as such moronic stories did. He entertained the idea of such stupid responses for half a second.

“We are.”

Medusa tilted her head at him, and her eyes opened wide, wider, and a little wider, until he was sure he could see around whole of the yellow in them. She squeezed his hand tighter, and leaned in against him to rest her forehead against his so her snake hair could nuzzle into his neck. Her smile was so huge, Darian couldn’t help but smile back and nudge back against her.

Gallea chuckled. “Maybe I said something too soon? Ah, no matter. All’s well that ends well. Boys! Back to Charon’s ship!”

The undead all sat up straight in perfect synchronization, and just like a cog in some weird, Athenian invention, turned the ship. One side rowed forward, the other pushed against the dock with their oars, and then rowed backward. Once they were pointed out into the black nothingness, they went forward.

“H-how do you ssssssee?” Medusa said.

“The light works much better for showing what’s on the ship, doesn’t it?” Gallea raised the green lantern from the ship bow and waved it through the air in slow motions. “If you’re not on the ship, this is barely more than a firefly. Still, it doesn’t help me see me off the ship. For that, I have to trust these fools.” Again the satyr punched one of the skeletons in the skull, but the skull only pulled back a ways before settling onto the undead thing’s shoulders. Its rowing went uninterrupted.

“Scary,” she said. “Death’s hands.”

Gallea chuckled. “Bah, death’s hands? Sounds like Fates talk to me. These are just bones.”

“Moving bones! Glowing, moving bones!” She pointed to the glowing eyes.

“They’re Charon’s leftovers, no soul, just mindless drones scooped up from the river Styx.” Gallea stepped up closer to the bow, and held the lantern out over the water.

Darian could see Medusa was torn, afraid and excited. She was looking over the boat’s side to look into the black; it was the first time she’d ever been on a boat since her curse. But, she had a youthful curiosity to her that made Darian jealous. She’d come so damn far in the small time he’d known her. Her slithering body reached out a little, just enough so she could lean up and over to gaze in the direction they were moving, and her eyes were wide with a happy grin on her parted lips.

And she also kept looking his way. The gorgon lowered her torso down to him again, and nudged her head into his before putting her lips right to his ear.

“A couple?”

“Sorry, just sort of came out.”

“No, no… I like that.” She squeezed around him with her coils in a slow and tender caress. “I like that a lot.”

He breathed deep, relaxed, and nudged his head back into hers. “Good. Because I like you a lot.” And this journey has me petrified you’ll get hurt. He tried to hide the thought with another cocky smile, but Medusa put a hand on his face and held his jaw with her fingers.

“It’ll be ok,” she said. “I sssurvived a century alone, hero. I defended myself against the best Greece had to throw at me. I’m sstill here.”

He blinked, looked down, and back up into her yellow eyes. That was true, wasn’t it? She didn’t know how to use a sword or a bow, and yet she’d taken down dozens of warriors in her life time. Hell, despite her almost childish enthusiasm, she was much older than he was. He was the youngster in this relationship. He really needed to get his head out of his ass and stop thinking she needed his protection.

“You’re right, you’re right. I—”

A loud splash stopped him, before a spray of cold sea water hit them.

“Ag, sorry about that. Bitch woman threw the ladder down without warning. Pinna! What in Tartarus crawled up your ass and died?”

“Your dick!” A woman’s voice, with the same bright and full tone of a singer as Gallea.

“I wish,” Gallea said to no one.

Medusa uncoiled from Darian, careful of her small space on the boat, and moved her human half toward the bow of the ship and Gallea. “Um… oh!”

Darian followed her, careful with his steps on the creaking boat, and looked out over the edge.

A ladder was in front of them, just barely lit up by the green lantern. Solid wood ladder, floating in the air. No, not the air. Darian leaned in closer, and strained his eyes against the black; he could see wood. A wall of wood rose high over them, the same color as the night sky, and with the same smell of the ancient sea.

This was a ship. A massive ship.

“Up you go, good woman. Pinna will help you,” Gallea said.

“And just who am I helping?”

“You’ll see when she’s up there!”

The darkness whined with annoyance. “Course I will!”

Medusa looked back at Darian, anxiety on her face, but he shrugged at her and nodded. It was safe, the Fates wouldn’t arrange this madness just to kill Medusa or himself there. There’d be no climax there, no story.

Medusa put her hands onto the ladder, and stopped. “I… uh… not sure if this will support me.”

“Charon’s goods are not of this world, my good woman. If he can drag a cyclops by a tooth across all the rivers of Greece with a splinter, this ladder will hold you.” Gallea hopped closer, stood on the boat’s side, hands braced against the larger ship — it looked like he was leaning against the night air — and helped motion Medusa up the ladder. “Just squeeze it on the way up.”

Even in the night, Darian could see the woman blush. Monster or no monster, she was not happy about trying to heft her weight.

But that didn’t stop her. She took a breath, spent a few moments wrapping her long snake length around and in between rungs of the ladder, and started to climb up. Darian watched after her, a bit panicked at the idea of her falling into the sea; he had no idea if she could swim with that body.

A few moments later, she was gone into the darkness above.

Darian approached the ladder, reached for it, but when Gallea moved up behind him, Darian snapped his hand out and grabbed the satyr’s throat.

“Ack… wha…”

“Sshhh.” Darian picked the satyr up, put his back against the black wood before him, and pinned him there. His grip tightened, enough to block the creature’s breathing, and ride close to the edge of damaging flesh. “Listen closely.” Darian leaned in further, and he let the anger in him build until bloodlust was on his tongue and his eyes started to blur white at the edges once more. The look in Gallea’s face told him he recognized the white glow in Darian’s eyes, the same as the Fates’. “If this is a plot to betray me, I will crush your nuts with clay bricks and feed you the pulp.” Gallea’s eyes widened all the more as he struggled with his grip around Darian’s immovable forearm. “And if any harm comes to Medusa, I’ll not only crush your bits, I’ll kill your wife and feed you her entrails. Understood?”

Gallea nodded, eyes watering.

“Good.” He let Gallea go, and tried his best to ignore the man’s pained coughing. He didn’t want to do that, but he couldn’t trust this man, and the tough-guy routine was usually enough to put people in line.

Maybe not this time though, with the Fates as this guy’s master. The worry ate at him. The Fates wouldn’t betray him, at least not yet. They’d want a grand spectacle after all, with spectators and a true battle.

Darian climbed the ladder, hopped over the edge, and gasped.

The ship was gargantuan, but the shocking part was how empty it was. There was no mast, no crew, no anything. It was just a big, flat deck, and a very long one. A couple hundred men could have fit on the deck with no issue for space. A few lanterns and their deathly green flames hung from posts that lined the sides of the ship, invisible to anyone not on the ship itself. Charon’s magic was frightening.

He took a step forward, and looked down. The vast, empty deck had many windows built into it that looked downward, all lined with wooden bars. When he looked down, he could see nothing except tiny green, glowing lights.

More eyes of undead. The ship’s interior was filled with them, a mountain of bones fit for a tribute to Ares or Hades himself.

In the center of the empty deck, Medusa was staring down through one of the square holes, her hands on the bars and her face and snake hair pressed to it. “So many!”

“I thought those undead scared you?” Darian said.

“They do, but… there’s so many. They look like an army.”

She had better eyes than him if she could see details. He could only see green lights and shadowy movements. He recognized the movement at least: rowing.

“Charon is most generous.” Another satyr walked up to them, a woman, dressed in the same leather vest and waist sash as her husband. “You must be Bellerophontes. I’ve heard much about you.”

Darian winced. “Call me Darian now, please. The less people that know who I am, the better.”

“Darian then? Alright.” She shrugged, and hopped over to Medusa. “And you’re going on this journey with the mighty Medusa? You know she’s going to be hunted everywhere she goes!”

This Pinna was a handsome woman, someone with some strength in her face and a bite to her eyes. She seemed about the same age as Gallea, long blond hair combed behind smaller horns, and tanned skin.

“Where’s Gall—”

“Here, here.” Gallea climbed up over the side of the boat and rubbed at his throat, but otherwise gave no signs of what Darian did to him. He waved lightly Darian’s way, and walked up to his fellow satyr.

“What happens to the smaller boat?” Medusa said.

“Back under the water. It’ll come when we need it. Same for this here ship.” Gallea tapped his hoof on the deck a couple times. “Right from the bowls of the underworld.”

Medusa looked terrified at the prospect. Even Darian shuddered. If it wasn’t for the happy-go-lucky attitude of the two satyrs, the whole trip would have seemed like a horrible nightmare into Tartarus.

Pinna walked over to Darian. “We have instructions to take you to the coast of Laconia. It will take some days to travel that far, but we will settle on shorelines when we can.”

“T-thank you,” Medusa said. “I… I’m already… feeling nauseous.”

Darian smiled at her, and reached up to pat the small of her back. After a hundred years on land, she had no sea legs. Or legs. He tried not to chuckle.

“What if we’re seen in the day? This ship isn’t exactly normal,” Darian said.

Pinna shook her head. “In the day, we’ll be nothing but an unusual fog to outside eyes. In the meantime, there are cabins you can sleep in. I… don’t know if they’ll work for you, Medusa, but I’m sure we can work something out.” The woman held out a hand for gorgon.

Medusa looked at Pinna, then Darian, then back and forth a few times. It wasn’t until Darian gave her a nod that she took Pinna’s hand, and let the satyr escort her to the back of the ship. While the ship’s deck was vast and empty, there was a raised section in the back with a door. At least they’d have a place to sleep.

Once they were out of earshot, Gallea wandered up to him, and he had a frown on his face. So the happy man was capable of anger. Good to know.

“You have some nerve to accuse me, Fate’s Child.”

It was Darian’s turn to frown. “You telling me you wouldn’t be suspicious in my circumstances?”

“I would, but I wouldn’t attack everyone and anything at the drop of a hat because of that suspicion.”

Darian stepped toward the satyr. Gallea took a small step back. That slight hint of fear in his movements was all Darian needed to see, so he dismissed the man with a tiny wave of his fingers, and walked toward the bow of the ship.

Gallea was not so easily dismissed though. “From what the messengers told me, we would be taking you, a companion, and probably others across much of Greece, Bellerophontes.” Now he was sure the satyr was testing his patience on purpose. “Charon lent us one of his great ships. The Fates have personally requested your aid. Aid! Something horrible must have happened to cause such a ruckus.”

Oh, the satyr didn’t know? Darian nodded, and leaned over the front of the ship with his hands on the railing. He could barely see a thing, with the weird barrier the ship kept between his eyes and outside, but he could feel the ship had started moving, guided by the whim of the undead. He shivered.

“One of the Moirai masks has been stolen.”

“Ah, that.” Gallea nodded and pulled himself to sit up on the railing. Despite his slip on the dock, the satyr had good balance. Darian was sure he probably played as a performer for crowds in the past. “I knew that was bad, but I didn’t expect it to cause this trouble.”

“Do you know what those masks are capable of?” Darian said.

Gallea shrugged. “We’re not all as privileged to be the Fates’ favorite, ‘Darian.’”

Darian rolled his eyes. Favorite? Cast aside like food scraps when they were done with him? Not exactly how you treat a favorite.

“There is power in those masks. The Fates wield the thread of people’s lives, but the masks give them that power. If someone has one of the masks, then they’ve gained a dangerous—”

“Weapon. Then why would they trust you to fetch it?”

Darian squinted at him. Perhaps the satyr didn’t know about Pegasus then, or the deal Darian made with the Fates to meet with Athena.

“Ask them,” he said. “And for that matter, why do the Fates trust you to aid me?”

“Because my wife and I are aedos of course. We’re going to record and sing this tale! The Fates would accept nothing less than a grand epic.”

Darian glared at the satyr with eyes hard enough to kill. “Fuck you.”

“You are a hard man to deal with, Bellerophontes,” Gallea said, and hopped back down off the railing.

Darian chuckled again, and looked back into the black water. “Wait until you meet the next recruit.”

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~~Medusa~~

Medusa slithered around in the cabin. No room, no room at all. The vast ship had plenty of deck space, but the cabin rooms — which she admitted were an amazing luxury to have on a ship — were small. She could only just barely fit into one when she coiled on the floor of the room. She kept herself off the bed, since Darian would need a place to sleep. A bed on a boat. The idea made her laugh, and also nauseous. The sea did not treat her stomach kindly.

Pinna poked her head in through the doorway. “I know I know. Tiny. I’m sorry, I had no idea the famous Medusa would be a guest on Charon’s ship.”

“Gallea said that too. Famousss? I don’t understand… Athena cursed me.”

“That she did.” Pinna stepped into the cabin enough to lean against the door frame, and pulled some of her long blond hair in front of her to twist its length around her fingers. “But we both know the gods are fickle things. You’ll find no ire toward you from beast folk.”

Medusa nodded, and made another attempt at settling into a coil she could find comfortable.

“I had thought maybe… if you serve the Fates, or Charon, or Hades, or… if you serve the gods, then maybe you would be bound by their rulings.” She danced on the subject with as graceful words she could find, but there was no getting around it; she was afraid to be in the presence of those who served the gods. It wouldn’t take much for someone to come into her room at night and chop off her head.

“We serve the Fates, Medusa, not Athena or Poseidon. And besides, I think you’ll find the gods do not agree on much, and where you may offend one, you befriend another.”

“Oh?”

“Indeed. I’ve seen much, traveling the world under the eye of the Fates. I’ve seen kingdoms squabble over women, and gods squabble over kingdoms. And Athena, in all her so-called wisdom, is just as fickle as any woman.”

Medusa laughed. “That does make me feel better.” She slithered further along the edge of the walls around the room, and looked out a porthole into the endless black. The sea was out there, cold waves, a cool breeze, salt on the air. Never, ever had she considered she’d be here, on a ship, setting sail and going on an adventure.

Adventure. If she kept thinking of it like an adventure, she was going to get killed, or get Darian killed.

“You and Bellerophontes. You seem awfully close.”

“We are!” Finally, a woman to gossip with! Forgive me the indulgence, Darian. “He showed up on the island, and I was fighting off some warriors from Athens. He saved my life, for no reason at all.”

Pinna swooned. “That is terribly romantic.”

Medusa nodded, big smile on her face. But, the memory of the fight crept on the edges of her mind, images of Darian brutalizing those two warriors like they were nothing. Like they were sacks of meat. It chilled her.

“Bellerophontes is a dangerous man, Medusa.”

Medusa blinked at the satyr. The other woman could read either read her mind, or Medusa was just too damn easy to read. The snake hair, now drooping at the thought of Darian’s brutality, didn’t help.

“He is.” She nodded. No use denying it.

“If we ever travel to Tiryns or Lycia, we’ll have to be extra careful.”

Opportunity knocked. Medusa looked Pinna’s way, then slithered her top half closer to the satyr, and peeked out the doorway. The hallway ended in a door that lead out onto the deck, and with the door closed, they had some privacy. She leaned in closer to Pinna, and spoke in a whisper.

“Darian doesn’t like to talk about what happened to him.”

“I can imagine he doesn’t.”

“He told me about what King Iobates and Proetus did to him, sending him away to be killed.”

“… did he tell you why?”

“No, no he didn’t.”

Pinna nodded. “I imagine he doesn’t want to talk about it.”

Medusa could already feel the guilt working up her tail like needles, but she just had to know.

“Can you tell me a little?”

Pinna snickered and leaned in closer. “No one knows this except the wind and the Fates, so don’t tell a soul.”

Medusa nodded, but could not hide her massive grin. This was fun.

“Proetus’s wife tried to seduce Bellerophontes — Darian. He turned her down.”

Medusa gasped. “Is she an attractive woman?”

“Oh yes, very. Beautiful as the sun, and just as searing. When Darian declined her, she told Proetus that he’d tried to rape her.”

Medusa gasped again. Her poor Darian; the hapless man suffered betrayal at every turn! No wonder he had such an angry soul.

Pinna continued. “But he’d treated Darian as a guest before then, so he couldn’t kill him himself, lest those damn Erinyes come to haunt him. You know the rest of the story if Darian already talked to you.”

“I do,” Medusa said. She could feel the grin on her lips, but she couldn’t push it away. Darian had denied a queen, a beautiful one at that, but had bathed in Medusa for a week. Pride and joy flowed out into her snake hair until the infuriating limbs were dancing on her head.

But why was Darian in Tiryns in the first place? How did he know the king? The questions itched inside her skull, but she pushed them down. She had to respect his privacy, and he said he’d tell her sooner or later.

“And you, Medusa? Where did you hail from before those horrible things happened to you?”

Gods, her life before? So long ago, a century, the memories were hazy and blurred with imagination; she could barely tell what was a memory anymore and what was just her self-told stories.

“It’s hard to remember. I was just a woman. I lived in Athens. I served the gods. Athena, Aphrodite, and Eleos were my idols. I had a normal father, a normal mother… I think my mother was a baker, and my father worked with trade goods. I….” She frowned and lowered her torso onto some of her coiled snake length. Her snake hair drooped down along her shoulders, nuzzled into her neck and jaw, before coming to a stop between her shoulders. “I was no one.”

“Beller — Darian doesn’t seem to think so. I saw the look in his eye. That man cares a lot for you.”

A grin forced its way onto her cheeks again. “I care a lot for him too.”

“Then I hope this journey goes well for you, Medusa. We’re sailing to Peloponnese, and a century has not wained their god-fearing ways. People know your name, and they know Athena is the one who cursed you.”

“I know. But I won’t let Darian do this journey alone, for me.”

“For you?” Pinna said, and tilted her head to the side.

“I… I should not speak of it. Darian may explain if you ask him, but it is private.”

Pinna nodded, and patted the air with both her hands. “I understand. I—” Creaking wood turned Pinna’s head. “Ah, Darian. Your companion is settling in… or trying. Sorry, there’s only the two rooms, and neither are large.” She gestured to the door behind her across the hall, where her own bed must have been.

“Thanks. I — oh.” When Darian came into view, he snickered at the sight of Medusa and how she took up the whole room. “Comfy?”

“No.” She frowned at him, but reached out, grabbed his hand, and pulled him into the center of the room. He was light enough she could drag him across her snake length to no worry, and plop him down in the center of her coils to sit against her snake body. “You have a bed though,” she said, and gestured to the bed in the side of the room.

“Hmmm. Help me with this.” Darian climbed across her coils, grabbed one end of the bed, and lifted.

“Um, ok.” She took the other side of the bed, and helped him lift it.

The whole situation was a horrible mess of awkward body movements, but eventually Darian got the bed out the door and tossed the furniture frame out onto the deck. Once the bed was gone, Medusa had enough room to coil comfortably.

“This will be fine,” he said when he came back. He climbed over her coils again, got back into the center spot where she had put him, and sat down. He leaned back against her scales, rested his head against her, netted his fingers on his stomach, and closed his eyes.

She giggled, laid her torso along the scaled length behind him, and put a hand on his chest. The others could be scared of Darian if they wanted, she knew he had a soft side.

“As you wish,” Pinna said. Medusa could see a bit of surprise on her face though. “We’ll be stop near Hydra in a couple days for supplies, and then it’ll be a short trip to Laconia. The Fates said you would need the help of someone in Laconia, near Sparta?”

Darian nodded I will. “It seems I will, to track down whoever stole from the Fates. He’s the only one who can find something the Fates can’t.”

Pinna tapped her fingers on her chin and quirked a brow. “How’s he going to do that?”

“No idea.”

Pinna frowned, then shrugged and bowed. “Rest easy. No one will find this ship, night or day.” With that, the satyr left. The cabin room had no door to close, but she closed to door to the deck behind her, leaving Darian and Medusa alone.

“You should be nicer to them,” Medusa said, and she slipped her fingers into Darian’s hair. With him sitting against her snake body and relaxed, he was like her little doll she could play with. There was something satisfying about running her fingers through his hair, something she had not done in a century; snake hair was not the same.

Darian sighed, relaxed under her touch. “They work for the Fates.”

“Did you not, in the past?”

“I was tricked. I didn’t know I was working for them, I….” He shook his head, but when she thought he was about to get up, he eased back into her fingers and relaxed once more. “You’re right. I’ll try and be nicer.”

“Good.

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When they landed on Hydra, they kept to the shore in secret, and only stayed long enough to gather provisions. Medusa could feel the pull of the unknown demand she explore — how much she had changed in so little time — but it wasn’t worth the danger. She wanted to explore, to genuinely slither across those new and unknown cliffs and fields, but she made herself stay by the mist-hidden ship, where it was safe.

It was a different story when they finally arrived on the shores of Laconia, part of the mainland of Greece. This time, they didn’t land to get provisions, they landed to set out on a journey. A real, honest to gods journey. Her enthusiasm had her slithering on the beach in circles, but every time she looked further out toward the mainland, she froze.

“It’s… been so long, since I’ve seen different trees,” she said.

Darian had stepped further up the shore, and Medusa watched him from the distance. He was no longer wearing robes, but instead was dressed in the armor of a hoplite, a rich one who could afford only the best; a gift from the Fates Darian was loath to accept. He looked dashing though, she admitted, with his tall sandals that connected into obsidian greaves. His armor was a beautiful breastplate, ebony, with many black straps hanging from its waist to protect his thighs. It contrasted nicely against the white tunic he wore underneath it all, and the silver engravings along his armor that highlighted muscle with embellishment.

He carried a sword on his left hip, sheathed in its black scabbard, and round shield of ebony on his back. The shield had a drawing of silver on its face as well: a circle of thread. In his left hand he carried a spear, and under his right arm he carried his helmet, a Corinthian ebony helmet with all the same embellishments as the rest of his new equipment. The helmet was even topped with a crest of beautiful white horse hair.

“The Fates are going to get me killed,” he called out to her from his perch up the beach, “wearing this garbage. Fancy, silver and black? I look like a… a….”

“A hero sent from the Fates?” she said, and slithered up to join him. Slow, Medusa, go slow. The feel of new rocks, new sand, new dirt underneath her bronze belly scales was making her shake with excitement and anxiety.

“Yes! Wearing this, I might as well be wearing a sign that says ‘notice me.’ We’ll never get anywhere without being noticed in this garbage.”

“Did you expect to get anywhere with me and not get noticed?”

A little further, a little further. With a deep breath, she pulled herself up the small cliff face, off the shore, and onto a new land. Before her, rolling plains of green grass went as far as the eye could see, disappearing into forests and mountains that rolled and rolled on to the horizon. It was all so much bigger than her island. Breathe, Medusa, breathe.

While Darian was dressed in obsidian and silver armor, Medusa received no such gifts. She wore the same wraps around her hips and chest as before — now wrapped in an extra band to her annoyance — and she also carried a quiver and bow from her island. The Fates did not care about her, and that was to be expected. Still, she felt naked compared to her companion.

Darian groaned, look at her, and after taking a moment to look her up and down, managed a chuckle. “No, I guess I didn’t.”

“You both take care of yourselves.” Gallea jumped up the beach with a goat’s hopping grace, and leapt up onto the low cliff edge to join them. “Pinna and I will be here on the shore. Come find us, we’ll summon the ship, and we’ll be off to our next destination in no time. Wherever that is.”

“Thanks for everything Gallea, Pinna,” Medusa said, and she reached down to shake Gallea’s hand, and Pinna’s too when the other satyr jumped up to join them.

Pinna put down two large carrying sacks, and shook Medusa’s hand with both of hers. “Here, this should be enough food and water for a few day’s journey at least. I trust you both to fend for yourselves, what with living on that island for so long.”

Medusa nodded. “We can. Again, thank you.”

She flicked the tip of her tail at Darian’s back.

“Ah, I… thanks.” Darian made no effort to hide his loud sigh, but even he reached out to shake their hands. And they returned it too, though Medusa could see Gallea and Darian eying each other like angry dogs. “And if we come running needing a quick escape?”

“Ah well then you’re fucked,” Gallea said, and he put an arm around Pinna with a smile. “You saw the boneheads. Slow as balls. So either come in secret or don’t come at all.”

Darian rolled his eyes. “Right right. Well, cya.” With that, her companion put his helmet onto the top of one of the bags, picked it up, and started to walk off without a look back.

Medusa frowned after him, but before doing the same, she turned, and gave Pinna a tight hug.

“Thank you,” she said, again.

“By the gods girl, you’ll be back soon I’m sure,” the satyr said, but she patted Medusa on the back all the same. “We can wait here for weeks if need be.”

“You’re the first woman I’ve talked with in a century, and as much as I love talking with Darian, it’s not the same as talking with another woman.” She’d even learned to control her S’s with all the practice. No more unwanted hisses.

“Then I hope we can gossip more when you come back.”

Medusa nodded, shook off the anxiety with another deep breathe, picked up the last bag, and slithered off. She made sure to turn around as she did though, and wave again. And again. And then again, for good measure, before the two satyrs disappeared behind the twist and turns of the rolling hills.

“Did you really hate them that much?” Medusa said, slithering along beside Darian, her long, thick snake body following behind them almost thirty feet.

“No.”

“You seemed to. You’re usually a warm person, but any time Pinna or Gallea were near, you turned cold.”

He nodded. So he noticed it too, at least.

“I… yeah, I’m sorry. I know I said I’d be nice, but I couldn’t trust them.”

“They seemed like perfectly nice people — satyrs, to me.”

“They did. People usually do.” He adjusted the strap of the sack on his shoulder, and looked up to her while they walked. “It’s a mask though, it’s not them. Just like the Fates, people are masks, and the person underneath is not someone you know, or often, would want to know.”

“D… do you think that way about me?”

“No,” he said, and he smiled at her, that warm smile that he’d been hiding since the arrival of Charon’s ship. “Why do you think I like you so much?”

Damn it. Every time she tried to get angry with Darian, he said something that wisped away her frustration and replaced it with joy. She could already feel her snake hair dancing on her head with delight.

“Is that why you denied King Proetus’s wife?”

“Ah, so Pinna told you about that?”

“Yes. We gossiped about you and Gallea quite a bit.” Medusa giggled a little at some stories Pinna had said that stuck with her. “She didn’t tell me much about you though, except about the queen, and what lead to your quest to defeat the Chimera.”

“I should thank her for respecting my privacy then,” he said with a nod. “But, yes, partially. She was a queen and she was a manipulator, like they all are in royalty. She said a lot of things, but really she just wanted to control me.”

Control Darian? Why?

“… you said partially?”

“Yeah. I also didn’t bed her cause I know better than to stick my dick where it doesn’t belong.”

Medusa snorted on a laugh, and put a hand up to her face to cover her lips and nose in dismay. But Darian snickered at her horribly unfeminine display, and reached out to touch her hip with his spear-wielding hand.

“So, excited?” he said, and he motioned to the open land before them with the spear. “To the West is Sparta, but thankfully we’re heading South West. We should be able to avoid most traffic. Hunters roam these lands though; we’ll need to be careful.”

The idea of someone finding her was a scary one, but Darian was there to help her if needed. And, though she knew she shouldn’t, a small part of her entertained the thought of meeting a human who didn’t want her dead.

“I am excited, and terrified.” She looked down at her hands, and frowned at how her fingertips still shook with the rush of it all. “You said South West. What’s that way?”

“I fought the Chimera in Lycia, but in the battle, he mentioned his home in Laconia, South of Sparta. If he survived his battle with me, I’m sure he managed to find a way across the sea to get back here.”

“He mentioned his home?”

“Sort of randomly? He’s a… he’s weird. Speaks like ‘I am from the land of blah, and I will blah’ sort of stuff.”

She giggled again. “You like to laugh in the face of danger.”

“Laugh? No. But it never hurt to crack a smile.”

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Night time. The clouds of Charon’s ship were gone, the moon and stars were out, and the breeze was cool but pleasant.

“We’re going to ssssleep… outside? On the grass?” she said.

“Yeap.”

“But, what about animals?”

Darian shrugged. “Even if animals were a threat, they’d only be a threat to humans. They’ll avoid you, you’re much deadlier.”

That made her smile, but it faded when Darian started unrolling his bedroll, and threw it out onto the grass near a large tree. They were so exposed! On her island, she was closed off from everything else, but out here in the Peloponnese open land, the unknown hills and unknown trees were hiding eyes, starring at her.

“Come on,” he said, “you’ll get used to it. Here, coil up near me and I’ll keep you safe.” He said ‘safe’ with a big, teasing grin on his face. He took off his breastplate and set it down by the tree, before laying down on his bedroll.

She frowned at him, but did exactly exactly as he said. She coiled around his sleeping spot, and laid her human half across her snake body right next to above him. From there, she could look down at him, and reach down to stroke his hair some more.

“Do you plan to comfort me until I sleep?” he said, and nudged his head upward into her touch.

“This is for me! It’s relaxing.” She stuck her long tongue out at him.

“Come on, put your bedroll right here next to me. I know it’s meant for a human, but you can still put that bit of you on it and lay next to me?”

She nodded, that was true. And in fact, she reached over to her bag and did just that. She unattached the bedroll, laid it down on the grass beside Darian, and adjusted her snake half so she could lay her torso down onto the blanket. On her side, she was facing Darian, and she could reach out and touch him with her hands while she got comfortable.

He took her hand in his and held it to his chest. He was still wearing his white tunic, and she fidgeted with the fabric in her fingers.

“Better?” he said.

“Yes.” She slithered her human half a little closer until they were almost touching, and leaned in to nudge her forehead against his. It was a joy to see her snake hair nuzzle into his jaw and neck, and for Darian to nuzzle her hair right back. It calmed her.

“People don’t travel the roads by night, and there aren’t any roads for miles. We’re safe.” He nudged his nose into hers, and gave her upper lip a small tug with his lips. “Still sea sick?”

“No.” She patted her bare stomach with a hand. “I’ll need to eat something in a few days though.” Pinna’s small meals would not satisfy the hunger of her gorgon body.

“I’m sure we’ll find something.” He let go of her hand, reached over, and caressed her arm. He didn’t say anything though, he just smiled and looked at her.

“We’re really doing it,” she said. “Do you think you can convince Athena to undo the curse?”

He shook his head. “No… no but I can try.”

She sighed, but it faded into a gentle thing when Darian slipped his hand past her arm to find her back. So close, he was basically hugging her, and his fingertips drifted up and down her back between her shoulder blades. She melted into him, pushed herself closer, and hooked her free arm around his waist.

He was so gentle with her, so loving and tender. Always with her, and never anyone else. This Darian, a kind and warm man, was her secret.

“I feel like a child,” she said, “clinging to you wherever you go.”

“Oh? I thought I was the child, whiny and loud, getting into fights with the other kids. And the only person who can make me grow up and play nice is my mother.”

She giggled and gave him a quick kiss. “I am not your mother.”

“Definitely not my mother.” He pulled her tighter to him, squeezed her, and kissed her. A real kiss, a deep one that stopped her breathing, made her close her eyes, and pull on his body as much as he pulled on hers.

His hand drifted to her breasts, but stopped just shy of them.

“What’s wrong?” she said.

“Nothing, just—”

“You can be the one to sssstart. You don’t have to wait for me every time.”

Darian had been so patient with her. Every time they had sex, she had been the one to initiate. And she could understand Darian’s hesitation. Even now he still treated her like a fragile vase, but it wasn’t fair to him.

“If you want sex,” she said, “then ask.” She pulled away a little, just enough to put a few inches between them so they could move freely. “Maybe not ask, that’s not romantic, but… touch me. Touch me here.” She took his hand and guided it to her hip. “Or… here.” She slid his hand up her stomach. “Or… here, whenever you like.” She guided his hand under the wrap that held her breasts, and placed her nipple within his palm.

“Whenever I like?” he said.

She blinked at him. He looked surprised, as if her offering was absurd.

“It’s not fair that it’s always me. And I feel like a whore, hounding you for sex every night.”

“Trust me, I’m not complaining. I just… you know.”

“I know, I know. But… but now you can… touch me… whenever you want.”

She tried to sound kind about it, like she was giving him a gift, but her words were starting to come out a little deeper, a little softer, and her breathing was only getting faster. It was a completely selfish request, she knew, and with how her snake hair was flicking its tongues at Darian’s lips, he no doubt knew it too.

“You sure you want to give a man that right?” He kissed one of her snake hair’s heads, making her bite her lips to silence her swooning.

“I do.”

Darian smiled, that damn perfect smile, and pulled her close.