

Name: Hades

Titles: Lord of the Dead, King of the Underworld, The Unseen

Age: Just about as old as time.

Gender: Male

Sexual Orientation: Bisexual

Skin Color: Grey

Hair Color: White

Eye Color: Red

Height: 6'9"

Build: Muscular

Appearance: The son of titans, Hades in his assumed everyday form is a tall and imposing figure, one who can't help but radiate a quiet, subtle authority. There is a faint hint of menace to him, though it is often enough countermanded by some other facet of him that it isn't always detectable. His is a graceful, almost gliding carriage, a fluid smoothness and controlled strength of motion that results in the same sleek impression one might get from something feline.

Unusual even among the expanded palette of deific skin tones, Hades's complexion is a deep grey, the undertones darker still, as though blood of some color other than red runs in his veins. He's cool to the touch, perceptibly so, and anyone standing in the few feet immediately around him may notice a difference in ambient temperature, though not usually a large one.

His features are sharp, many of his angles squared in a classically-masculine fashion, with a slightly hooked nose and an angular jaw. The symmetry of his features is perfect, enough so that it actually might register as slightly uncanny or unnerving; with time this tends to fade from notice. His hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes are all stark, bone-white. He wears his hair to about his shoulder blades—it falls thickly, but with a straightness and shine that implies something soft and smooth.

His eyes are a startling shade of ruby-red, a sharp contrast with the way the rest of him seems almost to lack color. He tends to favor black, grey, white, and silver in his clothing as well, and could not fit with his surroundings more aptly if he tried.

Though he seldom smiles, and almost never does so in a way that shows his teeth, he has notably-prominent eyeteeth. They are obviously elongated and sharp, particularly the top pair.

“It wasn't always like this.”

Personality: The Lord of the Dead is an imposing, nightmarish figure to many. The gods, otherwise usually quite assured of their immortality, fear Death because he is inevitable, and many of them believe that the very nature of Hades and his magic possesses the potential to take from them their assurance that they will always live and always reign.

One can imagine, then, that he's never had very many friends.

The truth of it is, though, most wouldn't deem his personality very suitable for socialization even if that larger concern were not present. Hades is, if imposing and commanding in his presence, rather retiring in

his demeanor, or at least awkward. He tends towards straightforwardness, at times even bluntness, and while he is certainly a clever being, he is not the fastest to pick up on certain social cues. For example, though he understands sarcasm as a concept, and can at times deploy it rather deftly, he doesn't always recognize it, especially if it appears in a context in which he ordinarily would not expect to find it.

There is a certain dignity to him even despite this social and political ineptitude, and for those inclined to really look, a kindness as well. For someone who represents the end of life, he seems to hold it rather sacred, and is generally much less keen than his Olympian brethren to meddle in the affairs of mortals. He in fact *hates* the cycles of long and bloody war that the gods often incite humanity to for their own entertainment, and thinks of them as fundamentally disruptive to the proper flow and cycle of life and death.

He is most often gentle to those he considers his family, and thinks nothing of offering all of them a home and a place in the often dark, but utterly necessary function of the Underworld. His affinity for misfits and those never given a proper chance shows in his choice of companions; there is not one among them who has not somehow suffered for the pride of gods, and all he wants is to offer them sanctuary and succor, insofar as one of his nature can. He grapples with what he is, at times, but over the eons has learned to more or less accept it, even if it does tend to bring about a certain feeling of solitude.

Lest anyone think the God of Death too much a bleeding heart, however, it is also true that Hades can be hard. Can be terrifying. He is, however, fully of the opinion that true strength does not need to constantly announce its presence, and so even in this he tends to be somewhat quieter and more humble than people generally expect, given his reputation.

“I was taught that I had the right to nothing. Then we won a war, and I was told I had the right to anything. Both of those lessons seem empty to me.”

Strength: 10/10

Dexterity: 10/10

Intelligence: 10/10

Wisdom: 8/10

Cunning: 4/10

Willpower: 7/10

Constitution: 10/10

Weapons: None

Armor: None

Fighting Style/Training: Hades fights with nothing but what he always has: his body, and his magic. His is an efficient, brutal style of combat that is focused not on artistry but effectiveness, and it shows. When Death comes to battle, he is all but impossible to turn aside.

“I do not like to do violence. I suppose this counts as irony.”

Name: Hermes

Titles: The Herald, the Messenger, Dolios (the Trickster)

Age: Young for a god, but still several centuries.

Gender: Male

Sexual Orientation: Pansexual

Skin Color: Dark Brown

Hair Color: Black

Eye Color: Silver

Height: 5'8"

Build: Lean, athletic

Appearance: Hermes isn't the most imposing of godly figures, by any stretch of the imagination, and frankly he prefers it that way. Just barely clearing 5'8", he's built compact and lean, something that suits him as the messenger of the gods. He's almost constantly on the move, and built for it. Light on his feet, graceful, and efficient in movement, he doesn't lack for style and verve, either, something easily detectable just by watching him for a little while.

His complexion is a deep, rich brown color, warm in the undertones in seeming spite of his partly-Chthonic nature, which has given many of his companions a cooler palette. His face is youthful, with a slightly squared jaw otherwise accompanied by soft, broad features and round, thickly-lashed eyes. Their color is a pale, almost metallic silver, apt to catch any available light. There are times when there's a keen, mature sharpness to them, almost like the edge of a knife, but for the most part any inherent brightness to him is made of gentler, warmer things, his own effulgent personality simply shining right out of him.

Hermes is very fond of his hair, the regular, shiny black coils of it styled around his head and kept about six inches long. He delights in the windswept look it acquires in flight, believing it only adds to his natural roguish charms. Because of this, he usually elects not to wear any kind of crown or circlet, though he has from time to time been known to sport a modest petasos, a type of hat favored by travelers and field workers.

Of course, the most distinctive feature of his appearance are his wings. Structured like those of a swift-flying falcon, each is about six feet long fully extended, giving him a rather impressive wingspan overall. He can, technically speaking, manifest and banish them at will, but sees no reason to be without them most of the time, and in general will only be seen without them when indoors and sitting, or when needing to fit into a small space of some kind. The wings are a lovely silver color, of a kind with his eyes, with subtle gradations of color including darkening towards the tips of the longest feathers.

He favors red when it comes to clothes, but can be seen in a wide variance of colors and patterns. Hermes knows how to dress to look good, and does so at any opportunity. His trademark winged sandals are actually not necessary to his flight, but he wears them at pretty much all times regardless.

“Well, you know. There's a reason sculptors like to depict me, and all.”

Personality: Confident, socially-adept, and energetic, Hermes is the life of the party, in almost any situation. He has an easy, roguish charm, with the smile to match, and he's happiest when things are easy and relaxed. More lover than fighter, he prefers to resolve any and all disputes with words, and when those fail, tricks and deft social maneuvering.

Not that he really finds himself in very many disputes. He is to all surface appearances a favored son of Olympus, bright and halcyon as any of his deific fellows, and beloved by nearly all of them, for some combination of his looks, his demeanor, his talents, and his charisma. Rarely does anyone have a bad word to say about Hermes, though there is, if one knows how to look, less sunny sentiment beneath the surface.

For everyone knows that Hermes has been tainted by the Underworld. They do not and cannot openly shun him, because he has made that impossible simply by being the cunning, charismatic social mover that he is, but as he'd say, beneath the munchie and rainbows and large smiles at elaborate celebrations there is poison. Hermes knows that he is 'beloved' without being loved, appreciated without being accepted, and envied just often enough that he has to be constantly wary of it. It feels like being two people at the same time, and as much as he hates it, he does it, because he desperately wishes to be accepted.

Of late, he spends more and more of his time in Hades, because the people there don't force him into that kind of performative, double identity. He's just Hermes there, for better or worse, and feels no particular need to be on his guard or especially mindful of his rougher edges, such as they are. If he wants to be a little petty and make fun of his enemies, Hekate's right there to add commentary. If he wants to get up to harmless mischief, he's got Pyri to sneak around with and Alekto to chase them both. If he wants to stop being on for a while, well—his uncle has never minded if he's not feeling especially cheerful or energetic.

But some part of him can't quite give up that dream—the dream of being truly accepted, truly loved, by his Olympian kin.

“Have I charmed you? It's only fair, considering how delightful I find you.”

Strength: 8/10

Dexterity: 10/10

Intelligence: 7/10

Wisdom: 3/10

Cunning: 9/10

Willpower: 6/10

Constitution: 7/10

Weapons: Hermes carries a short wand that he likes to pretend to seriously hit things with, but when the time comes for actual combat or anything of the sort, he's a daggers fellow, usually one in each hand.

Armor: He does of course own a very nice set, mostly silver and white to emphasize his general aesthetic, but he's usually not to be found wearing it.

Fighting Style/Training: The divine messenger and patron of thieves relies a lot on skill, speed, and cunning in a fight, particularly against other gods or those blessed with divine strength, as his own is, while not lacking, not what anyone would characterize as top tier. He is, however, quite possibly the fleetest of the gods, and uses this as much to his benefit as possible in any situation where violence is a necessity.

He was technically taught to fight by Olympians, but took much better to a more pragmatic style he learned in the Underworld—the fundamentals of this were taught to him by Hekate; Charon and his uncle

Hades helped him develop it as he desired and perfect it. He can feign the glorious straightforwardness of more traditional combat, but Hermes shines the most when he's allowed to be cunning, and what some might even classify as craven.

“I prefer to leave this stuff to the more serious types, but it never hurts to know what you're doing. I might need to rescue some beautiful stranger someday, you know?”

Monthly Q&A Digest - October 2020

Q1. I know it's soon to ask, but are you planning to continue the series?

A: Oh, absolutely. I've I think mentioned this a couple places (though maybe not; my memory is terrible), but the plan for FOA is for it to be the first book in a series of 3. The other two installments are very tentatively subtitled Blood of the Living and The End of Winter.

Q2. What is the angstiest 'scenario-type' tumblr ask you've received?

A: I think probably the angstiest question I've gotten so far was about the ROs waking up alone, from a nightmare in which PC died horribly. I got pretty good traction out of that, including a follow-up ask that led to my first Hekate vignette.

Q3. In what order did you decide the ROs would be ROs?

A: Hades was first, of course, given the source material. Charon, Hermes, and Hekate were pretty quickly after that, as sort of bigger names with obvious ties to the Underworld. I debated a little on Alekto and Pyri, because I wanted a river deity and a member of the Erinyes, but I wasn't totally sure which ones. I ended up choosing Pyri for the fire theme and Alekto because of the fact that her domain among the Furies is kinda the broadest (moral transgressions), and so I imagined her as sorta being "in charge" of them.

Q4. If the ROs, as a group, got teleported to an AU, what fandom AU would you think would be an interesting one?

A: Oh there are so many good options here haha. Let's see. As far as an alternative fandom, I think it'd be kind of fun to port them to something like the MCU? The Norse crowd's already running around so it's sorta doable; the universe is stretchy in the right way. Hermes would love being a superhero, as would Pyri. Some of the others, not so much haha.

As for like "general fandom AU trope," I'm gonna be super basic and say the coffeeshop AU. I think Hekate actually owns the place. Hades is a regular because it's dog-friendly, and it's kind of the gang's hangout spot. Possibly integrated with like... a film noir genre AU? I think something like that would be really cool, at least off the top of my head. Just kind of seeing the gang in more "human" roles and occupations, but still keeping the fundamental cores of themselves.

Q5. What would be the RO's reactions if they had to play horror games like Silent Hills P.T., or Until Dawn?

A: Heh, I love this one. *Until Dawn* scared the pants off me when I played it. I am weak to jumpscare. I still managed to save everyone... somehow.

I'm pretty sure nothing in this type of game scares Hades, Alekto, or Charon. Alekto is not a huge fan of the jumpscare, which for her are almost totally visual, but they don't get the jump response so much as the 'punch' response, and that's probably not great for the TV. Hades and

Charon can run through a game like that without flinching. Hades might, but I don't think Charon would.

Hermes and Pyri kinda giggle manically through the whole thing, because that's their way of like... handling it? They find it fun, but also scary enough that it prompts some kind of coping mechanism like that haha.

Hekate is the kind of player who deals with the scary by like... sitting there and analyzing the crap out of it. She tries to predict when the jump scares are going to happen, what the consequences of certain actions are movements are, that kind of thing. Arm herself with genre knowledge (which she has a lot of) and predictions and statistics.

Q6. What would the ROs do if the group find themselves in a horror movie scenario?

A: Heh, well, there's not a lot that's scarier than them, from a certain point of view. That said, supposing they were more human-ish and couldn't deity-power their problems into non-problems:

Hades is pretty competent, and while fairly fearless, also cautious. I think he survives and probably succeeds in keeping anyone with him alive because of this.

Hermes absolutely bites off more than he can chew. He might escape the consequences of this by sheer pluck and daring, but he also might get taken out pretty early because of it? Kind of depends on what/who the villain is. He's clever and can be sneaky, but also would act in reckless defense of his group.

Charon is uh... well lets just say that rowing is not *all* he can do with the staff. Like Hades, even human-shaped he's very competent in several relevant skills. He's also very much the type, however, to make a heroic sacrifice so everyone else can escape.

Pyri's a doofus. This is just a fact. If they manage to not be in the first one or two people to die before the group knows at least a bit about what's going on, they have a fighting chance, because they're scrappy and resourceful, but they are very likely to be in the first few, due to being exactly the type of person to, for example, hear a noise in the woods and go to investigate haha.

Alekto probably beats the snot out of whatever the problem is. If that's impossible, say because she's a human and it's a huge monster, she is probably the one who suggests things like grenades and flamethrowers, and she will absolutely back this up by bearing such weapons herself.

Hekate would have to be up against a clever monster or murderer to need to worry haha. Someone would suggest the group split up and she'd just be like "are you kidding me? That plan is dumb for so many reasons; do you want me to count them for you?"

Q7. The RO's reaction to a MC who stands up for them (either socially or in a fight)?

Generally very impressed! I think Hades is most surprised by it, though Alekto would be too. They'd also be touched, Alekto with a touch of worry on PC's behalf for possible consequences, whereas Hades I think would be a little more confident in his ability to prevent those.

Charon is flattered, but not surprised. As insightful as he is, he likely knows PC always had this in them. He's appreciative and would absolutely say so without reservation.

Hermes and Hekate kind of take it in stride. Not because they aren't grateful, because they are, but because for them that's part of the give and take of the kind of relationship they have with PC and they know it. Hermes maybe melts a little on the inside haha, but in general I think even he is aware that this was something that'd happen when people are bonded in such a way. They do, of course, reciprocate at any opportunity given!

Pyri is a little flabbergasted, but not really with the reserve of Alekto or Hades. They openly demonstrate appreciation, probably in bear hug fashion.

Q8. Is Hades any good at braiding and styling hair?

A: He's learning! He does this for Makaria. Hekate is teaching him how, because she is very good at it. Makaria sometimes wanders around with slightly clumsy braids because she got tired of waiting for him to manage it to his satisfaction. Plus she thinks anything her dad does looks cool, so it was already the best ever to begin with!

Gallows Humor

“He... what?” Charon hasn’t felt quite this much alarm in some time.

It’s not unusual for Hades to return from a visit to Olympus in a dark mood, but when his best friend had approached him to talk about it, they’d not been expecting... this.

Hades’s jaw is tight. “I felt I couldn’t refuse. I don’t—I don’t know if he’d have followed through on what he was threatening, but he might have.” He curls his hand into a fist on his knee, and Charon elects to sit beside him, setting a hand on his shoulder and giving a small squeeze.

“You did the right thing,” they say. “The best thing anyone could have, in a predicament like that.” Hades may well doubt it, but Charon does not.

“Have I?” he asks softly. “I’ve just tied someone completely innocent to the Underworld. To *me*.”

Charon purses his lips, sighting quietly though his nose and letting his hand fall back to his lap. “You know, when you say things like that, I have to wonder what you think of those of us who have willingly come here, and tied ourselves to you.” It’s faintly-chiding, but only in the softest sense.

Hades turns troubled red eyes towards Charon. “I—” The discomfort is thick in his voice. “I didn’t mean—”

“I know,” they reply. “I do. You’re worried because we chose this, and this young demigod has not. But I don’t think it’s so bad as all that, you know. You won’t keep them any longer than you absolutely must. We both know you won’t require anything of them. Perhaps, in time, we will find that they choose this too. Olympus is not good for everyone, as you and I both well know.”

Hades grimaces. “I’m never sure if that is a flaw in Olympus, or in us.”

Charon finds himself mirroring the expression. “I wish I could say with confidence that it’s them, but sometimes I think it must be us.”

“Thank Olympus for the Underworld,” Hades says, rolling his eyes and giving his head a faint shake. “Where else would we keep all the rejects and misfits?”

They chuckle. “It does make for good dinner conversation. We have that to offer.”

“Mm. And perpetual darkness. And a very slight chill. Never too hot in summer.”

“And our chief deity has a charming sense of humor.”

Hades groans, running hand down his face. “He absolutely does not,” the chief deity himself replies. “My sense of humor is sarcasm, gallows humor, and puns.”

“Sometimes all of them at once, yes,” Charon adds with a smile. “*Gallows* humor. I liked that one.”

“Charon, I’ve figured out why we’re friends. You’re the only one with a sense of humor as dumb as mine.” There’s the faintest tick to the corner of Hades’s mouth. It’s not quite enough to chase away his grim aspect, but it’s familiar in a comfortable way.

“That’s a funny way of pronouncing ‘Charon, you’re a wonderful friend and a delightful person and yes I absolutely would like to hear a boat pun,’” he drawls flatly.

Hades sighs. “I’m going to hear a boat pun whether I want to or not, aren’t I?”

“It’s the best way to make sure our friendship remains afloat,” Charon says with a solemn expression.

“Oh, for—” Hades rubs at his brow. “I feel like I just lost something important and interesting from the annals of memory, to be replaced by that. Thank you.”

“I am only too happy to serve, Your Majesty.”

The flat look he gets wrings another chuckle from him. “Sorry, sorry. I know. But... I really do think this will work out all right. I’m no augur, and I’m sure the Moirae won’t say anything about something so important, but... call it a hunch.”

“Hm.” Hades expels a long, heavy breath. “So do you want to go to Olympus to pick them up, or...?”

They know Hades would never actually shirk such a personal responsibility onto someone else, so they reply in kind. “You know I’d consider it, but I’d really prefer *not* to end up in a fight with my successor or take a thunderbolt to the face.”

“What a time to be reasonable.”

Full Name: Hekate

Titles: Mother of Magic, Goddess of Witchcraft and Crossroads

Age: Very, very old.

Gender: Female

Sexual Orientation: Pansexual

Skin Color: Medium brown, with segmental vitiligo

Hair Color: Varies; originally black.

Eye Color: Very dark brown

Height: 5'2"

Build: Generous, full-figured

Appearance: There's a certain undeniable vivacity to Hekate. It is perhaps not as overt as it could be, given that she also has a certain dignity that prevents its most outright-energetic expressions, but nevertheless it is there, and it can be seen. For one, she tends to favor rich colors in her manner of dress, particularly on the blue-indigo-purple end of the spectrum, with a particular fondness for gold and rose gold in her choices of jewelry. She likes the way the colors contrast with the tone of her cool brown skin.

She likes a lot about how she looks, actually, having a certain confidence and self-possession that does not ever really become genuine vanity. For one, she likes the pale patches of skin that stipple her body on the right side, and intentionally wears her hair in an undercut, most of it over her left shoulder, so as to make these patterns even more obvious. She knows, of course, that some others find it strange, but she feels it's beautiful, and therefore that there is no reason to hide or minimize it.

So too is she fond of the shape of her body. It is not the build of the typical athlete, by any means, being rather too generous and soft for that, especially in the bust, hips, and thighs, but also in her stomach and arms and posterior. But it is hers, and it moves and flexes and bends and stretches in all the ways she might desire of it, and to her it is therefore exactly as it should be. She is conscious also that it has a certain appeal to others, depending on their preferences, and this is enjoyable in its own way, if thoroughly secondary to her own uses.

Hekate keeps her tightly-curled hair in braids, and is fond of changing the color of them, either by weaving in various fibers or with the simple application of magic to the hair itself. At the moment, it's a soft, rose-pink, worn long enough to reach her diaphragm when it spills over her shoulder. She has been known to pull all of the braids together in a tail, either high or low, when in the midst of a particularly volatile experiment.

"I'm my own cup of tea, thank you very much."

Personality: Hekate is the kind of woman who knows herself well. Self knowledge and self-confidence blend easily in her alchemy, making for an assured, steady sort of personality at its very core. Unlike a lot of people in the Underworld, she fundamentally *likes* who she is. Though like anyone she has her traumas and her sticking points, she knows that she is steadily working on those things, and even the ones she isn't quite ready to face head-on yet are things she is at least willing to acknowledge are *there*.

She is by no means serious and dignified all the time, though both traits do have their places in her makeup. She is, after all, the Mother of Magic, one of the first deities to practice any sort of craft outside of her native domains. In so doing, she gained dominion over witchcraft in general, and it makes her quite

powerful, something only boosted by the raw force she has from other sources. It is this spirit of invention and innovation, with its attendant curiosity, that forms what she considers to be the core of her being: Hekate likes to understand things, to know how they work, to organize them into systems over which she can gain understanding and mastery, and she is as a rule very good at this. It seeps into everyday life, too: her problem solving method of choice is research and organization, and she sometimes flusters when put on the spot and unable to approach things this way, or when she's forced to confront a problem outside her areas of comfortable expertise.

In her interactions with others, Hekate is charming and sociable for the most part. A little flirty, too, though not typically the sort to carry idle amusement *past* flirtation. She has before, of course, and had a few romantic entanglements here and there, though she has always felt that they were missing something and were, in fact, meant to be temporary. This is not to devalue them, only to sort them into what she thinks of as the right category of thing. Her friendships are as a rule much more enduring, though she keeps few.

Much of Hekate's time and interest is devoted to matters of research and magical development, as well as tinkering, but she can be convinced to break from this for time with her friends or any sort of interesting diversion. She's the kind to want to plan in advance for such breaks in the flow, however.

Deep down, there's a bit of loneliness to her. It's a residual sort of thing, from a part of her life before she was surrounded by people she loves. And though intellectually she knows they wouldn't abandon her, viscerally she still fears it.

“Time can do interesting things to a person, but I think it's been mostly good for me at least.”

Strength: 6/10

Dexterity: 7/10

Intelligence: 10/10

Wisdom: 9/10

Cunning: 8/10

Willpower: 9/10

Constitution: 7/10

Weapons: Sometimes she will manifest a knife, but she is in general reliant upon her magic.

Armor: None.

Fighting Style/Training: Hekate is a caster, through and through. Her fluidity with knife forms is only really ever a supplement to this, designed to buy her enough time to work devastatingly-powerful magic in the event she doesn't have allies to do this for her. Though she in general prefers subtler spells, the kind that might end a fight before it begins, she is well capable of raw force most gods would have reason to fear as well. She is not Chief Minister of the Underworld for nothing—her power is respectable, and *respected*.

“I suppose there *are* fringe benefits to all the work I've put in.”

Monthly Q&A Digest - November 2020

Pyri

Q1: What sort of warm up exercises/routines do you do in the morning, and can MC come along?

A: Well it kinda depends but usually I run! I think it's a good way to wake my body up and also help me figure out how comfortable I'm feeling in it that day. Is it the kind of day where I want to wear really loose clothes and forget it exists, or the kind of day where I'm feeling super awesome about myself? I like knowing in the morning, so I can get my bathing and clothes and stuff organized around that. It helps me feel like I'm in control of things.

Anybody's welcome to come with me though! Sometimes Leks does, but most of the time I run by myself.

Q2: With the above, how would you handle/feel about a "super peppy in the morning" MC, versus super dead in the morning but wants to join you anyway" MC?

A: I think having someone around who was super energetic all the time would be fun! It'd help me get going too—I like being up early but sometimes it's kind of a drag. But I can definitely understand being kind of dead in the morning... actually, are we kind of dead all the time? I've never quite figured that out. We live in the Underworld, right?

Q3: If MC is going out to the markets, what are some things you might ask MC to help buy or keep a look out for?

A: Oh, I'd love to go with actually. Markets are fun—loads of people and interesting stuff to look at! If I couldn't go though... hm. It's tricky because most of the stuff I buy is usually kind of... specialized? I get stone and wires and metal for my crafts, and you can get cheated pretty easy if you don't know what you're looking for with that stuff.

But if they wanted to get something I could make into a piece for them, that'd be neat! Also I guess like... maybe a scarf or something? Or interesting snacks!

Q4: What makes you happy?

A: Lots of stuff! Honestly I'm pretty happy with just my day to day life as it is. Doing a job that matters, spending time with people I like... really basic stuff like that. I also like little stuff that depends on context. Like naps, but only when I'm tired, or particular colors, but only on certain stuff. Does that make sense even? It's kind of hard to explain.

Q5: What one quality do you value most in a friend?

A: I dunno. I think I could be friends with almost anyone, as long as they were actually friends with me. Reciprocal-ness? Is that a quality? Just like... I don't want to be a burden on anybody. As long as I know I'm not, I think almost any friendship would be great!

Q6: Which 'virtue' of character is most overrated?

A: Honor, definitely. The whole thing is kind of stupid, and then when you think about all the even more stupid problems it causes... absolutely not worth it. Who cares about your honor? Just be kind, jeez.

Q7: Who do you get along with best in your life?

A: Well my friends in general obviously. If you're asking me to pick between them, I dunno if I can. I think I have the most concentrated *fun* when I'm around Featherboy, but I relax the best around Hekate. Leks is my favorite to spar or work with, and Charon's my eternal rival—which is extremely important. You don't have a good life without good goals after all. I think I admire Hades more than anyone, and am probably most grateful to him. So I guess it depends on what you mean by 'get along with'!

Q8: If you had the chance to leave the Underworld, would you take it?

A: What like for a trip? Sure I guess. But I wouldn't want to be gone too long. If you mean like... permanently, absolutely not! Why would I want to leave home forever?

Q9: What living person do you most despise?

A: I don't know. I might have forgotten someone, but at the moment I don't really have any enemies. I guess Zeus or Apollo on principle, but we've never met or anything.

Q10: Do you have any natural talents for anything?

A: Not really. I'm good at some stuff, but not *talented*. I mostly just work really hard for a really long time and sometimes get some skill. I've never been a natural at anything though.

Falling

Hermes can always tell when it's going to be a nightmare, because in his nightmares he's always falling.

It would be just about impossible for him to do, given the wings. And he can fly even when he doesn't manifest them—he just prefers the feeling of something with a little more *torque* to it than the gravity-nulling thing His Deathliness does.

But in this nightmare, he has the wings, only they're disintegrating, feathers pulling free and falling more slowly than the rest of him, a trail of shining silver left in his wake to obscure his view of the glowing mountainside he is falling *from*.

He reaches for it, but his fingers close over nothing but empty air, and strain as he might, he cannot seem to stretch his wings and let them catch the air. It's like he's forgotten how to fly, like the knowledge like the ability was a gift granted to him only to be snatched away at the worst possible moment, when he has been propelled, unwillingly, from that most precarious of perches.

No, he thinks, the urgency sharp but silent. *No please! I can be better. I can be what you want!*

He doesn't know if it's true, but he knows he'd try. Knows he *has* tried, for ages, for as long as he's been alive, to be what they want. To be what *he* wants.

But no response comes. There is no intervention to halt his plummet, and the winged god *falls*.

He falls for what feels to be interminable hours, years, something. Day and night cycle past him in a blur of soundless color, his ears desensitized to the roaring of the air. His back hurts, all feathers long since stripped from him, until what's left is bird-bones, held together by valiant spare sinews, and it *hurts*.

It *hurts* to fall, and he hasn't even hit the ground yet.

His eyes blur with tears, and his soundless pleas dull into mantra, repeated so many times he doesn't know if the words really have a meaning anymore.

Please. I'll be what you want. I'll be whatever you want.

Just please don't leave.

Please don't let me fall.

There is no turning to meet his demise. All he is able to look at is what he has left, growing smaller and more indistinct until it is nothing but a pinprick of light in the distance, as far from him as a star from any of the innumerable mortals walking their earth.

Until he is as far from godliness as any of those same humans.

And in this moment, he understands why he is falling.

I cannot be what you want.

The thought leaves him stricken, paralyzed, unable to bear its weight, and at last he closes his eyes to the fading star above him.

The impact with the ground beneath him is almost a relief.

Full Name: Alekto
Titles: Minister of Punishments, First of the Erinyes
Age: Quite Old
Gender: [Trans] Female
Sexual Orientation: Bisexual

Skin Color: Deep Tan
Hair Color: Chestnut
Eye Color: Hazel - brown primary/green secondary
Height: 6'2"
Build: Muscular, husky, athletic

Appearance: The First of the Erinyes is an imposing woman at first glance, tall and sturdily-built, with hard eyes and a seemingly-permanent furrow to her brow. Her complexion is deep and sun-touched uniform in its smoothness but for the mole beneath her lower lip on the left side. There are in fact a few more of these elsewhere on her person, and a few scars as well, but for the most part she dresses such that these are not visible.

She typically dons armor of a gold-bronze color, a full chest plate, bracers, and greaves, with thick studded leather skirting to her knees. Usually also wearing a sword at her hip, a round shield on her back, and carries a bronze-handled whip coiled on the same hip as her sword. Her hair, straight and glossy, is usually kept pulled into a high ponytail on her head, and even so lifted falls to the small of her back easily. When not in the armor, Alekto has elaborate and elegant taste in clothing, and favors shades of green most of all, with other colors to complement as appropriate. There's hardly a garment in her closet that isn't lovingly-embroidered, and she also has, apparently, a wide variety of excellent jewelry, from heavy torcs and thick armbands to draping earrings and even a nose stud or two.

Alekto's build is a formidable one, muscle layered on a somewhat-thick frame, and some softness as well. She's athletic to be sure, but if she were inclined towards sport, it would definitely be more strength-based ones, from the look of her alone. That said, she's quite light on her feet, and her gait has a graceful, almost gliding quality to it.

“The body has a way of remembering. And telling.”

Personality: The first impression most strangers get of Alekto is as of a cold, unforgiving, perhaps even cruel woman. There is a sense in which she very much appears to be what she is titled. *Erinyes*, after all, means *Fury*. Hers is to all appearances a more icy than burning rage, but it's still there nevertheless, and the aura of authority and intimidation she drapes herself in is certainly not the most soothing first impression, even among the denizens of the Underworld.

The truth, as truth usually is, is a bit more complicated than that. Alekto's apparent hostility can be broken down to three fundamental things: her difficulty trusting people, her protectiveness of those she *does* trust, and her job. The first is, largely, a function of her history, which includes a rather tremendous and traumatic betrayal that turned just about everything she thought she knew upside down. The second is a trait she's always had to some extent but which has definitely grown as she's spent more time in the Underworld. The third is purely a function of her task in Hades's realm, which demands of her a certain hardness and uncompromising willingness to exact justice, even when justice is difficult.

But beneath this difficult shell is a rather soft interior. She can be surprisingly fussy about the oddest things, and has quite the nurturing and mentoring instinct, though she does try not to be overbearing about either of these things. It was Alekto who took naturally to the role of Pyro's instructor when they arrived in the Underworld and were given their job tending the river of fire, and likewise she who is most likely to pester Hekate to do things like eat regularly and leave the library every so often, that sort of thing.

She has a great love of and skill at the arts, particularly the visual kinds, including painting, weaving, and embroidery.

"I just... am. People can either put up with that or they can't, and I try not to let it bother me."

Strength: 9/10

Dexterity: 7/10

Intelligence: 6/10

Wisdom: 7/10

Cunning: 4/10

Willpower: 8/10

Constitution: 9/10

Weapons: Alekto can fight with just about any kind of weapon, but when she has her choice, she favors the classic sword-and-shield combination for its flexibility and defense. The whip is, typically, a tool of her trade rather than a weapon as such.

Armor: Typically on the heavy end for infantry. Alekto's particular set of armor has a lot of enchantments on it, courtesy of Hekate.

Fighting Style/Training: Efficient, effective, and none too pretty. Alekto is all business in a fight, forgoing even the slightest superfluousness of motion so as to grant her foes no openings. She is sturdy and durable, and so when the foe is tough, she will take a defensive approach, wearing them down before finding the right time and place to strike. She can be quick on her feet, especially in short bursts, but in general she opts to fight with the minimum possible amount of energy expenditure, and save everything she can for the blow or series of them she knows will end the fight.

"It's all but a given that I fight now. Even if it weren't the job, I'd want to. I'm tired of not being able to protect the people I love. I'm tired of not being able to protect *myself*."

Proust Questionnaire Pt. 1 - Charon

Q1. *What is your idea of perfect happiness?*

Genuine tranquility—it is equally unattainable, at least.

Q2. *What is your greatest fear?*

Recidivism.

Q3. *What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?*

Rage.

Q4. *What is the trait you most deplore in others?*

Cruelty, definitely.

Q5. *Which living person do you most admire?*

Admiration is a strange construct. I think, however—most likely Hades. Or Pyriphlegethon, but for completely different reasons.

Q6. *What is your greatest extravagance?*

Self-pity, by far. Or at least that's my greatest indulgence. I don't tend to have much by way of extravagances.

Q7. *What is your current state of mind?*

Conflicted, but perhaps more solid than I used to feel.

Q8. *What do you consider the most overrated virtue?*

Valor. The world does not truly need people to inhabit battlefields. I would that there were fewer capable of such.

Q9. *On what occasion do you lie?*

I try not to, but I will if I believe it will protect someone or make the timing of learning something more in line with when it can be dealt with in a healthy and appropriate way.

Q10. *What do you most dislike about your appearance?*

I rarely have cause to consider it. I suppose I wouldn't mind looking somewhat less sallow.

Makaria's Morning

“Makaria.”

She stirs slightly, only peripherally aware of her father's low voice. It's quiet, but she's always liked the way it rumbles. Sometimes, when she's hugging him or even just standing close enough, she can feel it as much as hear it, through her chest or the soles of her feet.

In her bed, however, it is still, and she snuffles, turning over to bury her head in the pillow with a discontent grumble.

He sighs. “Makaria. It is time to wake up, *leukiskos*.” He accompanies the words with a gentle touch to her shoulder.

Frowning, Makaria rolls over to face him, eyes narrow. “I don't want to wake up yet,” she declares. “Come back tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow?” He chuckles. “That's quite a sleep you plan to have.”

The bed dips as he takes a seat on the edge, and she giggles as she's inevitably pulled in that direction. “Stop bending gravity, dad, it's not fair.”

“Oh is that what's happening here?” He turns, sliding one thick grey arm underneath her, and all of a sudden she's airborne, clinging to him with a delighted shriek.

“See, see?” If anything this only further proves her point.

“Hmm. Yes, I think it makes sense now. Gravity too must bow to the princess.” He swings his arm, and she lets go at the top of the arc, cackling madly as she launches up *just* far enough to touch her ceiling with an extended arm and then back down. She could let her flight kick in, but she's not very good at it yet, and she'd rather her dad caught her anyway.

He does, standing smoothly and cushioning her fall. She wraps her arms around his neck as he moves over to her trunk, crouching smoothly to flip the lid. “What would you like to wear today?” he asks.

Makaria contemplates her collection. Auntie Alekto makes amazing clothes, so almost all of them are embroidered in whatever patterns have taken Makaria's fancy over the years. “I want the red one, with the feathers!”

“Hm. Your cousin will approve, I'm sure.” Her father extracts the tunic and a silver rope-cord to belt it with, closing the trunk over and handing both to her before he sets her down. “All right. Let me know when you're done, okay?”

She nods, and he steps out into the outer part of the chamber, closing the door behind him. Makaria shucks her sleeping clothes and pulls the new tunic on, wrinkling her nose at the sandals and electing to remain barefoot, but tying the cord around her waist in a large, slightly clumsy bow. She traces one of the silver feathers embroidered at the neck with a smile.

“All done!”

He reenters, smiling gently at her in the mirror. “Okay. What kinds of braids do you want today?”

Makaria thinks on it. Today she has lessons with Empusa like usual, but instead of spending her afternoon on the Isles, she’s going to be getting a lesson from Pyri. “I want one of the ones that stays close to my head,” she says. “But also a fish tail. Can you do that?” She regards him somewhat skeptically.

He huffs softly. “Well I can try. If you don’t like it, we can ask Empusa to fix it. How’s that?”

“Sounds good!” When he sits down, she crawls up into his lap and tilts her head slightly down so he can comb through her hair and separate the stands he needs. “What are you doing today, dad?”

“Well, let’s see.” He hums, considering it as he begins to braid at her hairline. “Today I have some souls to let go, and then after that I’m meeting with Hekate and the architects about the light enchantments for the city. I promised Charon and Alekto I’d have lunch with them, and then I have a few more meetings, and some judgements Rhadamanthus wants me to look at.”

Makaria furrows her brow. “That sounds like a lot.” It usually did, but still.

“Mm, well. Sometimes I have to do a lot, but I’ll still be at dinner. So you just worry about having fun for both of us until then, okay?”

Makaria grins. “I’ll have so much fun you won’t even believe it.”

“Good. I’ll want to hear all about it later, so make sure not to forget anything.”

Full Name: Charon

Titles: The Ferryman, Minister of Passage

Age: A few eons, at least.

Gender: Nonbinary (Demimasc) [He/they]

Sexual Orientation: Bisexual

Skin Color: Very pale, slight blue/grey undertone

Hair Color: Platinum Blond

Eye Color: Light Blue

Height: 5'10"

Build: Lean, athletic

Appearance: Charon very consciously attempts to give off an aspect of unruffled calm. Still water, Hades calls it, and every bit as deep as the proverb would have one believe. Their facial features hew to the slightly androgynous side of things, a certain grace and delicacy in the arch of their brow and the precision-straightness of their nose, complemented by the way their hair tends to be left to fall in soft, silky waves to their shoulders. The color, pale at is, tends to glimmer and catch just about any amount of light. It is quite fine, though the sheer number of strands gives it a soft thickness overall.

Their eyes are the kind of blue that can contextually seem either rather soft or rather sharp, a kind of ocean hue noted for somehow appearing frostier when he is agitated or upset, though this is of course seldom. With Charon, such claims are not mere poetry—his nature as god of storms and a magician of some skill mean they really do occasionally change color, when his power is either at work or being suppressed.

Their complexion could reasonably be described as pallid, perhaps even slightly unhealthy-looking, or so it might be on a human. This is primarily due to the grey-blue undertone of it, caused by a mixture of Chthonic influences, the unusual color of his blood, and his heritage. Despite the wan look it gives them, however, they are in fact not sick or unhealthy—this is simply his ordinary coloration.

His build is a lean one, though the firmness of his muscularity is often concealed beneath the layers of his clothing, which is usually some combination of blue, grey, and green. He wears a cloak arranged to form a hood, which is most often up when he attends to his duties and down otherwise. Their physique is in closer accord with a swimmer or runner than more thickly-muscled athletes, though it would be a serious mistake to underestimate their physical strength, which is considerable.

With a resting expression somewhere between neutral and welcoming, he is certainly not one of the more intimidating figures in the Underworld—at least, not to anyone who doesn't know better. They prefer it that way.

“Truly, I would prefer not to frighten anyone. It makes the job that much more difficult, you see.”

Personality: Charon is perhaps the most outwardly serene and calm of his compatriots. He shares a certain reserve with Hades and Alekto, but lacks the former's awkwardness and the latter's grumpiness, being instead a rather patient, gentle sort of person who does not lack for social grace or aptitude. They have little trouble saying what's on their mind if they find it warranted to do so, but at the same time he often doesn't, just because his first instinct is to contribute something helpful or not at all, when it comes to most conversations.

He also makes judicious use of omissions, white lies, and understatement, when he thinks they will help facilitate a situation. He's not deceptive without reason, but peacemaking is by choice something of a general goal of his, and it manifests in the way he handles both politics and personal relationships. If there's anyone Charon is unreservedly honest with, it's Hades, and to their best friend they tend to show other sides more often, including a penchant for wryness, dorky humor, and self deprecation. They have a running, half-serious accord, however, that if one of them is on a moody, self-hating tangent, the other cannot also start, so they tend to take turns with that kind of thing at least.

Charon is an excellent listener, and tends to be the informal counselor of the group, in a lot of ways. Their willingness and ability to meet others where they are means they end up wearing a lot of hats, so to speak. Pyri sees in them a 'rival' in the combat arts, Alekto a sounding board, Hekate a teatime companion, and Hermes either a mark or a confidant, depending on the day. He does his best to be all these things and more, as they do all get at something of him that's really there, and also that he wants to nurture in himself.

It is also true, however, that there are parts of Charon's nature that he hides, vigilantly, and tries to quash. His history is an unpleasant one, and he considers the Underworld his one and only second chance, his opportunity to make things right, inasmuch as that's even possible. His job is penance, and his friendships the anchors that keep him from straying from his new path.

He hopes, fervently, that he will never again find himself detached from those anchors, for they do not want to consider what would happen were they entirely free to follow the demands of their worse nature.

“I think it is inevitable that no immortal remains forever whole. We are doomed to fracture, and try to reconcile our pieces with one another.”

Strength: 9/10

Dexterity: 9/10

Intelligence: 8/10

Wisdom: 9/10

Cunning: 7/10

Willpower: 8/10

Constitution: 9/10

Weapons: Less a weapon on most days than a utility item, Charon carries a pale, extendable pole. It's not entirely clear what material it is made of, actually. Most of the time he uses it to row the ferry, but at other times it is an effective cudgel or quarterstaff.

Armor: Charon typically wears no armor at all.

Fighting Style/Training: Though the Ferryman in a spar or confrontation is a rare sight, he certainly knows how to handle himself. His style is one of almost unmatched fluidity and grace, and though he prefers the blunt, typically-nonlethal polearms available to him, he is also competent with... literally anything else. As far as magic goes, Charon is somewhat more limited in scope than some gods, but has several powerful effects at their disposal that usually act as complements to their physical capabilities.

“For such an abominable thing, battle has its allure.”

Proust Questionnaire Pt. 2 - Charon

Q11: Which living person do you most despise?

At the risk of sounding maudlin, myself. I think it would be fair to say I have hurt myself more than anyone else has hurt me, and I am the only one to blame for the greatest shames of my life.

Q12: What is the quality you most like in a person?

Authenticity. I think perhaps it is that I like a wide array of things, and so my favorite quality of all is the one where people really genuinely *are* as they are, without the need to hide anything.

Q13: Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

Hedging phrases of various kinds. 'May,' 'perhaps,' and similar.

Q14: What or who is the greatest love of your life?

I can't say I have anyone or anything like that. Perhaps the family I have found, in a way.

Q15: When and where were you happiest?

As... alarming as it might be to consider, I think I was happiest during the time of my original appointment, before it all fell apart. The fact that I *was* happy being as I was then is... part of the reason I do not so easily find happiness now.

Q16: Which talent would you most like to have?

Is optimism a talent? It seems so, sometimes. I think I might like to be optimistic, but it's quite impossible.

Q17: If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

Who I was born to be.

Q18: What do you consider your greatest achievement?

Removing myself from my place on Olympus, insofar as I was the one responsible for that.

Q19: If you were to die and come back as a person or a thing, what would it be?

I don't know—I don't expect to reincarnate as I do not expect to die. Typically, it would be another being, god or similar. But ah, if indicative humor is the intent of this question... a fish.

Q20: Where would you most like to live?

I think I'm quite comfortable where I am, truthfully.

War

CW: This vignette contains some bigoted language against the disabled. Please discontinue reading if you do not want to encounter such.

He recognizes a moment too late what he's in for.

The sweep of the pole smacks hard into his legs, sweeping them right out from beneath him and planting him on his back with a *whumpf* of displaced dirt.

"Fuck you," Ares grumbles, the prick of the spear-point at his neck drawing red-gold blood in tiny beads. a thin line of it runs the edge of the metal, before dripping back down to his shirt in a tiny, warm splash.

Athena smiles, wolfish and not at all warm. "I'm sorry, did you say something? I missed it." The way the point presses just a little further in suggests that she did *not* miss it.

"No," he says sourly. "Nothing."

She hums her satisfaction, coiled muscle retracting and then relaxing as she brings the spear back to rest at her side. He can see a touch of ichor along the edge still.

Lifting his hand to his neck, where the wound already begins to close, he feels the slightest interruption in the smoothness of the skin where a thin scar has formed. Hephaestus *would* make her a spear. All she'd have had to do was promise she'd use it to leave a mark on Ares at some point. The twisted fucking cripple doesn't miss any opportunity to screw with him, though Ares has no idea *why*. It's not like he likes Hephaestus either, but before his elevation he wouldn't have gone out of his way to make that god's life miserable. Now, though...

Not through Athena. She'd wipe the floor with him and spit on his corpse.

"Hm," she says, clearly bored with him. "You're not half the god he was. What a disappointment."

She refers, of course, to his predecessor. At least her reason for hating his guts is straightforward and makes sense, even if he doesn't understand why his sister would prefer some waterlogged get of Poseidon to her own brother. It's not like she was fucking him.

Ares hauls himself to his feet. He wants to say something, preferably something rude, but he's too wary of the spear she still wields, and maintains a tight grip on his own, straightening his helm. Not Hephaestus crafted. Not even gifted to him by his mother or father in hopes of offering some protection against his ruthless sister. No, the golden thing once belonged to Apollo, and secondhand as it is, it is still the only thing Ares has ever been given that he actually wanted.

Well, that and the cloak Hestia made him once.

"It take it you're still keeping an eye on Troy?" Athena lifts the helm from her own head, tucking it under an elbow and running her fingers through the short strands of her light brown hair.

He bristles at how little she regards him.

“Obviously,” he replies, though honestly it’s mostly Eris who does the watching. Nothing much has occurred yet, certainly not enough to draw his attention.

Ares knows there are ways to forecast these things, to predict when war will come to humans, but he doesn’t care to learn them. War is everywhere, with them, and there’s always the threat of more. He will have his fill. The strategy rooms might belong to the witch in front of him, but the fields... the fields are his. And everything on them is his, until the living are swept off to the realm of that freak and his friends.

She hums speculatively, like she doesn’t believe him, and Ares feels an ugly surge of anger, one he struggles to keep down. It twists his face, fortunately gone by the time Athena has re-donned her helm and turned to face him once more.

She levels her spear in a challenging gesture, and the wild, incomprehensible fury surges. He crosses his spear with her own, his blood singing in his veins with the promise that this time, this time, he will best her.

And if not here, then later. He will find a way. His *dear sister* will kneel at his feet.

They all will.

Olympus

I: Topography

As one might expect, Mt. Olympus is in fact a mountain! The thing is, it works a little differently from most of them in that the physical mortal-world location “Mt. Olympus” is simply the entry part to Olympus, home of the gods, much as there are several entry points to the Underworld in the mortal realm that are not strictly just passages through space as ordinarily understood. Technically Olympus like Hades is a different “dimension” or “plane” and can be accessed only under the right conditions even from the physical mountain.

Those conditions tend to be, well, the permission of Zeus, or godhood, or something like that. Being that the entrance is at the top of a very tall, difficult to scale mountain, it’s arguable that no one of less power than a demigod could even reach the metaphorical door unassisted, let alone be invited in!

Once the dimensional shift occurs, however, the plane of Olympus is quite obviously divine. It’s not cold in spite of being atop a mountain, and in fact isn’t even really all that mountainous. There are a lot of rolling plains and foothills and the like as well, and on first inspection it gives off quite the pastoral, agrarian vibe. Bathed in sunlight most of the time, Olympus has short nights and no winters, though there is a brief ‘rest’ period between fall and spring for agricultural purposes.

Aside from all the production land and the occasional rural village or forest grove, pretty much everyone who lives on Olympus lives in the city of the same name, home of the gods and seat of Zeus power. The King of the Gods himself lives in a massive, sprawling palatial estate on the highest point on the plane, closest to the sky that is his dominion. There is a large civic district in the center of the city, as well as residences and gathering places of various sorts outside of that. The bathhouses and gymnasiums are popular, as are the gardens and theaters.

Everywhere there is evidence of the richness of Olympian life, the literal as well as the metaphorical kind. Precious stones, eternally-fresh flowers, and other such extravagances are all commonplace as decorative features, and the color palettes tend towards white, gold, pastels, and occasionally dramatic jewel tones.

II: Governance and Demographics

In addition to the Olympian (as opposed to Chthonic or Titanic) deities, Olympus is home to a variety of demigods, nymphs, satyrs, centaurs, and other creatures of myth. Such beings are not typically members of the ruling class, but not all of them are of the service class either, as many live outside the main city amidst nature. For those non-deities in the main populations centers, however, occupations tend towards various kinds of servitude (public or private), or else the arts and the like. There’s a bit of species-specific expectation when it comes to this kind of thing; one is much more likely, for example, to see a nymph actor or a centaur master-at-arms than the other way around.

Non-deities actually make up the vast majority of Olympus’s population, and demigods whose other parent is some sort of Olympian being are... very common. They tend to occupy a social stratum of their own, between those of their parents, and to have a demigod child can

sometimes be a status move for a nondivine parent, though just as often there's nothing so calculated about it.

The 'government' of Olympus is an absolute monarchy—Zeus's word *literally* constitutes Olympian law, though as it happens he doesn't tend to pronounce on every little thing. Within their own domains, each other Olympian deity tends to have a fair amount of latitude; Demeter for example runs the food supply, and this is power that she can leverage to get her way in other matters, since quite obviously no one would be as good at that job as she is. But one must always be careful when applying such leverage, as domains can in fact be stripped from the gods that hold them under certain circumstances.

This is, in fact, how Ares came upon his position as God of War—though he is not the only one to have come into power this way, he is the obvious example.

III: Culture

For the most part, Olympians enjoy a relaxed lifestyle of considerable luxury, particularly the gods themselves. There is, of course, the responsibility to hear and attend to mortal prayer, but the extent to which each individual deity does this is largely self-determined. It is known though not fully understood that large mortal followings add to a god's power, but they are in some circumstances also known to have deleterious effects, and so this is a well that most deities are very careful about tapping into, and the most fastidious among them keep a careful distance from their followers.

The arts flourish on Olympus, particularly in music, visual art, and theatre. As in much of the mortal world, honor and valor are prized traits, particularly on the field of battle, and physical and deific strength is almost a direct measure of one's importance among the gods. There are those who eschew such standards, but such people often find themselves relatively relegated as a result.

Zeus's favor or lack thereof plays a large role in one's perceived status as well, and the King does not as a rule hesitate to play favorites. He is known to be largely fickle in his affections, however, platonic or otherwise, and the truly insightful tend to seek the lesser but much more stable favor of Hera, or else one of Zeus's more beloved children, such as Athena or Apollo.

IV: Relations with the Underworld

Simply put, most Olympians would prefer not to remember that the Underworld exists. Gods whose dominion is primarily concerned with the mortal world, such as Poseidon, are readily-enough accepted, but the Chthonic deities are typically disdained at best, and to have cordial relations with one or more of them is to invite social ridicule.

In fact, Olympians have in the past made rather a habit of exiling the undesirables within their own ranks to the Underworld, as a form of punishment.

Hades himself is universally feared, due to a suspicion that he (or contact with him) is capable of rescinding the immortality that Olympians enjoy regardless of their social status.

The bare minimum of contact is retained for necessary balance purposes, and Zeus does occasionally express displeasure with people who 'ridicule his brother, who cannot help being as he is,' but for the most part, the two factions have very little to do with one another.

Full Name: Pyriphlegethon (“Pyri”)
Titles: The River of Fire
Age: 27
Gender: Nonbinary (Agender)
Sexual Orientation: Biromantic Asexual

Skin Color: Bronzed
Hair Color: Ginger-red
Eye Color: Golden
Height: 5’0”
Build: Wiry, lithe

Appearance: Pyriphlegethon is not the Underworld’s smallest resident, but they might well be the smallest *adult*. At exactly five feet tall and none too broad, they certainly don’t, in pure physical dimensions, take up all that much space.

Almost by way of compensation for this fact, however, every iota of space they do occupy seems to be *filled*. There is a presence about them, a vibrant energy that’s poorly contained at the best of times. It’s only highlighted by their coloration and looks, which are striking to say the least. Warm, almost coppery bronze skin is smattered almost everywhere with freckles, especially on their face, where the deeper flecks crowd their nose, cheeks, and brow, tiny and dense. Their hair, often a bit of a disheveled mess, is a riot of 3B curls chopped at chin length, all a gingery red with an uncommon glossiness. When the light strikes it, it can almost seem to carry all the colors of fire, befitting their domain.

Their eyes are large, long lashed and bright golden, accompanied by a snub nose and full lips, the shape of them slightly pulled on one side by the trio of parallel scars that cut upwards from their jawline to their forehead, missing their left eye but cutting into the brow above. The marks are pale, stark against the depth of their complexion.

Pyri usually favors especially loose garments, and when they are outside of armor, often but not always binds their chest. Whether they want to tends to vary somewhat over time, and so they have elected against any more permanent magical or alchemical alterations to their physical form. They also have and sometimes wear a set of armor, however, and honestly it’s in that that they feel best about their appearance. Their form is a spare one, wiry muscle packed economically onto a thin frame, and they’re proud of the evidence of their work and training, as well as the calluses that have begun to form on their hands.

“I used to hate mirrors, you know? But here... I’m really *me*, and it feels amazing.”

Personality: Subtle and discreet are words that apply to Pyri about as well as they apply to Kerberos, which is to say, quite poorly. They are, to all appearances, an open book, their emotions worn clearly on their face, their foot semi-permanently in their mouth due to what would seem to be the complete absence of a mental filter. They’re a force of personality, really, and there’s an odd charisma about them—one that allows them to perhaps escape the more dire consequences of their trademark irreverence.

They have little issue talking to or back to authority figures, and indeed feel free to question people when they either think they’re doing something stupid or don’t understand why something is the way it is. They’ve caught a lot of flak for this over the years, though in the Underworld, they’ve found that their free

expression of their thoughts has been embraced rather than suppressed, a welcome change. Pyri's so straightforward that it's almost impossible to imagine that what one sees isn't what one gets with them, and to be fair, that's most often true.

They're not the most socially-apt of people, being a strange combination of intuitive and oblivious that's sort of hard to predict. Though often enough the implications of other people's actions or words are lost upon them, they can display surprisingly-apt insight at the strangest times, generally corresponding to whether this is something they can understand as being similar to an experience they've encountered before, as opposed to completely foreign to them. Open, friendly, and generally honest to a fault, there's also no mistaking the fact that they usually do their best to do right by people, even those that would not so quickly extend them the same consideration.

That said, from the boisterous, lively way they present themselves, many people infer a lack of intelligence or skill. Because they laugh too loudly and talk too much and smile a little too often, they can be perceived as lacking some better qualities, someone likely to succeed only because they have a way of making friends of superior talent. They are, in truth, quite happy to be underestimated. By now, they know that their demeanor leads some to fill in the blanks with a rather ungenerous brush, and they've come to relish surprising those people when they have the bite to back up their bark.

“Hekate says my straightforwardness is charming. I dunno about that, but it’s *me*, at least.”

Strength: 6/10

Dexterity: 7/10

Intelligence: 5/10

Wisdom: 4/10

Cunning: 4/10

Willpower: 9/10

Constitution: 6/10

Weapons: Pyri has trained with a number of weapons and armor configurations since their arrival in the underworld, but they favor the spear for the extra reach it grants them. They can use a shield with it, but generally prefer to fight with it in a two handed grip, switching between forms and moves that treat it like a quarterstaff and more expected spear use.

Armor: On the average day, Pyri's wearing normal clothes or leathers, but they do have a proper set of battle regalia, including a copper-colored metal chestplate with the leather skirting, greaves, and bracers common to the residents of the Underworld, and a bright crimson cloak.

Fighting Style/Training: Pyri's definitely still a scrapper, pulling moves and forms from any and all sources they can find and improvising when nothing else seems to work. According to Alekto, they have the fight instinct, but not quite yet the fight skill to back it up, as it were. Still, they're learning. Their principal teacher is Alekto herself, but they've also learned some things from Charon, and a few more from Hades, even. They aspire to be the kind of warrior their teachers are, and are pretty much always the first to volunteer for a spar or practice bout, even and *especially* when they expect to lose.

“It’s called being a work in progress. The key part is the *progress*.”

Proust Questionnaire Pt. 3 - Charon

Q21: What is your most treasured possession?

I don't think I'm particularly attached to any—hm. I suppose if I had to choose, it would be either my staff or the ear cuff Pyriphlegethon made for me. The first because it reminds me of my purpose, and the second because it reminds me that I have a family who cares about me.

Q22: What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?

Being at war with oneself.

Q23: What is your favorite occupation?

I like... being in motion. That is a rather nonspecific answer I suppose, but it encapsulates most of my pastimes. The feeling of rowing is nice, as are walking and swimming. I don't find stillness unbearable, but I do prefer to be active.

Q24: What is your most marked characteristic?

I think in terms of first impressions I must seem to be very mild-mannered. Truly I hope one day that *will* be my most marked characteristic, but for the moment I think it is actually guilt.

Q25: What do you most value in your friends?

I think that depends on which one we're talking about specifically. But if I had to take them as a group, I suppose they all share a certain... acceptance. A willingness to take the now along with the past, and give their trust even sometimes to people who may not deserve it. Such vulnerability is difficult, and an act of enormous grace, I believe.

Q26: Who are your heroes?

I used to have many. Now I suppose I have none. I would have held Hades my hero, but he was rather insistent that I not elevate him in such a way and be his friend instead. I think that... that saved me. So he both is and is not, I think.

Q27: What is it that you most dislike?

Violence. It's hard to explain the full extent of my relationship with it, but suffice to say I loathe it more than anything.

Q28: What is your greatest regret?

Falling under the sway of my worse nature. Letting worship get to my head. The two are fundamentally connected.

Q29: How would you like to die?

If I were to die, I would want to do so in an attempt to redeem what I have done. I do not truly believe such a thing possible, but I have learned to content myself as much as I can with the attempts themselves. They alone must mean something.

Q30: What is your motto?

“A mask worn long enough and sincerely enough becomes a face.”

Tipping Point

“Mother, why does father hate me?”

Rhea’s hands still at the loom; she watches her fingers tremble and stifles a sudden stab of fear at the reminder. Curling them softly into her palms, she turns in her seat.

She has never been one to lie to her son. Truly she doesn’t wish to start now. But what would it do to him, to her child, if he knew the truth? If he knew that Kronos had every intention of killing him before he should reach the fullness of his power? She bites the inside of her lip.

“He doesn’t hate you, Aidoneus.” Rhea folds her hands in her lap, her lips pinching slightly when the child in her belly kicks. He’s a rather tempestuous one. Aidoneus by contrast was as mild a baby as he is a child—perhaps the gentlest creature she’s ever met, accommodating and docile as a fawn.

Big violet eyes, the same shade as her own, stare back at her. He favors her in other ways, too, bearing little of his father in any respect but his stature. Perhaps the still-round lines of his face would one day show such fine angles as Kronos, but Rhea knows he will never reach that point. She wants nothing more than to make it so he can, this child of hers. So she can know him as an adult, see what he will become. But she can’t.

Rhea does not make a habit of hatred, but some part of her will always hate Kronos for caring more for his throne than his children, and Uranus and Gaia for disclosing to him the dread secret that one such child will be his end. Whether Aidoneus, this son she carries now, or some other into the future, she does not know, but... She hopes it is the first. She does not wish to see him hurt.

And yet she knows, deep in her heart, that no matter how mighty her son becomes, he will never have it in him to slay his own family. There is too much tenderness in him. Too much of her, and it pains her every time she thinks of it.

It is why she knows she will never see the adult he might become.

“He does,” Aidoneus whispers, and the certainty in it breaks his voice and her heart in the same syllables.

Rhea closes her eyes, gathering herself just long enough that it gives her the strength to stand and gather him, too, into her arms, and take a seat on the bench where he’d been a moment before. She uses one hand to stroke his hair, whisper fine and thick, the inky-dark strands of it a match to her as well.

My poor boy. If only you could have been after the others. If only you could have been after all this pain.

Aidoneus does not cry. As sensitive and softhearted as she knows him to be, he has never once done that. Sometimes she almost wishes he would. That he knew it was all right to be as affected by things as he was. But though she has told him this, still he never much emotes what she knows he feels deeply, and she is left to guess as well as she can what he might need from her in any given moment.

“You’ve done nothing wrong, little one,” she says instead, hoping that the truth will soothe where the lie could not. She should have started with it anyway.

“I must have,” he says, slightly muffled into her shoulder, where he rests, nearly still as the grave. “Father wouldn’t hate me for no reason.”

But he would, really. Kronos doesn’t care that Aidoneus is too gentle to be the child his parents warned him about. He doesn’t know him well enough to realize it in the first place, and won’t accept her assurances, because he trusts prophesy more than he trusts her, and is much too paranoid in the first place.

“You didn’t do anything wrong,” Rhea repeats. “Can you trust me on that?”

He pulls back slightly to look at her, the melancholy of a much more ancient being lending his eyes a depth no others have. She does not know what this child will be, but she does know that in him there is the potential for a greatness the world has no yet known. Knows it instinctively.

Perhaps Kronos does, too, and that is why he is afraid.

“Okay,” Aidoneus says, nodding solemnly. “I will trust you, mother.”

In that moment, Rhea makes a decision. No matter how long it takes, no matter what she must do, she will ensure that Aidoneus can become the splendid adult he is meant to. That he can, that his brother yet unborn can, that any others she may have the privilege of mothering can. Her power is so little compared to the king of titans, but her cleverness is more.

You will live, she swears, to herself and to her child. *Even if it kills me.*

The Moirae's Mirror - Oblivion

"It's Lethe," Charon says, their expression grim. Their thumb traces a small dip in the pale wood staff they hold. "It would appear that she's dying."

"What? How? Gods don't just get sick and die!" Pyri's the first to react, ever the spark of brightness in a dim world.

Alekto's jaw tightens; Hermes sighs heavily and throws an arm over their shoulders, fluffing their ginger curls with an uncharacteristically-faint smile. Even Hekate feels her fingers curl against her palms. It's hard to explain, to a new deity, that the rules aren't always the rules. That by nature they are beings of exceptions and omissions and caveats, especially here in the Underworld, where the orderly divine law cannot penetrate the heart of chaos.

All eyes turn as one to Hades. There is a reason he is the king, much as he tries instead to be something less than that. To be a leader among peers and no more.

His eyes are narrow, expression pensive. His hand rests on his own shoulder, crossed over his chest, thumb tapping a regular pattern on his collarbone through dark fabric. "Have they started to remember yet?" he asks, bass rumble easily audible even in spite of its quiet.

Charon grimaces. "I'm afraid so. There may even be one case that is... considerably advanced."

"What?" Hermes looks back and forth between them. "Who?"

The Ferryman sighs. "Her name is Eurydice. I wasn't sure at first, but in light of this development I can only assume she remembers—or rather, that she never truly forgot."

"When?" Hekate asks. Determining the time of this development is going to be vitally important for pinpointing its cause. And if they can't do that, they might not be able to save Lethe.

"I ferried her three days after the Consort's arrival."

"Wait—you don't mean Persephone has something to do with this, do you?" Pyri looks almost offended at the declaration.

"She has been vocal in her distaste for what happens to the dead," Alekto points out somberly. There is no sense of vindication in the statement at all. It sounds, rather, like something she does not *wish* to say but feels she *must*.

"It is not Persephone," Hades says simply. "She could not. Her powers are not those of death and disease, but the very opposite. And even if she could, she would not." The solid certainty of his tone puts both Pyri and Alekto a visible ease, though it does not dispel the tension that pervades the room.

"The timing is interesting but perhaps ultimately coincidental," Charon agrees readily. "I fear however that this is not just an intake problem. Without regular drinking of Lethe's waters, the rest will soon follow. We may be looking at an upset we've never seen before."

Forgetting their lives before is an important component of spirits becoming ready to live once again. If they cannot be freed of their previous lives, both the good and the bad, Hades will not be able to reincarnate them into the mortal realm. Hekate expels a breath.

“Well, we have to start somewhere. I’ll see what I can do for Lethe,” she says, looking to Hades for confirmation.

He nods, trusting her judgement. “If you would, ask Persephone if she would be willing to accompany you. Her power may be of assistance, if she be willing to grant it.”

“Understood.”

“What of the rest of us?” Alekto asks. “We can’t just proceed as usual while one of us is dying.”

Hades purses his lips. “We won’t. We need to find the origin of this illness. The rest of you should talk to all of Lethe’s regular visitors. We need to know if anyone noted anything at all unusual recently.”

“And you?” Hermes seems to have picked up on the same thing Hekate did—that Hades is keeping a thought to himself.

He tries to smile, but it looks more like a grimace.

“I will be needing to talk to my father, I believe.”

Name: Zeus
Titles: King of the Gods
Age: Very, very old.
Gender: Male
Sexual Orientation: Does it have a pulse?

Skin Color: Burnished tan
Hair Color: Gold-blond
Eye Color: Light grey
Height: 7'0"
Build: Heavily muscular

Appearance: The King of the Gods bears the title in his very being, and it only serves to amplify what was already an exceptionally-commanding presence. The tallest among the Olympians even in his common form, he is only larger still in his true one, though it has been some ages since he saw the need to shed his more genteel skin.

Olympus is known for its rich golden hues, and the essence of the place is shared with its lord, from the burnished almost honeyed tone of his light brown skin to the locks of his silky golden hair, usually host to the gold-and-gem laurel crown that represents his station as the mightiest deity on Olympus. Zeus is built powerfully, thick ropes of muscle banded everywhere about him, or near enough, from trunklike arms to a broad chest and shoulders, run all the way to his feet. It's the athleticism of titans, and he more than any of their direct offspring bears the evidence of his lineage plainly and visibly, for all to see.

His eyes are a cloudlike shade of grey, like portentous thunderheads, something that perhaps suits his domain of sky and lightning. There's a certain luminosity to them evocative of the latter, as if darkness itself could never fully take hold in Zeus's presence, even if he weren't actively making attempt to forestall it.

He walks with the authority and pride one would expect of his station, and then a fair bit more even than that.

“This would be an opportune moment for you to bow.”

Personality: Zeus has very seldom in his life been told *no*. He has even *less* frequently bothered to listen when he was. And, whether or not it's a good thing, he has in general always had the power to make his will into reality. These facts have combined to make him supremely confident, to the point of arrogance, and also extremely decisive. The qualities, combined with the rest of his personality, do make him at times a highly-effective leader, someone others can look to for direction and receive it.

He is also, however, rather entitled and arguably morally bankrupt, even as a comparative judgement among his peers. Not much caring for the effects of his actions on other people works remarkably well for he kind of cold strategy warfare rewards, however, and it also makes his ambition to remain at the top of the Olympian heap quite possible even with powerful enemies. This near-sociopathic disregard for others does manifest in his personal relationships, but it tends to do so more subtly than one might think.

For Zeus is quite capable of wearing friendly faces, and one would be hard-pressed to identify his coldness from a distance. To most, he seems at worst an overblown ego with a handful of rather unsavory, if reasonably commonplace, vices. Few know the worst of him, and even then, he has a certain charisma that makes it difficult to do anything about them, a magnetism so powerful and a perception so keen that one can almost begin to gaslight oneself before *he* ever need suggest that perhaps things are not exactly the way one thought.

It makes him a king of frankly staggering power, matched only by his ambition. Perhaps his greatest strategic (rather than personal) flaw is his tendency to routinely underestimate others, particularly those he believes to be most firmly under his thumb.

He is good to his friends, and a terror to his enemies, and this alone is enough to ensure that most wish to be the first rather than the second.

“It is, as We say, good to be king.”

Strength: 10/10

Dexterity: 7/10

Intelligence: 8/10

Wisdom: 8/10

Cunning: 9/10

Willpower: 10/10

Constitution: 10/10

Weapons: Zeus favors his trademark thunderbolts at a range. Up close, he’s a wrestler and a spearman in about equal measure, so which tack he chooses depends on the situation.

Armor: There is no armor in the world more effective than the vital immortality of the king of all gods.

Fighting Style/Training: Brutal and effective, Zeus is a monument to the power that felled Titans, who were gods before there were gods. He isn’t shy about getting up close and personal, though he’s also quick to show off, for as long as he takes his opponent to be beneath him—and he takes everyone to be beneath him. He has, after all, not yet been defeated by anyone: human, god, or anywhere in between.

“What is there in the world that could stand tall before Us? Nothing in the heavens or upon the earth.”

Proust Questionnaire Pt. 1 - Hekate

Q1. What is your idea of perfect happiness?

The library, in autumn, with the windows open and the smell of the air just that exact mix between parchment, cooking food from the city, and crisp air. And me, with nothing to do but enjoy it with my friends.

Q2. What is your greatest fear?

That someday everything I have built will be gone again.

Q3. What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

Inattention. I try not to miss things, but sometimes I just do.

Q4. What is the trait you most deplore in others?

Callousness. Caring may take many different forms, but not to care at all? That's deplorable.

Q5. Which living person do you most admire?

Hades, without a doubt. He changed my entire world, and I will always be grateful to him for that.

Q6. What is your greatest extravagance?

I reject the premise of the question. What is called 'extravagance' is most often people taking a little bit of something for themselves, for their own enjoyment apart from the mechanistic need for productivity and 'usefulness.' By that standard, I daresay I hope most of my life is extravagance. I shall be happier and more fulfilled for it!

Q7. What is your current state of mind?

Hmm... contemplative. I suppose I'm usually at least a little bit like that, though.

Q8. What do you consider the most overrated virtue?

Humility, by a fair margin. Not to say arrogance is better than people think it is, but confidence is nothing to be ashamed of. Quite attractive, too, as a trait. If I do say so myself.

Q9. On what occasion do you lie?

I suppose if telling the truth would pose a danger? I like to think I'm fairly honest in general.

Q10. What do you most dislike about your appearance?

Must I dislike something? I happen to quite enjoy the way I look, actually!

Dossier - Empusa

Name: Empusa
Nicknames: Em, Emmy (to Makaria)
Age: 485
Species: Spirit
Lifespan: Immortal
Date of Birth: April 4
Profession: Tutor, Librarian
Residence: Hades

Hair Color: Dark brown; greying
Hair Length: Shoulder
Hair Texture: Loose curls
Eye Color: Brown
Height: 5'10
Build: Slender
Skin Tone: Deep tan

Distinguishing Features: Prosthetic leg, made of bronze or copper, with runes etched in it

Weapons: None

Magic: A minor gift, especially able with shapeshifting and information recall

Skills: Excellent memory, teaching, organization, speed-reading

Talents: Vocal impersonation

Hobbies: Reading, writing, lyrics composition

Friends: Hekate, Charon, and Leuke in particular, but she gets along well with everyone

Sexual Orientation: Queer

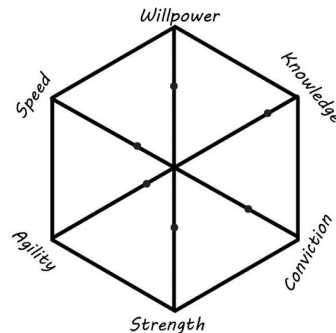
Partner/s: Daeira

Other Family: None

Habits: Tidies automatically, talks to herself

Goals: At the moment, mostly making sure Makaria gets a good education

Fears: Disruption to the flow of her life, something happening to Daeira



Atlantis, the Sunken City

I: What is generally known

Atlantis, formerly a powerful mortal empire with close connections to several gods, was once a thriving city-state with considerable outside lands. The people who lived there were in some cases even practitioners of magic, and as a location on the material plane it was quite unique, both for its large demigod population and for the fact that nymphs, centaurs, and the like were reasonably often among its citizenry.

Sometimes called “Lower Olympus,” it was known as a place where gods would often go wearing mortal guises, when they had the desire to mingle, and many of its religious ceremonies and rites had a reputation for ecstatic revelry, in which the gods themselves occasionally participated (something that had a lot to do with the large population of demigods).

Atlantis was forcibly pulled into the sea a great many centuries ago, though no one will talk about why. It has become something of a taboo subject among those old enough to remember, and mentions of it in official records give no indication of the reason for its destruction.

What is known is that the separation between deities and mortals became considerably more pronounced after its sinking, with the gods typically only infrequently directly revealing themselves to humans, and other divinity-adjacent beings almost never.

II: What is speculated

It is sometimes offhandedly mentioned that Atlantis entered an armed conflict with another nation, and was winning handily. Though the war had begun on somewhat benevolent pretenses—Atlanteans were at first quite concerned to end the practice of slavery within their unfriendly neighbor’s borders, and wished to snuff out the burgeoning campaign of empire that was fomenting there—somehow events changed.

By the time it sank, Atlantis had itself taken to the practice of slavery and empire, greatly enriched by its successful campaign against its neighbors and looking to further expand. The Atlantean king was thought to have ambitions of a unified human society under his rule, and there are those that whisper that he was supported in this ambition by some of the gods, for he was skilled at statecraft and himself a descendant of divine blood.

And yet somehow, the city was pulled into the ocean. The watery nature of the grave leads some to suspect that Poseidon was involved, but he denies this in the rare instance he is asked about it. He seems to have few feelings on the matter in general, though worth note is the fact that the edifice of the city is preserved in his waters, and a version of it now serves as the seat of his own throne.

III: Lingering mysteries

Primary among the unanswered questions stemming from the incident is: what happened to the Atlanteans? It could be reasonably guessed that they all died when the city sank, but of additional remark is that it seems that the location almost immediately disappeared from human records: there were no accounts of survivors, nor reminiscences from naives who were

away from the city at the time of the sinking. As if every single person who lived there disappeared with it, whether they were actually there at the time or not.

What is more, the events faded from fact into myth unusually quickly in the consciousness of mortals. Few at present have heard of Atlantis, much less believe it ever existed, and this was true within the next mortal generation that followed, suggesting that someone exercised great effort to hasten the forgetting.

Secondly, if Atlantis enjoyed as much favor with the gods as it seems to have, how exactly did it come about that a being powerful enough to sink it did so without their interference? Was there interference? Punishment? Who was this person or persons? Why did they sink it? Was it mortal witchcraft, undertaken in vengeance? Or divine retribution of some hazy kind? All of these matters are unclear, the silence enforced by what seems to be something powerful enough to still the tongues of even Olympus's most shameless gossips.

Name: Demeter
Titles: Goddess of Law and Agriculture
Age: Eons
Gender: Female
Sexual Orientation: Demi(Hetero)sexual

Hair Color: Dark brown
Height: 5'8"
Build: Willowy

Appearance: The thing that strikes the careful observer most strongly about Demeter's appearance is how *disciplined* it is, and how *regular* and *neat*. There are many types of beauty; the Goddess of Law has one befitting her domains. There is nothing wild or untamed about her in the least, not from her immaculate mahogany curls to her artful choices in jewelry, nor is there a wrinkle or spot to be found anywhere on the rich fabrics of her clothes. Her signature colors are shades of green and gold, to tan and wheat, though she has been known to occasionally venture into blue and white as well.

Demeter is not a showy person by any means; this has little to do with any sense of humility as such, but rather her view that tidiness and a certain kind of modesty and plainness are themselves proper not only in conduct but appearance, to some extent. She doesn't go so far as to shame anyone who chooses otherwise, but her own preferences are abundantly clear in her simple, clean style of personal upkeep.

"An orderly mind makes an orderly life. An orderly appearance is simply the natural reflection of both."

Personality: What manifests in appearance is deeply true of personality as well. Demeter is a disciplined, orderly, regimented kind of person, strict in her personal adherence to principle, law and even schedule. It makes her in some ways difficult to get along with for those more inclined to flexibility, but it also makes her honest and reliable. A promise made by the Goddess of Law will be a promise kept, come what may. She prefers to be straightforward and frank as well, but she can and does make use of more subtle and clever means as well, as she must to keep her position as strong as she prefers it to be in Olympian politics.

Her concern with appearances can seem at times superficial, and truthfully, there are plenty of people she allows to believe she is rather shallow and petty. But the fact of the matter is that Demeter rather than caring much on a personal level for such things understands the way they are read by others, and how appearances and impressions can translate to very real advantage and disadvantage in politics and negotiation. So she is fastidious in her own, and can seem overly fussy with them to others in her circle, but this is all an attempt to ensure that they like her are always given the advantage—or not given the disadvantage—of estimation based on appearance.

Demeter compartmentalizes her personal life and political one as far away from each other as possible, and dislikes when they cross in any manner. As such, she especially attempts to keep the machinations and repercussions of her various politicking away from her only child, and to some extent even from her sister, who is her only other close relative. This can sometimes have unwelcome consequences, however, as she finds it difficult to relate at times, or to understand the concerns of people who exist wholly in one compartment, love them though she does.

In general, her priority with respect to her demideity child has always been their protection, and in some cases this may have chafed them or made them feel smothered, something she is vaguely aware of but tends to think they will see the reasons for eventually. She does not think a mother is a friend, though at the same time she finds herself wishing for a kind of closeness she doesn't think it really there, and the tension of being at odds with herself on the point is perhaps the hardest thing she's ever had to reconcile.

“Each thing in its place, in proper sequence.”

Strength: 7/10

Dexterity: 6/10

Intelligence: 8/10

Wisdom: 9/10

Cunning: 7/10

Willpower: 9/10

Constitution: 8/10

Weapons: None

Armor: None

Fighting Style/Training: Demeter has little inclination to the fighting arts. This is not to say she is incapable of defending herself, rather that she prefers diplomacy first in all instances, and when diplomacy fails her strength lies in the sheer power of her magic. Diplomacy rarely fails, however, as the mistress of the food supply is one goddess even Zeus cannot anger too much too often. She is, therefore, powerful in the political as well as magical sense, and she much prefers to resolve matters before one cedes to the other, as open conflict is a failure of adjudication that she finds personally offensive.

“Battle is such a shortsighted method of resolution. Woe upon he who forces me to such barbarism.”

Proust Questionnaire Pt. 2 - Hekate

Q11: Which living person do you most despise?

Most? Oh my. That's a difficult one. I think I shall say Zeus, if only because I find hatred on behalf of other people to have a bit more bite than hatred on my own behalf.

Q12: What is the quality you most like in a person?

Curiosity. It is the antithesis of both boredom and boringness.

Q13: Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

I'd like to think I vary my phrasing often enough not to have any obviously-overused quirks of dialogue. But if I do, oh well.

Q14: What or who is the greatest love of your life?

It's a long life, and has *been* a long life. I think the greatest love of it is one I haven't met yet.

Q15: When and where were you happiest?

I think that is yet to come, but... until it does, here and now.

Q16: Which talent would you most like to have?

Well I have several already that I'm quite satisfied with, but I wouldn't mind being a little more artistic or crafty. In the sense of making things. I'm *plenty* crafty in the other sense already.

Q17: If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

Nothing. I like who I am, and have no interest in being more 'perfect,' whatever that means.

Q18: What do you consider your greatest achievement?

If you've been in the Underworld for any length of time, you've benefited from my greatest achievement. I'm the one who designed the magic systems that do things like heat water and so on.

Q19: If you were to die and come back as a person or a thing, what would it be?

Actually, I do sort of wonder what would happen if I died. I don't think it would be death in the usual sense. Not interested in trying it, at any rate.

Q20: Where would you most like to live?

Right here suits me just fine.

Dossier

Name: The Moirae (Klotho, Lachesis, Atropos)

Age: Exceedingly old; believed to predate the 'first generation' of Olympians

Species: Unclear - perhaps Titans?

Lifespan: Immortal

Date of Birth: They celebrate on the last/first day of every year.

Profession: Underworld Ministers/advisors, goddesses of Fate

Residence: Hades

Hair Color: Flaxen blonde (Klotho, Lachesis); Grey (Atropos)

Hair Length: Waist (Klotho); Shoulderblades (Lachesis); Chin (Atropos)

Hair Texture: Curly (Klotho); Wavy (Lachesis); Straight (Atropos)

Eye Color: A pale pearl-grey

Height: 5'6" (All)

Build: Slender (All)

Skin Tone: Fair, grey undertones (All)

Distinguishing Features: Each wears a wreath of olive—in a different stage of life.

Capabilities

Weapons: The Moirae are not warriors; they neither carry nor use weapons.

Magic: Powerful sorceresses and practitioners of fate-magic, they are both powerful and unique.

Skills: Collectively they are all excellent weavers. Individually there is wide variance. Klotho is somewhat athletic and acrobatic and loves to run. Lachesis is an excellent cook and brewer of tea. Atropos should not be challenged to games of strategy, bluffing, *or* chance.

Personal Details

Hobbies: Gossip, trolling, taking walks, working on three-part harmonies.

Friends: Hekate, Hades, Daeira. Klotho has an odd fascination with Charon.

Sexual Orientation: All three are asexual.

Partner/s: None

Other Family: Apparently only each other.

Habits: They don't feel completely comfortable unless the tools of their trade are nearby, so it's not uncommon to see them habitually touch these. They're incorrigible gossips, and greatly enjoy having guests for tea and ~~interrogations~~ socialization.

Goals: It's hard to pin a goal on any of the Moirae. Those who know them best might venture to say they have some overarching goal like cosmic balance, but even that is sort of hard to be certain of.

Fears: Ironically, Klotho is very unfond of spiders. Neither Lachesis not Atropos has ever demonstrated fear of anything in particular.

The Flame and the Fury

Alekto rolls her shoulders, settling further back against the bark of the tree behind her. She passes the charcoal to her other hand, flexing the one she's been using to draw, and sighs under her breath. Sometimes she wonders why she still holds on to these parts of herself; they aren't necessary for who she is now. Rather they feel too much like remnants of who she used to be, things she should have cast off a long time ago, if only to make the weight on her back feel a little less heavy.

But contrary to her expectations, Hades and the others have encouraged her to keep them, these remnants of a creature called something much milder than Erinyes. And perhaps it hasn't been all bad. They've convinced her she is still capable of making people smile. Something she hates to admit she needs.

She does, though. Need it. Especially because the work she does now so seldom allows it. No one smiles when punishment is exacted. Not she, and not those being punished.

A glimmer of motion beside her draws her attention, and she feels the head resting against her thigh shift away, relieving her of negligible weight. Pyri seems to have concluded their nap.

And indeed, they sit up a moment later, stretching their arms towards the boughs above, and Alekto, just for a moment, marvels at their brightness. She remembers the last Phlegethon, of course. But though he too was a lord of flame, he did not carry it in his essence quite the same way this one does.

Golden eyes land on her, and they smile, ever so slightly gap-toothed, and bright. Their smiles are the easiest Alekto has ever encountered. The others, weighed down like she is, must always have *reason* to smile, at least genuinely. But Pyri... Pyri needs no reason to smile other than that they are alive. Or, sometimes, that a friend is present, Alekto among them.

Not even her sisters smile just because she *exists*. It is foreign. She thinks it is also beautiful, in the same way fire is beautiful, because there is something dangerous about that quality.

The danger is that it makes Alekto want to smile back.

Instead, she lifts an eyebrow. "Good sleep?" She can feel more than hear her own tone, but she's reasonably sure it is appropriate. Gone are the days when there was effortless music in it, however. It's all right, though. She thinks, some days, she actually likes this version of herself much more than the one she left behind. Remnants or otherwise.

Pyri nods, lifting their hands and replying in clumsy signs. *Warm-good. Good drawing?*

She hums, turning the parchment she was working on, the thin board she's braced it on with. The depiction is of the tree in front of them, lightly laden with tentative buds and blossoms.

Pyri 'ooohs,' or some other indistinct sound of the kind, she thinks, leaning forward to make a proper inspection of the rendition and nodding with satisfaction. *Pretty. Good?* They pull a face, then point to the charcoal in her off-hand, obviously inquiring as to its quality.

Alekto nods once. *Very good.* She doesn't think skill with crafting things is native to the domain, but Pyri seems to have ability with smithing, and some adjacent skills as well. Apparently

including the creation of drawing charcoal. Hekate swears she only gave them a recipe and they figured the rest out themselves.

Perhaps it has something to do with who they were before, though Alekto understands there are things they do not remember. May never remember. Things about this new arrival that may remain always a mystery, upon which they can build a new life. A new self.

Like she has, except she has not forgotten.

They smile brighter, and against her will, she feels her lips tug upwards in response.

That's all right.

She can go forward from anywhere. Somehow, looking at them, she knows it.

Proust Questionnaire Pt. 3 - Hekate

Q21: What is your most treasured possession?

Does the whole of the library count? I consider it mine in the sense that I am its keeper at least. If not, I suppose it's just the little incidental things I've received from friends over time. None of them extremely materially valuable, but important for the sentiments attached.

Q22: What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?

Ignorance. Nothing is more miserable than being wretched and not knowing it. I speak of course of misery and wretchedness in some not-purely-subjective sense, as I doubt many such people *feel* miserable. All the worse.

Q23: What is your favorite occupation?

Learning, in nearly any form it should take. Reading, conversing, exploring, experimenting... and so on.

Q24: What is your most marked characteristic?

Oh I don't feign to know what others pick out about me first. As though I were an assemblage of parts instead of a whole. ...Perhaps pedantry. Perhaps good humor.

Q25: What do you most value in your friends?

Genuineness. Eccentricity. A willingness to admit faults, and, when possible, laugh about them.

Q26: Who are your heroes?

After a long and arduous battle, I am pleased to announced I have killed them all.

Q27: What is it that you most dislike?

Gleeful ignorance.

Q28: What is your greatest regret?

Letting others decide my worth for far too long.

Q29: How would you like to die?

Truly I would prefer not to. But if I must, in service of those I love.

Q30: What is your motto?

Hmmm... I'll go with 'know thyself.'

Departure

It's hard to believe it's come to this.

Demeter is rarely so blindsided as she was when Zeus first decided her son was to be married to his brother. It's an unconventional match if she's ever heard of one, and, honestly, she'd sort of supposed Hades would be a perpetual bachelor, perhaps keeping himself a cadre of pretty nymphs or some such thing—she *has* heard rumors that he abducted some poor thing named Leuke. The idea that her poor boy might be subjected to the companionship of such a monstrous being as the Lord of the Dead...

She'd thought even *Zeus* wouldn't go that far. He's petty, yes. Spiteful and terrible. But seldom do any of his little shows of power encompass something like forcing a political marriage. And yet in this case rather than a show of wit or subtlety or even persuasiveness he'd simply brute-forced the situation: she, Demeter, was to give up her son of both of their deific domains. *And the King of the Gods says so.*

It almost makes her wonder if this plan is really intended as a move against *her*, or a move against Hades, somehow.

But, of course it is. *She* is his favorite rival, as it were; he barely gives mention to his wretched brother.

And now, before she can think of some method of counterattack, here she is, at the conclusion of a party where neither of those celebrated feels very celebratory, and she must bid goodbye to her son. Her only child. Her greatest love.

Mystis has retrieved him, and Demeter steps forward, seeking to envelop Dionysus in her arms.

"Please don't," he says softly, taking a half-step away.

Demeter stills, her hands falling to her sides. She has no idea what expression crosses her face, but she supposes it must be rather surprised. She forgets, sometimes, that he has such an aversion to touch. She had thought *this once* he might allow her, but... no, it's not good to think that way. He has his needs; she must respect them.

Even if she wants nothing more than to wrap her arms around him, press her brow to his, remind him that she is, and always will be, on his side, doing everything she can to keep him safe.

"I'm going to get you out of this," she says, exerting effort to steady her voice. "I'll get you back to Olympus, Dionysus, I *swear it*."

Yes. This, she can promise. Because she'll do it no matter what it takes. No matter how many favors she has to call in, how much of her eons-built political debts she must call in. Anything to bring her boy home.

She swallows thickly, eyes intent on his. "Whatever you do, stay strong. Don't let them convince you it's hopeless. Remember who you are."

"I'll be all right," he says, offering a mild smile. She can't fathom why he isn't more worried about it, but perhaps she should count this a positive. The only thing she wants less than to send him off afraid is to send him off blithely unaware of the danger. Hopefully he can be the first without being the second—surely she has said enough about how dangerous that lot is.

She nods firmly, bolstered. "I hope so, Dionysus. And I'll work as fast as I can to get you home. Just leave everything to me."

A throat clears behind her, and she forces herself to break eye contact. Never trust Death with one's back. Hermes trails not far behind, but that's of no comfort at all.

"With apologies," the Dread One says, in that low bass that hums through the air and makes her skin crawl. "We do have to return to the Underworld. I'm sure you're aware why lingering here is inadvisable."

Demeter's expression sours outright. She knows. It makes nothing any better that Zeus would chase them out if they didn't leave soon enough to keep Olympus untainted by the Underworld. "Save your apologies, *Agesander*. You may take my blood from me now, but what is not yours to keep will always escape you eventually."

She names him thief, because he steals from her the one thing she cannot lose.

Red eyes blink slowly, and Hades dips his chin. "So it is," he acknowledges. "But people have minds of their own, and Dionysus's mind is neither yours nor mine to claim."

Demeter *tsks* sharply, the fingers of one hand curling into her palm. The *audacity*. She knows her son better than anyone does—who is this god, this King of Ashes, to think anyone might prefer going with him to staying here, safe and warm?

Hades himself certainly doesn't seem concerned with it, and only stands patiently in his spot, a loose, relaxed grip on his weapon of station. He regards her levelly, with uncanny crimson eyes; there is no mercy to be found here. He will not apologize to her for what he is about to do, whatever shapes his forked tongue makes.

She can't stand it. She *must* find a way out of this. Trying to hold the promise in her eyes, she fixes them one last time on Dionysus, then rips herself away, departing in rapid strides.

Only then does she allow the tears to fall.

Proust Questionnaire Pt. 1 - Hermes

Q1. What is your idea of perfect happiness?

Flying.

Q2. What is your greatest fear?

Fear? Never met her.

Q3. What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

These questions are really depressing. Can we maybe talk about something more, I don't know, *fun*?

Q4. What is the trait you most deplore in others?

All right, fine. I'll bite. It's really annoying when people talk like they're experts on something they don't understand at all. Does that count? Oh—and judging people over dumb things that don't matter. Those two are tied.

Q5. Which living person do you most admire?

Hades. Just... yeah. He's not going to read this, is he?

Q6. What is your greatest extravagance?

Like, which one's the best? That's tough. You're expecting me to say sex, but it's doesn't even break the top three, actually. Have you ever felt like someone just *gets* you? Now *that's* extravagance.

Q7. What is your current state of mind?

I'm kind of hungry, I guess? If you mean like in a more 'long term' kind of way, I guess I'm excited to see how things work out.

Q8. What do you consider the most overrated virtue?

Propriety. *Fuck* propriety.

Q9. On what occasion do you lie?

Now why would I ever tell the truth about *that*?

Q10. What do you most dislike about your appearance?

See, this sounds like an invitation to be down on myself. Not going to happen. I'm not tall but I don't care, I have the best hair on Olympus, and my eyes are *just* piercing enough to make people swoon. It's almost like I'm a god or something.

Lifted

“Why do I have to learn how to fight, anyway?” Hermes tests the tip of the dagger with his fingertip, finding it to be blunted enough. Probably. It could still take out an eye or something, but he’s not going to be aiming there, and he doubts he could hurt his uncle with a fully-sharpened one anyway.

“You don’t,” Hades replies simply, setting aside the water he’d brought to the ring for both of them by looping the straps on the gourds over one of the fenceposts. “If you don’t wish to fight, you need not learn how.”

He wishes it were so simple. “That’s not what Father says,” Hermes notes a little sullenly. He tries to flip the dagger in the air and catch it in his hand again, but he misses—it catches briefly on his fingers and falls to the ground. His mother says he’ll get more graceful and powerful with time, but Hermes doesn’t *want* to wait. He wants to be graceful and powerful *now*. Maybe if he was, then...

Hades hums quietly, moving closer and crouching. The act drops his eye level to Hermes’s, so he doesn’t seem quite so tall anymore. Hermes can’t remember ever being *scared* of his uncle, but he is beginning to understand, as he grows, why some people might be. His sheer physical presence alone is formidable, before one even considers the subtle tang of death in his aura. But to Hermes it’s familiar. Comfortable; soothing, even. It feels like peace and quiet, and like all the expectations are sloughing off his shoulders for a while.

“Well,” Hades says softly. “I can’t say otherwise if that’s what he says, but you don’t have to fight *here*. Or practice, if you don’t want to.” He reaches for the fallen dagger, almost dwarfed by his large hand, and picks it up.

“I’d rather do it here,” Hermes admits quietly. “Ares is mean, and Athena doesn’t want to because I’m not challenging. Apollo just laughs at me. Artemis is the only one who really even tries to help, and I don’t think she likes me very much.” He scuffs his sandal on the dirt, frowning when some of it gets between his toes and the sole.

“Okay,” Hades replies with a nod. “Then I will help you. What do you want to be able to do, besides fight? Did you want to learn how to do this?” He tosses the knife in a controlled arc. It flips end over end several times before landing handle-first in the palm of his hand. “Or perhaps this?” Taking the blade between his first and second fingers, he hurls it, and it sinks to the hilt in a nearby straw target.

Hermes’s eyes are already huge, and they only get bigger when a motion of his uncle’s hand calls the knife back to it unerringly, like it reverses through time—only the hole it made in the target is still there.

“I can do stuff like that?” he asks, almost breathless with wonder.

Hades huffs softly. “If you want to,” he replies, flipping the blade in his hand and holding it out to him hilt-first.

Hermes takes it, feeling the weight of it in his hand quite keenly. “Am I... am I weak if I don’t want to fight?” he asks.

Immediately, his uncle shakes his head. “No,” he says, quiet but firm. “You aren’t, Hermes. I promise you that. Sometimes the most difficult thing to do is solve a problem without violence. People who can do that are much more valuable than people who only like to fight and kill.”

The young god’s brow puckers. “But isn’t Father the King because he’s the strongest? He could kill any of the other gods, and that’s why they do what he says.”

“Did someone say that to you?” Hades’s features seem harder than usual, though Hermes can’t place why that would be. Still, his uncle doesn’t seem to be mad at him, so he presses his lips together and nods.

“Yes, but also no,” he says, running a thumb along the handle of the blade. “He says he’s King because he’s the strongest god, and that everyone respects strength. That’s why I have to be good at fighting, too—so people will respect me and I won’t shame him by being weak.” His jaw tightens at the memory.

The thing is, he doesn’t think he *can* be like that. He doesn’t want to fight anybody. And he doesn’t think he’ll ever be big and strong enough to go toe to toe with someone like Ares or Athena, never mind someone so incredibly powerful as his father. It stings him in a weird, mixed way he can’t fully explain.

“Hermes?” His uncle’s voice draws his attention for a moment. “Would you like a hug?”

It hadn’t been on his mind before then, but suddenly Hermes realizes he very much *does* want a hug. He nods, a little jerkily, and opens his arms, reaching out to request the same.

Hades interprets this gesture correctly, not only enveloping him in very big, sturdy arms but also lifting, standing back to his full height and bringing his nephew with. The feeling not only of physical compression but *affection* in it is just enough to coax the tears out.

The knife falls back to the dirt, and Hermes cries. He doesn’t just cry—he sobs, and he wails, and takes great big stuttering breaths and through it all Hades just holds him tight, rubbing a big hand up and down his back and letting him cry as much as he wants, right there in the practice yard.

When at least the tears have ceased, Hades doesn’t put him down right away—but then, Hermes doesn’t want him to.

“Perhaps we leave the practice for some other day,” he suggests. “How about you show me that music you’ve been putting together for your mother’s party?”

It’s a party Hades is not invited to, but he’s never seemed to be upset by that kind of thing.

Hermes nods a couple of times, wiping his eyes with a little bit of assistance from the edge of his uncle’s robe. “Okay.” He manages a slightly-watery smile. “I think you’ll like it.”

“I’m sure I will.”

Petitioner

Hera's eyes fall to the nectar in the cup cradled between her hands; the soft golden color of it wavers slightly as she exhales, bringing it closer to her lips and inhaling the sweet scent before she takes a sip. The spelt pancake in front of her is delicious, but she's eaten half of it and doesn't think she'll be getting to the other half.

The Queen of the Gods does not admit discomfort aloud, not to anyone. Well, maybe to one person, but that one is so distant as to be functionally unreachable, most of the time.

But she does admit discomfort to herself. Hera hardly sees a point in self-delusion, after all. When all of your dearest illusions have shattered, the ones left aren't worth the effort of their upkeep. And she will admit that she is... uncomfortable. That Demeter makes her so.

It isn't, exactly, the other woman's power. Demeter *is* powerful, to be sure, but so is Hera. Neither of their powers is well-suited for direct physical confrontation, but if they had to confront one another, that isn't how they'd do it anyway. And that's part of what's unsettling. Demeter is no ally of Hera's, because she is no ally of Zeus's, and Hera is, by default, for better or worse, an *ally* of Zeus.

But Demeter is also a mother, and it is in this manner she has come to petition Hera's aid. It makes saying no surprisingly difficult, and this more than anything is what unsettles Hera. She knows better than almost anyone that Dionysus will come to no harm in the Underworld, under the protection of Aidoneus and Hekate and the others. In fact, for a demigod still coming into his power, it may well be *safer* there than it is here.

And yet Demeter's fear is very real, and Hera can understand it. It is something that she, from time to time, feels for her own young daughter, and for her brash, impulsive son.

"I will... consider it," she says slowly.

Demeter purses her lips. She hasn't touched any of her food at all; even the nectar is half-drunk at best. Golden sunlight pours into the Queen's courtyard from above, brightening the white marble and the emerald leaves of the nearby plants. Plants that grow by her grace, but ultimately also by the foundational grace of Olympus itself.

Hera understands that the latter fact troubles her, and no doubt seems especially salient right now, for the 'foundational grace' of the Underworld is a far different thing.

"Please do," Demeter says softly. "I know there are many here who don't think much of my son, knowing what he is. But he is my son, and he is all I have. I think... I think you understand, how that feels."

She rises slowly, evidently not expecting an answer. It's technically rude, to do so without Hera's dismissal, and at any other time, she would think it an intentional, calculated slight, because that's how deliberate and fastidious she is. But it's not, and so Hera lets it pass without comment or remonstrance.

Demeter pauses in the act of turning to leave, the deep green hem of her gown sweeping the stone, and then turns back, expression unreadable. "I have... heard you have some sense of Fate, at times," she says, so quietly the words are almost inaudible. "Can you at least...?"

Her runs her thumb along the rim of her goblet, the golden alloy uniformly and perfectly smooth. There are peacocks etched into it, white like the ones that wander the courtyard and surrounding areas.

“I’ve been granted no insight into this matter,” she lies. Not because she wants to, but because Fate is fickle, and sometimes to speak it aloud is to change it in the very shaping of the words. And what she has foreseen for Dionysus is a future she wishes to protect. It is not a perfect one—it is full of difficulties and trials. But that is in fact what many of the best destinies are like, even if this one shifts and wavers, unable to be pinned to one possible outcome only.

“I see.” It’s impossible to tell whether Demeter believes her, but it doesn’t especially matter. Even if she supposed Hera were deceiving her, there would be nothing she could do about it. Least of all now, when she by her own difficult admission needs the Queen’s assistance. “Thank you, then, for your consideration. Farewell.”

Graciously, Hera inclines her head, and Demeter takes her leave.

When she’s gone, Hera leans back in her chair with a long exhale. “Perhaps it’s time I paid you a visit, Aidoneus.”

Dossier

Name: Lethe, The River of Oblivion
Age: Old; roughly of an age with the second generation of Titans
Species: Nymph
Lifespan: Immortal
Date of Birth: Midwinter
Profession: River Deity
Residence: Hades

Hair Color: Dark blue
Hair Length: Waist
Hair Texture: Loose curls
Eye Color: Black
Height: 5'4"
Build: Very thin
Skin Tone: Ash-grey
Distinguishing Features: Lethe is one of the few residents of the Underworld who show any hint of their age; she appears as an elderly woman.

Capabilities

Weapons: Lethe is a magician rather than a physical combatant, though she does carry a knife.
Magic: As befits her domain, Lethe's magic is subtle, enchantments that ensnare the mind. It is said that to look into her fathomless eyes is sufficient to render the weak-willed completely insensate. Naturally, she has a particular talent for the manipulation or removal of memory, and a surgical precision with the same.
Skills: Lethe has been known to paint, though she uses very dilute colors to do it, and the results are always vaguely uncanny.

Personal Details

Hobbies: Swimming, painting, sleeping.
Friends: Acheron, Kokytos, Pyri, Hekate; others to some extent.
Sexual Orientation: Aromantic Lesbian
Partner/s: None
Other Family: Distantly related to some of the others, but not closely to anyone.
Habits: Talking to herself, counting things, spacing out.
Goals: Lethe only really wishes to execute her duty as the River of Oblivion to the best of her ability. It could be said, though, that she is quite sympathetic to those with bad memories, and sometimes offers to take them away, though this is rarely something anyone takes her up on.
Fears: Lethe is comfortable in her routines and her role, and so for the most part what she fears is disruption of the same, or harm befalling her friends or her realm.

Proust Questionnaire Pt. 2 - Hermes

Q11: Which living person do you most despise?

Despise? That sounds intense. I'm not really a 'despising' kind of guy, you know?

Q12: What is the quality you most like in a person?

A sense of humor's always appreciated. Doesn't have to be the same as mine or anything, but something, you know? You've got to be able to laugh about things or you'll end up crying about them instead.

Q13: Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

I think Leks would say my nicknames for everyone. She's... well, probably not *wrong*, but oh well.

Q14: What or who is the greatest love of your life?

The open sky. Well, that and my family I guess? Though normally I wouldn't say that—little too on the nose, right?

Q15: When and where were you happiest?

Were? I like to think there's more happiness in front of me than behind!

Q16: Which talent would you most like to have?

I'm pretty satisfied with what I can do, but I guess... some people have this way of making you feel safe. Like everything's going to be all right. I wish I could do that.

Q17: If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

It feels like everything about me is in halves. I'd really prefer to *feel* as whole as I *am*.

Q18: What do you consider your greatest achievement?

Well there was that time I invented the lyre. That was pretty excellent of me.

Q19: If you were to die and come back as a person or a thing, what would it be?

Die? I don't think so. But I guess if I had to and it worked like that... I dunno. A bird maybe?

Q20: Where would you most like to live?

Somewhere that feels like home.

Quality Time

Hermes, frankly, loves babysitting duty.

Though he's not entirely sure how he ended up sharing it with Leks. She doesn't actually dislike him—who could?—but to say their demeanors are like oil and water might be doing a bit of a disservice to the difference. They work well in a group setting, where they anchor the spectrum of personalities their mutual friends possess, but alone with only Snowflake for company... he's not entirely sure how this is going to go.

None of which is going to stop him from acting exactly the same as usual.

“Hey Snowflake, what do you want to do today? Should we go flying again?” He tilts his head up as if to make eye contact with the little girl on his shoulders. He doesn't usually let people touch his hair, but Makaria's an easy exception to make.

“...Again?” He can tell from the slight weariness in Leks's pointed tone that she half-suspects this to be the intentional bait it is.

She still takes it. She can't help herself, of course—not if there's a chance he's put Snowflake in danger without the appropriate precautions. It's simultaneously one of her most frustrating and endearing traits.

“I don't think that would be vey nice,” Makaria says thoughtfully. “I don't know if Auntie can fly.”

Hermes snickers. “She definitely can,” he assures her.

“Hermes,” Alekto says, a warning note in her voice this time. “What do you mean *again*?”

“Exactly what I said, Leks. Snowflake and I went flying last time, didn't we?” He gives Makaria's ankles a little encouraging squeeze where he's holding them.

She giggles, nodding emphatically a few times. “All the way up to the ceiling!” she agrees. “We were so high up I touched the lights!”

Alekto sighs, but something in her expression softens at Makaria's obvious delight. She also doesn't *actually* ask Hermes if he'd had Hades's permission to do that. He's a little pleased about this, because it means she knows, deep down, that he would have asked.

“Nevertheless,” Alekto says, as if in response to his thoughts, “let's pick something to do besides flying this time, all right?”

Makaria nods, dutifully putting her thinking face on, and Hermes hums as if he too is considering the conundrum before them. “What do you think, Snowflake?”

“Let's play...” she trails off, unsure. “Can we pick flowers? I want to bring some home to Dad.”

Hermes and Alekto exchange a look. But it's the thought that counts; no doubt his uncle will be happy to receive them, even if they'll last maybe a few hours in a vase on his desk or something.

“Sure!” Hermes says brightly. “That’s a great idea. I even learned how to make a flower crown the other day, so we can all try those, too.”

A request to Erebus gets them to the meadows pretty quickly, and while there’s not a lot of variety, asphodels don’t make the worst flower crowns. Probably; he does have to try it out. He’s sure Sunshine is used to working with much healthier flowers, but hopefully they can improvise.

After gathering a reasonable pile of blooms, the three of them sit down in a small circle. Hermes demonstrates as well as he can how to weave the stems of the flowers together, and Makaria imitates his efforts, clumsy from a combination of youth and inexperience.

Alekto simply watches her for a bit, at least until Snowflake notices she’s not attempting it and frowns at her. “Auntie,” she says, “you have to do one, too, or it’s not fun.”

The Minister of Punishments blinks owlishly at the tiny little girl, looking almost *affronted*, though he’s sure that’s not the emotion she’s trying to convey. “I don’t see how my participation correlates with the fun you or Hermes would have doing the activity,” she says, the language particularly stilted in context.

Hermes, his fingers still weaving stems together, snickers, earning himself a reproachful glance from not only Alekto, but Makaria as well. He puts on an appropriately-chastised expression.

“If we’re not all having fun, then it isn’t fun,” Makaria explains.

Alekto’s brow knits as she tries to follow this logic.

“Just go with it, Leks,” Hermes advises.

She rolls her eyes at him, but obligingly takes up the flowers anyway. It’s almost a little bit annoying, how perfectly her floral wreath comes together, easily the most beautiful and well-shaped of the three, as if it transcends its medium. Frost-colored blossoms arranged at regular intervals, but with respect to their inherent wildness and the individual flaws and shape of each.

He’d be jealous, but it’s sort of part of who Alekto is, so he can’t begrudge it.

“Wow, auntie,” Makaria says, pulling in a gasp. “That’s amazing! You made a pretty one on the first try!”

“Mm. I just wanted to make sure it would look good,” she says, placing the crown on Makaria’s head.

The little girl giggles, straightening the arrangement. It blends a bit with her white hair, but honestly the effect of that is a daintiness, one that somehow suits her.

“Okay, then... Uncle Hermes should have mine!” She stands, and he obligingly bows his head so she can put the not-quite-circular wreath atop his curls. She laughs at the effect, which he’s sure is more than a bit comical, considering the clumsiness of the wreath and the volume of his wind-tossed hair.

He doesn’t mind, though, grinning back at her and reaching out to lightly pinch the end of her nose. “No laughing at your own handiwork,” he scolds as she shrieks in mock outrage at the hold.

“You should give Auntie yours so we can all have one!” she declares.

Lifting a brow, Hermes meets Alekto's eyes and tilts his head. "I think Her Highness has spoken," he says, with a seriousness that is very obviously feigned.

"Yes," she replies dryly. "I suppose so." She holds a hand out for the wreath.

He considers pushing it by insisting on crowning her himself, but the fact that he's about to see her wearing a flower crown is amusing enough as it is, so he hands it over without complaint.

Alekto makes a show of examining it, but she corrects none of its flaws, simply setting it atop her head and pulling her long ponytail through so it sits properly. It doesn't suit her at all, with her expression so stern, but then, Hermes supposes it might once have done, and might do so once again, someday.

Makaria beams. "There! Now we're all the same!"

Hermes huffs. "Well... close enough, I suppose."

Dossier

Name: Kokytos, The River of Lamentation
Age: Old; roughly of an age with the second generation of Titans
Species: Nymph
Lifespan: Immortal
Date of Birth: Late Autumn
Profession: River Deity
Residence: Hades

Hair Color: Black
Hair Length: Shorn/bald
Hair Texture: Should he grow it, it has a very tightly-coiled texture.
Eye Color: Blue-Black
Height: 6'3"
Build: Wiry
Skin Tone: Dark brown
Distinguishing Features: Kokytos is most easily distinguished by the quiet, assured manner in which he carries himself. Rooms seem to be somewhat calmer and more reflective in mood just because of his presence in them.

Capabilities

Weapons: Kokytos carries no weapons or instruments of harm.
Magic: His magic is largely noncombative, and as a pacifist, Kokytos generally does not resort to force unless it feels absolutely necessary to defend himself or others. When he does, his magic is primarily mental in nature, working on an opponent's mind, and incapacitating rather than lethal. He is sometimes called upon for his empathic magic.
Skills: For such a tall man, he can be rather difficult to notice when he wants to be. He's also adept at listening, and helping others sort through their feelings, even independently of the magic he has.

Personal Details

Hobbies: Walking, caring for animals, writing poetry.
Friends: Acheron, Lethe, Pyri, Alekto; others to some extent.
Sexual Orientation: Aro/Ace
Partner/s: None
Other Family: Daeira is his twin sibling.
Habits: Meandering, long silences, staring into the middle distance.
Goals: Kokytos mostly just wants to do his job, as it is work he finds personally fulfilling. Helping others come to terms with and express the negative emotions that may hold them back in the next life, or in the case of his fellow deities helping them simply identify, process, and begin to heal from various forms of emotion, grief, and trauma.
Fears: Violence.

Proust Questionnaire Pt. 3 - Hermes

Q21: What is your most treasured possession?

Hm. Well, I really like these wings for my shoes Red made me. Let's go with that.

Q22: What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?

You know that feeling where you're surrounded by people, but you feel so disconnected from all of it because none of them see the world the way you do and you just don't *belong* no matter how hard you try? That. That's the worst.

Q23: What is your favorite occupation?

Flying. Best feeling in the world.

Q24: What is your most marked characteristic?

My sparkling charisma, of course.

Q25: What do you most value in your friends?

Open-mindedness.

Q26: Who are your heroes?

Between you and me, His Deathliness.

Q27: What is it that you most dislike?

People waving their power around like an accident of birth makes them better than anyone else.

Q28: What is your greatest regret?

I don't really believe in regretting things. Everyone does inadvisable stuff sometimes. You learn, you grow, you keep moving.

Q29: How would you like to die?

Well that's morbid! I'd rather not, if it's up to me.

Q30: What is your motto?

Uhhh... 'don't do anything halfway'? I don't really have a motto, I guess.

Midwinter

Hades has long forgotten the exact day on which he was born.

In some sense, this is a shame, as he remembers, in a vague sort of way, his mother taking occasion to celebrate it in his youth. She always made barley cakes and honey, and would eat with him and speak of all the things he'd achieved in the year before. Ask him what he wanted to achieve in the next. In retrospect he has come to realize that she most likely always knew he would only have a limited number of them before—

Well. *Before*.

Celebrations, too, are something he had left in the before, and so many years had passed since then, without the day observed by anyone, that he'd honestly forgotten exactly which day it is. He remembers the season though; that in the past those celebrations were always winter things.

It's something Hekate shares, that lack of knowledge. Perhaps he stopped marking the day because she couldn't. It had seemed fundamentally unfair, to pay special heed to some day as belonging to him when there was no day she could point to in the same way, in those times when it was only the two of them, working together to break down and reconstruct the Underworld, weaving lattices of magic, warping the fabric of space and time, trying to scaffold what could not be altered, to lend some softness to a fundamental edge in the universe.

He had known the birth dates of the River Deities, at least the days on which their lives as deities had begun. Kokytos and his twin Daeira were the children of late autumn. Lethe inhabited the teetering precipice of winter. Acheron and Phlegethon bookended summer. Styx hated him a little more for knowing she had come to be in the spring. He had acknowledged these days, when it was welcome, happily. There had never been a question that such things were worth observance if one wished to observe them.

When Charon arrived, fresh from turmoil and tumult, they had not wished to observe anything of the kind. It wasn't what *drew* them into that first triad with himself and Hekate, but it was something they had all understood about one another.

Alekto found the markers of years passed to be melancholy things, and so at first none marked them for her.

It was not until Hermes, summer child that he was, asked his uncle when his birthday was that Hades had cause to even realize, properly, consciously, that there was something there he had forgotten. Explaining this was a matter of stops and starts, a deep awkwardness suffusing the conversation that Hades was only afterward able to identify as discomfort. It took him longer still to understand why the topic should make him uncomfortable, why it was not simply another one of the myriad things that were what they were, with no particular valence at all.

He wasn't sure what to do with the realizations.

He *was* sure that, when Hermes explained he did not receive an acknowledgement of his birthday that year from his father, celebrations of such would have to make their entrance into the Underworld, and their return to his life, at least in some capacity. Because Hermes wasn't a selfish child—when he was acknowledged, he would suppose that the thing to do is acknowledge others in turn.

Alekto rolled her eyes, but time had begun to heal her wounds, even if they left scars, and so she put up with the nonsense if only because Hermes knew how to appeal to her sense of justice.

Charon, too, had fairness deep in their bones, and so while at first they were very reluctant, and insisted always on the smallest of scales, they did divulge the proper day.

Hekate seemed vaguely baffled by the whole thing, but after some thought, chose a day that felt well enough off the calendar. Hades pretended he did not see her weep after the party was over, but the gifts and warmth were still there. But she caught him pretending, and so he embraced her instead, and let her cry it out.

And he, well... Hades decided that midwinter was as good a time as any. And even though, when he started on the meal they've made him, the lingering taste of barley cake was thick on the back of his tongue, he found he enjoyed himself.

Even if, that time, Hekate had to help *him* get through the things that ambushed him in the aftermath.

With each year that passes, that choking recollection lessens a little, and the occasions become more unambiguously pleasant, even if marked only by a small contingent of family. He still doesn't remember when his birthday 'really' is, but midwinter is as real as anything.

Dossier

Name: Styx, The River of Loathing
Age: Old; roughly of an age with the second generation of Titans
Species: Nymph
Lifespan: Immortal
Date of Birth: Late spring
Profession: River Deity
Residence: Hades

Hair Color: Raven-black/very dark brown
Hair Length: Shoulderblades
Hair Texture: Smooth, straight
Eye Color: Blue
Height: 5'10"
Build: Thin
Skin Tone: Pale, slightly washed-out.
Distinguishing Features: Styx tends to move with a certain sharp efficiency, and to carry herself with enough pride that she gives off an impression of haughtiness.

Capabilities

Weapons: Styx is not known to carry any weapons, and disdains physical combat for the most part.
Magic: Styx's magic has a few distinct nodes of expertise. As the Oathkeeper of the gods, she is good at ferreting out broken promises, and indeed binding them, such that without extraordinary measures they cannot be broken. She is also quite skilled in the application of protective wards and other bolstering measures, and also in their removal.
Skills: Styx has a facility with 'legalese' and tricky wordplay, and is expert at deciphering and solving riddles.

Personal Details

Hobbies: Reading, solving puzzles.
Friends: She quite proudly has few, though she tolerates Charon well enough.
Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual
Partner/s: None
Other Family: Styx is Charon's blood sister, though they are not close.
Habits: Organizing things, journaling, writing letters she does not send.
Goals: Styx's goals seem rather inscrutable. She doesn't seem happy with her place in the world, but executes her duty as Oathkeeper fastidiously. She's never late or inaccurate with paperwork or regular work, and doesn't cause any fuss.
Fears: Deeply, she fears that someone important to her has forgotten her, or never felt she was important to him in return. The fear of knowing is what precludes her from asking.

Proust Questionnaire Pt. 1 - Pyri

Q1. What is your idea of perfect happiness?

I don't think any happiness is perfect, but I like the kind I get on a good run, when someone else is with me! It's like my body feels good because of the running and my heart feels good because of the company, you know?

Q2. What is your greatest fear?

Losing the life I have now.

Q3. What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

Hm. I think... part of me is still afraid. Of a lot of things, but mostly of failing or dying.

Q4. What is the trait you most deplore in others?

I guess being a jerk? Like... thinking you know better than somebody about themselves? Something like that.

Q5. Which living person do you most admire?

That would be a four-way tie! Bossman, Leks, Hekate, and Charon. They're all amazing, in their own ways.

Q6. What is your greatest extravagance?

Uhhh... I guess I like fancy jewelry? I make it myself though. Is that still 'extravagant'?

Q7. What is your current state of mind?

Well... excited about new stuff happening. Also a little scared I guess. For Lethe and what might happen to her.

Q8. What do you consider the most overrated virtue?

Whatever the one is that's supposed to be about doing what your parents want.

Q9. On what occasion do you lie?

I try not to? I can't really think of a good reason, except maybe if it like... protects someone somehow?

Q10. What do you most dislike about your appearance?

I really wish I was taller!

Loathing

Her fingers catch on the strands, and she pulls them back with a grimace, tucking her hand into her side.

“See something you didn’t like?” Atropos’s tone is dry, crackled like old parchment, and far too knowing.

Styx hates that of all the people in the world, this miserable crone is the one who knows her fate. It means she has to keep coming here, to the seat of the Moirae, and pulling what spare threads she can out of their tapestries. If she gets enough, preserves each with care and perfect attention, she should be able to reassemble them. She is no weaver, no builder. But she is a solver of puzzles, and this is the one that captures her the most.

Will she, will she?

She could wait for ages, if only she knew eventually the waiting would mean something.

She will wait for ages anyway.

“You know I can divine no meaning from these things. If I could, you’d be out of a job.”

The old woman chuckles, the edges sharp like knives. If the river goddess’s waspish tone bothers her, she’s never given any indication of it.

“Styx.” Her sibling’s voice is clear and soft.

Blue eyes meet blue eyes over her shoulder; ocean-blue, changeable as the flow of rivers. Hers glacial, always, now.

When did his eyes get soft again? Like the turquoise water off an island with white sand, somewhere in the middle of the sea. How has he found that which eludes her?

It makes her happy. It makes her jealous. It makes her bitter.

“What?” Tension strings out her tone, gives it a high tremor.

“Is this really what you want?”

She knows what they mean. What *Charon*, this strange, sanitized version of them, wants. Charon has given up on returning to how once things were. Charon serves out his sentence as prisoner willingly, bowing to his captor, the god strong enough to contain his power, and finding *comfort* in the fact that he will never again be the storm that rages and howls.

Styx’s ambitions were different, but she refuses to give them up. Refuses to roll over and pretend that she is docile as a rabbit. Her nature has warped, too, but not so far. At her core is still the same hard determination that has always propelled her. And beneath it, still the same, hopeless love.

“It is the *only* thing I want,” she replies, the string thrumming with challenge.

Push it, brother. I dare you.

But he doesn't. Of course he doesn't. The lord of the dead in his power and his *mercy* has domesticated the inherently wild. She hates him. Will always hate him.

It will make her strong.

"Then look," Atropos says. "Collect your little clues, piece together your future, and see if it's what you think." She tilts her head, silvery threads of hair brushing across a shoulder. "I'll give you another, for free: the eye that turns most easily is held not at all."

The implication is obvious. It is no clue Styx is being offered, but an insult. Her back stiffens, entire body drawing taut. The crone will give her nothing further today, she is saying.

Turning on her heel, she departs without another word, not bothering to listen behind her for whatever excuse Charon makes to the old woman. He will smooth it over. He always does.

That they still allow her to look, because she wants to, is the reason they of all people are the one she can trust. Just a little, and only if she keeps his loyalty to the death-god in mind. But a little is not nothing, and it is all she needs.

Styx is used to surviving on scraps: affection, worship, now information. She will collect every last one of them, and make herself whole.

Interview - Autumn Seasonal

Q: Perhaps we should start with something simple. What's everyone's favorite candy?

PYRI: Snickers! No, wait. Candy corn! Wait—ugh. This is hard.

HERMES: And a fumble on the softball question, right outta the gate.

PYRI: Stuff it, Featherhead.

HEKATE: I like caramel apples, but they're a pain to eat, so usually I just slice apples and dip them in caramel instead.

HADES: (*to Hekate*) Do chocolate-covered fruits count as candy?

HEKATE: Sure, why not?

HADES: Ah, then, mine are those little round cups made of chocolate with an assortment of berries stuck inside.

HERMES: Somehow that's exactly what I expected. What about you, Snowflake?

MAKARIA: M&Ms. In popcorn.

PYRI: Oh, that *is* good.

HERMES: You're never going to make up your mind at this rate.

PYRI: You make up *your* mind, and then you can talk.

CHARON: I do believe they've caught onto you, Hermes.

ALEKTO: Turkish delight.

HERMES: Does that even count as food, though? No wait, don't hurt me!

MAKARIA: Auntie would never hurt you for disagreeing, Hermes.

HERMES: Of course not, kiddo. You're right, obviously.

MAKARIA: She'll just 'knock the stuffing out of you' next time you spar.

ALEKTO: You are very correct, Makaria, thank you.

MAKARIA: You're welcome!

CHARON: My favorite candy is saltwater taffy, by the way.

PYRI: I think I've decided! Anything with chocolate and peanut butter. Like those rice krispy things... scotcheroos?

CHARON: I'm... not sure those qualify as a candy, exactly.

HERMES: Eh, close enough. We'll give it to them. Mine's uh... hm. I'll say sour gummy worms.

HADES: Never ask us to make a consensus decision. We have enough trouble arriving at individual ones.

Q: If you had to dress up like one of the other people here, who would it be?

MAKARIA: Dad!

HADES: And I'd dress up as Makaria. No offense to any of the rest of you, but she has the best style.

ALEKTO: ...I do have to concede this. My choice is Makaria as well.

HEKATE: *(laughing)* And mine!

PYRI: No, I'm Makaria!

HERMES: Dork. But, you know what, yeah. Let's all be Makaria. You in, Charon?

CHARON: I almost feel as if I should disagree, since we're supposed to be poor at consensus decisions, but I can't argue with the obvious.

Q: What's the best use of a pumpkin?

HEKATE: Like in food, or...?

HERMES: *(snickers)*

MAKARIA: I like pumpkin bread the most.

PYRI: Jack-o-lanterns. Or like... costume pieces. Be a headless horseman or something.

ALEKTO: I really don't think you'd want to wear an actual pumpkin for that.

PYRI: That's... probably fair. Jack-o-lanterns, then!

HERMES: I'm going to be controversial and say pumpkin spice.

ALEKTO: You're dead to me.

HERMES: Does that mean I don't have to get up to train before Helios is even awake?

ALEKTO & PYRI: *(simultaneously)* No.

HEKATE: I like them best as a smell, rather than a taste or a visual.

CHARON: By themselves?

HEKATE: No, no. More like the smell of pumpkin-based baked goods. Pies or what have you.

CHARON: Ah. I think I like the seeds best. Just lightly roasted.

HADES: Autumn is a lovely season, visually, so I suppose I would say the best use of a pumpkin is as a decoration. At least, if it's only me. Some people can carve rather incredible art into them, and of course they are important foodstuffs to others.

PYRI: Yes! The boss agrees with me, that means I'm right.

Q: How do you feel about horror movies?

HEKATE: Probably the best genre of movie.

HERMES: Yeah, they're great.

HEKATE: You can't even be in the room when I'm watching one. At least Alekto is honest about hating them.

ALEKTO: They make me think about what might be behind me. I don't like it.

HERMES: I don't get scared. I just don't like the jump-outy ones that rely on surprise. Everyone jumps when they're surprised.

PYRI: You know what that's called, Hermes? A jump-scare. You definitely get scared.

HERMES: I do not. I simply appreciate a good thriller or psychological horror more than cheap attempts to startle me.

CHARON: I *do* like suspense. Honestly I prefer to stay away from anything with gore in it, though. In general the genre isn't my favorite.

HADES: Does it count if you find horrifying themes in your daughter's movies and have to talk to her about why the implicit assumptions of the film are bad?

HERMES: Not really, no.

HADES: Ah. Then I suppose I like them well enough? I don't find them scary, as such. Though some are well-made or interesting in other ways, and I do like the social commentary horror as a genre often carries.

HEKATE: I won't lie, I watch them to switch my brain *off*, so I don't pay much attention to that kind of thing. At least not in the moment. But he's not wrong.

HADES: A judgement I aspire to.

Q: What is the best hot beverage?

CHARON: Tea. By a substantial margin. Ideally black, but other sorts are also good.

HEKATE: I prefer red and white, but yes.

ALEKTO: Black coffee.

HERMES: Like your soul.

ALEKTO: Do I look like an edgelord to you?

HERMES: ...

ALEKTO: ...

MAKARIA: Dad and I like hot chocolate. Mine has marshmallows in it.

PYRI: All of these are good, but have you considered *icing* them? Except the hot chocolate, I guess. Sweet iced tea. It's the best thing.

HERMES: I actually like green tea. Or else, like, coffee but with so much other stuff in it you can't really taste the coffee.

HADES: Does that really count as liking coffee, though?

Q: Of those present, who is best to cuddle with when it gets cold?

HERMES & ALEKTO: (simultaneously) Pyri.

HEKATE: (laughing) Yes, definitely Pyri. They're very warm. And cuddly.

MAKARIA: I like cuddling with dad! But Pyri too.

CHARON: Perhaps this one is a bit obvious. Though in fairness I think the ideal situation involves everyone in some assortment or other.

HADES: That's true, though if I'm only picking one person it's Makaria. No offense, Pyri.

PYRI: None taken! Maka's the cutest. But I like big piles of friends, too.

Proust Questionnaire Pt. 2 - Pyri

Q11: Which living person do you most despise?

Uh... I don't think I really despise anyone? Well, maybe a couple people, but like... not anyone I've met personally. Just people who've given my friends a hard time, you know?

Q12: What is the quality you most like in a person?

Honestly? I think kindness is underrated. Not niceness—you don't have to be nice to be kind. But not a lot of people are kind, at least not from what I know. It's why I like the Underworld so much—there's a lot of kind people here!

Q13: Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

Hekate tells me I end sentences with 'you know?' a lot, so I guess that?

Q14: What or who is the greatest love of your life?

Uh... I don't think I have one of those yet. Maybe someday, you know? Oh. I did it again.

Q15: When and where were you happiest?

Right here and right now! Well, not, like, exactly this second. But also kind of yeah, exactly this second. I really like the life I have now. It's more than anything I could have imagined, before.

Q16: Which talent would you most like to have?

I want to be good at making people happy.

Q17: If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

You know, there used to be a bunch of stuff I'd change, and maybe some of them I still would, but I'm pretty happy with who I am now. I guess I could stand to be a little smarter about some things.

Q18: What do you consider your greatest achievement?

Mm... probably the first time I fully connected to the River. It felt like I'd finally stepped into the role Boss gave me, and like I could really do something to pay everyone back for how kind they've been.

Q19: If you were to die and come back as a person or a thing, what would it be?

Well that's already happened, kind of! So I guess a river deity?

Q20: Where would you most like to live?

Exactly where I am, of course! What a weird question.

Masquerade I

Pyri squints at you, reaching up to straighten the mask on your face and nodding. “Yeah, looks good. We’re gonna fit right in with all those weird rich people, don’t you worry!” They clap your shoulder companionably, hopping off the small step-stool they’ve been using to be at a slightly more comfortable height in front of your shared bathroom counter.

“I think my mother qualifies as one of those ‘weird rich people,’” you murmur, scrutinizing your face in the mirror. She definitely won’t recognize you though. Not with how long it’s been since the last photo dad sent. The half-mask and the costume makeup underneath will definitely thwart any possible identification by anybody, related or otherwise, and that’s the goal of it, really. Get in, see it all, and leave.

Pyri hums, attaching their own mask to their face. The masquerade party is basically a more upscale version of the ridiculous Halloween things the two of you occasionally went to in college, and good grief is it pretentious. Fortunately, your perpetual roommate’s skill in craftsmanship means you’re not about to walk in there looking half as poor as you are—at least no one’s going to throw you out right away.

And you just want a glimpse, really. Of the famous mother you’ve never known. You don’t even know why, but you do.

Your best friend’s firebird mask is a magnificent construction of tiny orange, red, and yellowish stones—glass, but no one has to know that, with the way Pyri cut them, and the gap-toothed grin they give you suggests all the mischief that comes with going places you’re not supposed to be.

They stick an arm out, skinny and bent like a chicken wing, and with an amused huff, you loop your arm through it.

A car honks in the driveway as you’re entering the kitchen, and Pyri laughs as they accelerate, throwing the door open. “Manners, flyboy,” they chide, in a voice far too loud to be mannerly.

Hermes, one of Pyri’s many, many friends from your not-long-gone-but-kind-of-long-gone school years, is your ticket through the door.

The two of you hop into the back seat, and he smiles at you in the rearview mirror. “Nice masks. I see Pyri gave in and accepted the bird idea.” His own is a rather bright white, feathered in a manner not dissimilar to theirs.

“I still think it would have been cooler if I was a dragon,” they complain.

“Maybe,” Hermes concedes. “But this way we look like we match. People might actually believe you’re my date.”

“Ewww.” It might be the cover story—that the both of you are his ‘dates’—but that doesn’t stop Pyri from complaining about it every chance they get.

Still laughing softly, Hermes backs out of your cracked driveway, the smooth purr of his sports car’s engine only barely audible. It looks almost hilariously out of place in your decidedly working-class neighborhood, but at least this way you don’t have to hire something appropriate, or show up in Pyri’s very used, *very* melon-orange Beetle.

The drive downtown isn't that long; the yearly masquerade gathering for Olympus Corp is held in one of the stylish, sleek skyscrapers owned by what was formerly Kronos & Sons, Inc. You have no idea what they use so many offices to *do*, exactly, but apparently one of the buildings is actually an event hall of some description.

As you approach it, you can't help but get a rather... unwelcoming feeling. It's tall, and it looks fancy, probably designed by some super-prestigious architect, but it's like... maybe it's just because it's so far away from anything your life has been. Maybe you're getting nervous.

Almost as if they sense it, Pyri takes your hand and gives it a warm squeeze. "It'll be okay, you know. We've got the emergency exit plan, and Featherhead here is the world's smoothest talker, so even if something happens, nothing's gonna *happen*, you know?"

You swallow down your unease, and nod, returning your eyes to the tower that seems to spiral towards the sky, endless light, graceful curvature and glimmering steel and glass. Like a hurricane has somehow been condensed into stillness.

Hermes pulls his car up to the curb, and the three of you get out. He hands his keys over to the valet, and gently pats your back. "Don't worry, Sunshine. Everything's going to be okay." You don't know him as well as Pyri does, but he's always been a positive force, and you can't help feeling a little reassured that the expert in this sort of thing thinks that.

The building's entrance hall is as stately and sleek as the exterior would lead you to expect. A lot of chrome, a lot of glass, some wood and some leather worked in, with a large, abstract sculpture you think is meant to represent a lightning bolt in the very center.

Hermes snorts when he catches you looking at it. "Don't ask," he advises, leading the two of you to the elevator.

Two people are already waiting there: a very tall woman with a warm, light brown complexion wearing a mask actually shaped into a raven, its wings fanning over her eyes and its tail feathers laying along the proud bridge of her nose. Dark hazel eyes are sharp behind it, and the sleek umber of her ponytail somehow manages to seem stylish and utilitarian at the same time.

The person next to her is somewhat shorter, their loose platinum-blond hair framing a very pale face decorated with a finned mask, blue and silver scales glittering in the lights.

"Hermes," they say, offering all three of you a mild smile. "How unexpected. I thought you'd decided to boycott."

Hermes grins. "Charon, Leks. These are my dates, Pyri and Seph."

You extend your hand by way of greeting. You can't say you especially want to make an impression, but you should at least observe the niceties, so you don't stick out for being *unsociable*, either.

Charon takes it gently, his skin smooth and just the faintest bit cool to the touch. "Nice to meet you both," they say, taking Pyri's in turn. "I am Charon, and this is Alekto."

The woman nods, a little stiffly, her eyes fixed on you. It's like she's trying to place you, which is... not good.

It would be better if you could get away from the situation, but unfortunately the elevator chooses that exact moment to open, and the five of you head in. You take a spot near the back, only halfway following the conversation between Charon, Pyri and Hermes. You're sure Alekto is still watching you, but you don't dare look over at her to be sure of that. The best thing to do is just to pretend that it isn't happening and wouldn't bother you even if it were.

The ride seems interminable; you stare at the numbers over the door, ticking upwards with each successive floor. When you've reached the highest, the doors open, spitting you out into the middle of... well, you daresay your mother must have had some hand in it, because not only is it the most decadent version of *autumn* you've ever seen, but you can already smell how rich and delicious the food is. That's her thing, according to your dad. Food. Agrobusiness, but also luxury eating and restaurants. She owns everything, farm to table.

But the décor and the refreshments only keep your attention for a moment. The people are a phenomenon unto themselves: a dazzling array of colors and light, swathed in gorgeous gowns and luxuriant suits, their faces obscured by masks. People of every shape and size, united, apparently, only by obscene wealth and some connection or another to one of Olympus's executives, or board members, or... however they decide who gets invitations to this sort of soiree. You're fairly sure there's a movie star or two in the mix, but you can't seem to focus on any one place in particular long enough to be sure.

You awkwardly step out of the elevator behind Pyri, who is, you think, possibly goggling at all of this even worse than you are. Hermes, chuckling softly, reaches over to close both your mouths by pushing lightly upward from beneath your chins. "Might want to pretend you're over it, Red, Sunshine. It'll be hard to fit in, otherwise."

He has a point, no doubt.

Parting from Alekto and Charon, the latter of whom sees you off with a friendly wave, you follow Hermes, not that you have the first clue where he's leading you.

The answer turns out to be towards one of the many round tables set out in the event area, each covered in a pristine linen tablecloth. Bypassing several empty ones, he takes a seat at one with only a single other occupant: a woman in a vivid purple gown, cut to flatter an ample figure. Her brown hair is arranged into what must be hundreds of tiny, meticulous box braids, all flipped to one side to show off the irregular pale stippling of her dark skin on the other side. Her mask almost looks to be cut from a single large slab of impossibly-clear amethyst, made glass-thin and formed smoothly to the contours of her face, where the black ribbon keeping it tied disappears into her hair.

"Ah, there you are." She sets down her wineglass, cut crystal, and assesses all of you with merry dark eyes. "I was expecting you to be a bit more fashionably late, Hermes."

"Well, I would have been, but I think that might have given my guests a heart attack."

Huffing softly, the woman extends her hand first, though she doesn't stand. "Hekate," she says. "I know who you are, but you don't have to worry." Behind the mask, she winks. "I can keep a secret."

TO BE CONTINUED?

FoA Ranked Lists I

Hey all—in this bonus content, I choose a random criterion and rank the FoA ROs according to it, with little explanatory blurbs for why the ranks are as they are. I picked a few off the top of my head this time, but if there are any of these that you'd like to see answers to in the future, I'm all ears. Eyes. However that idiom goes when it's text.

Onwards, without further ado!

Criterion: Technical Skill at Singing, Most to Least

1. *Hermes* - Quite musically-inclined, both genetically and in temperament, though he'd say his true gift is playing the lyre, at which he claims to be better than Apollo.
2. *Alekto* - Since losing much of her hearing, this is no longer quite the specialty it once was for Alekto, but she is still very good at it.
3. *Hades* - While in possession of no domain or particular focus on the art, Hades's natural singing voice is quite pleasant to listen to, and he's more than able to carry a tune.
4. *Pyri* - Their voice has a warm, tuneful tone to it, though they're not really skilled as such. Still pretty pleasant to listen to.
5. *Charon* - Charon can hum, and... that's kind of it, honestly.
6. *Hekate* - Hekate has the sort of voice suited to singing in the tub and singing lullabies to puppies, and she's quite all right with that.

Criterion: Workaholic Tendencies, Most to Least

1. *Hekate* - Though on some days Hekate is more than able to leave work behind for leisure, she is the one most likely to get caught up in a project for days on end, and forget to eat unless one of the others arranges for meals to be sent to her workshop.
2. *Hades* - Hades was once even worse than Hekate in these terms, but having a child adds a certain amount of structure to his day and forces him to take breaks to spend time with his daughter, so of late he's not quite so bad.
3. *Pyri* - Pyri's the most inclined to work to the point of exhaustion, largely because they feel they have a lot of catching up to do relative to the others, and not a lot of patience to let themselves get there in their own time.
4. *Charon* - For Charon, work serves as penance and distraction, so they do get caught up in it from time to time. But the worst of these tendencies have since passed, and they usually maintain a fairly healthy balance.
5. *Alekto* - Alekto knows her job is important, and she will devote as much time to it as necessary, but she also knows it can take a mental toll, and considers regular rest and recovery to be part of her duty as well, so her balance is quite good.
6. *Hermes* - Hermes isn't near as lazy as he likes to make people think, but he prizes his leisure time a great deal, and prioritizes accordingly.

Criterion: Personal Style, Fashionable to Plain

1. *Alekto* - Her armor itself is quite impressive, but when out of it, Alekto has an impeccable sense of aesthetics, and excellent taste. Her wardrobe is easily among the most stylish and high-quality in the Underworld, and the competition is mostly her sisters.
2. *Hermes* - Of course, Hermes is some degree of competition, too. He likes looking his best, and knows how to achieve it, though on average his selections tend to be a little simpler than Alekto's.
3. *Hekate* - Her wardrobe has quite a bit of variety in it, but most of the time she tends towards slightly plainer garments, just because the work she does might occasionally involve spills, and needs to not involve clothing getting in her way.
4. *Pyri* - Pyri's clothes are usually fairly plain, but they have some pretty nice jewelry, most of which they made themselves.
5. *Charon* - Charon doesn't wear exactly the same thing every day, but it's variations on a pretty narrow theme, and they tend to favor simpler garments as a rule.
6. *Hades* - For someone of his station, Hades dresses almost painfully plainly, and most of the items in his wardrobe are ones he's had for literal ages, since he repairs things rather than replacing them.

Criterion: Comfort with Silence, Most to Least

1. *Alekto* - Even before her hearing loss, Alekto didn't mind the quiet at all. Now, most of the time she prefers it.
2. *Hades* - Hades is often, though not always, more comfortable with silence than conversation.
3. *Charon* - Charon spends a lot of time in his own head, and while there is a certain sociability to them, they definitely value the quiet as well, with company or without it.
4. *Hekate* - Hekate is a fundamentally sociable person, but the quiet of a project or good company is something she can appreciate, too.
5. *Pyri* - Pyri's not very fond of being alone, and they're naturally probably the chattiest of the cast. They'll sometimes talk to fill a silence when they don't need to, but only when they think the other person would prefer that.
6. *Hermes* - Hermes tends to find silences oppressive, smothering, and a bit awkward on average, so he's the most likely to actively avoid them, and/or break them first. It's not a *universal* tendency, but he does commonly do it.

Criterion: Age, Oldest to Youngest

1. *Hades* - As sort-of the 'oldest' of Kronos and Rhea's children, and in fact the oldest of the third 'generation' of cosmic life, Hades is one of the most ancient living beings still in existence.
2. *Hekate* - Not much younger than Hades, though born under circumstances that kept her out of the early stages of Titanomachy. A bit younger than Demeter.

3. *Charon* - Approximately of the same generation as Hades and Hekate, but born significantly later.

4. *Alekto* - A generation younger than the other three, and perhaps half of one older than Hermes.

5. *Hermes* - Among Zeus's younger children, young enough to have still been a youth when the PC was born.

6. *Pyri* - Potentially younger than the PC, depending on how old the player sees them as. If older, not by much at all. Pyri can still measure the span of their lifetime in such years that it wouldn't be totally implausible for them to pass as a human of that same age.

Proust Questionnaire Pt. 3 - Pyri

Q21: What is your most treasured possession?

Possession? Hm. I guess my spear? Though I also have this torc that feels important to me for some reason...

Q22: What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?

Not being able to help. Like when someone I like is in trouble, or having a bad day.

Q23: What is your favorite occupation?

I guess I just like being around everybody. What we're doing doesn't matter so much, but active stuff is pretty fun!

Q24: What is your most marked characteristic?

Uh. Maybe the fact that I can't keep my mouth shut for too long at a time?

Q25: What do you most value in your friends?

...Patience. I think I need it, sometimes. Maybe a lot of the time. But nobody here has ever made me feel like a burden, you know? They all give me time and attention and help when I need it.

Q26: Who are your heroes?

Probably my friends, just all of them in a different way.

Q27: What is it that you most dislike?

I hate it when someone makes someone else feel like they're just a problem, or an annoyance, or beneath them or something. Stuff like that.

Q28: What is your greatest regret?

I don't think I really have any? Maybe there's something I've forgotten, though...

Q29: How would you like to die?

Hmm. Maybe like... protecting somebody I love from danger. As long as it actually worked.

Q30: What is your motto?

If it seems too hard, try anyway. Kind of a dumb one, I know, but it gets me places.

Masquerade II

This really isn't going how you planned it. Not at all.

To begin with, you hadn't expected to run almost smack into your very famous mother as soon as you'd left the table where Pyri and the others were sitting.

You definitely hadn't expected recognition to light in her eyes, in spite of the mask, in spite of how long it's been.

You *certainly* didn't expect this to trigger a panic attack.

Your friends had stepped in like the blessings they are, Hermes running interference with Demeter while Pyri got you out of the immediate danger and into some kind of... side room. You don't know what the place is usually used for—right now your only impressions of it are some kind of dark grey carpet and the dizzying dashes of city lights glittering in the bank of windows that serves as a whole wall.

You're in a chair that smells like leather, mask dangling loosely from your fingers, head between your knees, and trying to breathe past the waves of nausea that threaten. It would almost be working, if you could somehow get your heart to slow down, your senses to come back into focus... or even just the blood rushing through your ears to be a little more quiet. But as it is, all of that is rebounding inside your skull, making you uncomfortably conscious of everything that's wrong, and unable to do much of anything about any of it.

Your leg is jimmying up and down like a jackhammer, the only thing it feels like you have any control over in the moment. And even then, you know if you stopped you'd want to crawl out of your skin, and how much *control* can you really call an ultimatum like that?

There's a soft noise behind you, the door cracking open on silent hinges—it pierces the comforting darkness of the room with a wedge of yellowed light. You freeze, hunched low in the chair, hoping against hope that it's Pyri come back to check on you too soon—and if it's not, that whomever it is will just... realize this isn't a place where anything's happening and close the door again.

No such luck.

The door does close, but you can hear a soft tread as someone makes their way inside. You could swear the room's just gotten a little colder. For some reason you can't identify, you hurry to replace the mask on your face, trying to sit up, to put on the face you wear in front of strangers. The one that isn't in the middle of a struggle not to vomit all over someone's nice, plush carpet and comfy armchair.

Naturally, you fail miserably.

You can only imagine what it seems like, some strange silhouette popping up from behind a low leather wingback, breaths shallow and erratic. Are there tears? Have you cried? You don't know—at least the mask is there to cover them. Even if nothing will cover the tremor in your fingers, least of all when you wring them together hard enough to hurt.

“Ah.” The single syllable is uttered in a voice deep enough you swear you can almost feel it in your toes. You turn your head, and a man comes into view, taller than just about anyone you’ve ever met, if you can make any sort of guess from a sitting position. There’s certainly a lot of him; the monochrome black he’s wearing—suits, shirt, vest, tie, slacks, even his shoes—does little to conceal the thick bands of muscle in his arms, shoulders, chest, legs. For all that his build is imposing, though, you’d say he doesn’t carry himself like that at all. You hardly heard his steps.

Your eyes catch, though, on those underneath the plain black mask. They’re ruby-red, strikingly clear, and nearly luminous in the dark, twin spots of color that contrast sharply with his wardrobe and the white fall of his hair, loose about his shoulders and a few inches longer still.

His mouth curls down into something of a frown, pulling at angular, patrician features. “My apologies. I did not mean to disturb you.”

It’s sort of farcical, to describe this event that way. He must know you’re in distress, only... well, your heart rate’s definitely still kicking along in your chest, but you don’t think it *just* has to do with your previous run-in with your mother.

“It’s just,” he continues, “well this is my—”

He frowns, seemingly either losing the thread of the thought or setting it aside for the moment. With a near-inaudible hum, he moves a little further past you, close enough that you can feel the air stir in his wake. It’s... cooler than it should be, or maybe that’s just your imagination.

The man, whoever he is, moves back behind what you recognize to be a huge darkwood desk, bending to open the door of a... mini-fridge? He pulls out a bottle of water and cracks it open with one almost too-large hand, moving to your side of the desk and extending it towards you.

“Perhaps this will go some way to helping.” He offers the faintest of smiles, sympathetic enough that you *know* he’s guessed what was happening when he entered.

Well, if that’s true, there’s not much reason to put up a front. You accept the bottle with shaky hands, using both so as not to spill it. Your fingers brush across his—cool to the touch, steady and smooth—and you draw the water back towards you rather more quickly than you’d meant to, taking a few small sips, and then a longer draught. Dad’s always going on about hydration being important; maybe this way you can replace some of what you just lost.

The man leans back against the desk like he owns it, which, you realize belatedly, he just might. His hands grip the edge loosely, and he tilts his head, looking at you with those red, red eyes.

“I should say it’s none of my business,” he says, the words rolling over each other in his rumbling bass, “and I’m not a licensed therapist or psychologist, but... if you would like to talk about it, I can listen.”

Something tells you he could, too. That this man would really, honestly listen to you, and *care* what you said. And you love your friends, you really do, but there’s only so many times you want to inflict your problems on them, no matter how much patience they have. They’re all kind of first-world problems anyway, the sort the other kids at boarding school made fun of you about.

What’s the matter? Mommy doesn’t love you?

“I shouldn’t even be here,” you say, and it comes out miserable. You lift the bottle to your fevered forehead, letting the sensation anchor you.

Honestly, though, you think you were anchored as soon as you met eyes with the man in front of you. Can't hurt to be extra sure, in any case.

"What makes you say that?" he inquires gently.

You groan softly, almost under your breath. "Well, for starters, I wasn't invited. I'm a plus one's plus one."

The whole thing comes tumbling out. You're not even sure how. Maybe it's the softly-placed questions, which seem to arrive right as you're losing steam, giving you what you need to keep on. But everything comes out, from your parentage to exactly how you got in here on what Pyri had jokingly called their 'connections' to the whole fiasco that actually *seeing* Demeter had been.

When it's all done, you're half-expecting to be asked to leave. If not for the fact that you're barely allowed to be here, then for the rant you just went on.

Instead, the man blinks at you, slowly, his brows knitting in what you can't help but read as concern. "That is... a lot," he says, slow like he almost isn't sure of the words.

A burble of involuntary laughter escapes you, tumbling over your lips until you realize it and lift your hand to your mouth to smother it. "Sorry, I—"

But that makes him smile, a tender curve of the mouth that softens his entire expression. "No, don't be sorry," he replies. "It wasn't precisely my intent, but I am pleased to have made you laugh. It's a lovely sound."

His tone is the model of polite and genuine, nothing untoward in it at all, and yet you can feel your ears prickle with heat at the simple compliment. You're really all over the place tonight. "Uh. Thanks."

You clear your throat, but the smile doesn't leave his face, at least. Instead, he holds a hand out towards you. "Hades," he offers, and you do, dimly, recognize the name, though exactly *why* you do doesn't immediately click.

"Seph." You reach forward to take the proffered hand, and it dwarfs yours. You think it would dwarf most. There's a warmth there, but not as much as you'd ordinarily expect, like he's been outside without gloves for a couple of hours and only just returned indoors a few minutes ago.

"Seph," he repeats, the city lights slanting in through the windows and casting irregular light onto the planes of his face, glinting dully on the satin mask. A faint tingle hums near the base of your spine.

When he bends over your hand, turning its knuckles up to face him, the antiquated gesture feels like the most natural thing in the world. The brush of his lips isn't more than a second, isn't more than, in fact, a *brush*—and yet it makes the tingling sensation ricochet up your spine and spread, slow and warm, over your back and sides.

Oh damn. Oh no. This is the *worst*.

Probably because it's also kind of amazing.

Hades doesn't overstep even then, releasing your hand with a polite smile and straightening back up. "Delighted to meet you."

“Are you really, though?” The words are out before you can properly consider them. Family trait; Dad can’t keep his mouth shut when he’s nervous, either.

Hades tilts his head, as if pondering the question. “I daresay I am,” he replies with a faintly-wry tone. “As you have recently discovered for yourself, these engagements are... or can be, exceedingly unpleasant to attend.”

His name does register properly with you then: Hades, brother of Zeus, who himself is the man in charge of Olympus and therefore the host of this entire party.

You’re not quite sure what to make of that information, so you say the first thing that pops into your head.

“That must suck. I bet you have to go to a lot of them.”

Hades huffs softly, the corners of his mouth curling upwards. “I do,” he says. “I am probably supposed to say I don’t mind, but... you’re not wrong about how it feels, let’s say that.”

The admission... sort of makes it feel like he’s let you in on something, and that sense of confidence, of disclosure, is warming. There’s no reason for someone so important to even give you the time of day. By all rights, he probably should have kicked you out of what is most likely his own office. But you don’t feel like he’s going to do that at all.

You feel an answering curve slanting your own mouth, and the last tight knot in your chest loosens. “Well, then I guess my story probably doesn’t surprise you much.”

“Oh, it’s actually very surprising,” he says, his brows knitting faintly as you take another sip of the water. “I wasn’t even aware Demeter had children.” As if realizing how that could sound, he winces. “But, I’m relatively uninformed about such matters,” he adds. “She is not fond of me in the first place, so it’s hardly something that would have come up.”

“It’s okay.” Normally, maybe that kind of remark would have hurt, because it means your mother really doesn’t acknowledge you in all her circles, but... at this point you feel like the harm’s been done for the night and nothing else is going to make it worse. At least Hades has the grace to try and make you feel better about it.

“I’m sorry,” he says softly, resting one hand on his knee and absently tapping out some sort of rhythm there. You can’t tell whether he’s apologizing for what he said, or for all the things that are implied by the tone of your answer. You think it’s probably both.

You huff softly. “None of it’s your fault, you know. There’s no reason for you to have to apologize.”

“Still,” he replies. “It is... a terrible feeling. When your parent—perhaps I am projecting too much.”

The tone of the words makes it obvious that there *is* some old wound there. Not so different from yours. It makes his sympathy a rich, textured thing, like being wrapped in a warm blanket. You wonder how he can do that—manage such sincerity when so often similar sentiments have sounded hollow to you. It’s almost a little frightening, to be looked at and *seen* by this man when it feels like everyone else you’ve walked past this evening has immediately forgotten you in a sea of faces, none the wiser to the imposter in their midst.

Except the one who’d recognized you, and that had been somehow worse.

It's quiet for a moment, and you can hear the strains of the hired string quintet's music filtering in from the party outside. There's a bright wedge of mellow light coming in from under the door, but most of the illumination in here still comes from the city outside. Your eyes catch on the array of colors for a moment before they drop back to your feet, both hands wrapped around the plastic bottle in your hands for want of anything else to do.

"Do you dance?" Hades asks, the tone quiet as everything else he's said, but with a different sort of sense to it. A tentativeness that wasn't there even when you were shaking off a panic attack.

That, he'd seemed oddly accustomed to, come to think of it.

"Not well," you reply, a hint of wry humor in it.

"Me either," he admits. "But even so... would you care to?"

The phrasing immediately catches your attention, your stomach dropping out from under you in that half-pleasant lurchy way it does when you're at the top of a roller coaster or the elevator's *just* about to go down.

He extends his hand, and for a moment you stare at it dumbly.

Then your body's moving: you take it, you deposit the plastic bottle on the desk, you let him lead you to an open spot on the floor in front of the window—and you realize, to your relief, he doesn't mean to make you do this in public.

Embarrassing yourself in front of him seems somehow worse than and also not nearly as bad as that.

He's not a bad dancer. In fact, he's the kind of good that makes you a little better.

"Liar," you accuse softly, as the two of you fall into a smooth rhythm. He is, you recognize, so tall that it should be prohibitive to this kind of coordination. Then again, he's probably been that way long enough to learn to work around it.

"I've no idea what you're talking about," he replies, in a tone that informs you he knows exactly what you're talking about.

Given the heights at play and your relative inexperience, it's only reasonable for him to place his hand at your waist, and you yours at his shoulder. He's very polite about it, almost a little too high in his placement, but not so much so that it makes anything more difficult than it needs to be.

You'll know if he moves it even a little, because you're hyperaware of it. His hands are still chilly, but nevertheless it feels like the touch burns against your skin. You tilt your head up to get a better look at his face, and find him already looking quite intently down at you.

It's really not fair, that his eyes are that color.

You don't know what your feet do. You barely know what your hands do, barely track your own thoughts. But it must be all right, because at times you catch the city lights going by in your periphery—you're moving, and no one's falling over. Somehow, you even manage to execute a spin—you know that because the hand at your waist briefly disappears and the lights blur and elongate, and then it's back and you feel dizzy.

Maybe that last part isn't the spin.

Hades draws you to a stop, and his head tilts, and for a moment you wonder if he won't lean down and—

“—if you wish?”

You blink; time moves normally again. “Sorry, what was that?”

“Ah. I said, I might be able to help you, if you wish. With... the matter regarding Demeter. If you wished to meet her privately, or to make an exit unseen at some point. Or... perhaps if you wanted to return to the event, but not alone.”

Help you? You don't, somehow, doubt his sincerity one bit, and yet...

“Why do you want to help me?” Surely this is enough. *More* than enough, really. He doesn't have to get himself involved in your problems. No matter how oddly magnetic you find him, he's still more or less a stranger to you, and you to him.

“Perhaps it is presumptuous of me,” he says slowly, “but... I know something of how it feels, to have a fraught relationship with a parent. I think it took you a lot of courage to appear here at all; I simply wish to make it that you endure no hardship as a result of that courage. Or at least, none you do not choose.”

“I...” You purse your lips. “Can I be completely honest with you?”

“I think it's worked out reasonably well for us so far, yes,” he says with a hint of humor.

You smile almost despite yourself, but it swiftly fades. “I... think this was a mistake. Coming here. I'm not ready to do this yet. Seeing her... made that obvious to me. I think I just want to go home and dig the rest of my ice cream out of the freezer and watch bad TV.”

His lips twitch. “Well... then perhaps it would be acceptable if we left through a route no one else will be taking, stopped for ice cream on the way, and you allowed me to escort you home, that you might watch all the abominable television you please?”

“That's even better than my idea,” you admit. You'll have to text Hermes and Pyri, but it should work just fine.

The faint smile on his face widens, just enough that you notice it.

“Well then.” He offers you his arm, a gesture that you've always thought looks silly on other people. Somehow it seems natural as breathing when Hades does it, though. “Shall I steal you away?”

You slip your arm through his. “Please do.”

Mycenaean Greece

Hi everyone! This document contains a write-up of some of my research on ancient Greece for the purposes of backgrounding *Fields of Asphodel*. In general, I'm not especially concerned with rigorous accuracy—it's myth and fantasy, after all—but I consider it important to my process to understand where I am diverging from history and to do so with intention, rather than just at random. So there are some notes in here about that, too.

Those of you totally uninterested in history may want to skip this one, heh, but I did try to make it interesting! Conversely those of you with advanced knowledge on the subject probably know way more than I do, and this document would likely be redundant to you. If you do have a degree in, say, archaeology or Classics, please be forgiving; this is meant to be a useful resource for writing fiction, not an article at typical academic standard.

Greece - The Bronze Age

The umbrella term *Aegean civilization* is used for the various civilizations in the area of Greece and the Aegean Sea. It covers three distinct, but interacting, regions: the island of Crete, the Cyclades (a large group of smaller islands off Greece), and the Greek mainland. From early in the Bronze Age, Crete is associated with the Minoan civilization, and so when Minoans are mentioned, it is generally understood that one is referring to the people that lived on that specific island at this time.

Cycladic civilization converges with the one on the mainland relatively early on in the Bronze Age (specifically the Early Helladic period), while Minoan civilization remains distinct from the mainland until the Late Helladic/Late Minoan period. There's some convergence between Crete and the Cycladic islands, culturally, a little before that, though it's unlikely to come up.

The period of time I'm primarily concerned with is the Late Bronze Age (locally, the Late Helladic/Late Minoan periods). The very last part of the Middle Helladic, as well as the Late Helladic in its entirety, basically coincide with what is called 'Mycenaean Greece.'

Mycenaean Civilization

Mycenaean Greece spanned from about 1750-1050 B.C.E. The people after whom the civilization is named were indigenous (interestingly sometimes called autochthonous) Greeks. It's believed that contact and influence between their culture and that of the Minoans stimulated sociopolitical and economic growth, and produced the first distinctively 'Greek' version of ancient Greece, characterized by art, political organization, and architecture.

Mycenae itself was the most prominent settlement at this time, but there were lots of others, including Thebes (to be distinguished from the Thebes in Egypt), Pylos, Tiryns, Midea, Orchomenos, Sparta, Iolcos, and possibly Athens. There was also a fair bit of spatial spread at this time, with Greek settlements in places like Macedonia, Asia Minor, Cyprus, Epirus, and Italy.

This is the age of Greece that later ancients would attribute loads of their myths and legends to. For example, the stories of Jason and the Argonauts, Oedipus, Herakles, and the Trojan War were all said to have occurred in the Mycenaean Era, so it makes sense as the rough temporal setting of FoA.

Sociopolitics

The various settlements in Mycenaean Greece were generally built around a palace: a large, fortified building that serves as something of an administrative center for the settlement and the lands surrounding it. Generally speaking, each of these was occupied by a *wanax*, a king. This is why it feels like every major character in myths is a king or princess or whatever—because there were a lot of them around at one time!

There's some evidence that the wanax in charge of Mycenae—e.g., Agamemnon—controlled about 2-3x the territorial area as most others did, and some suggestion that that wanax may have been something like the leader of a bunch of loosely-confederated nation-states. At the very least, these polities were often in alliance with one another.

A wanax's rule was pretty absolute. The position was one of both religious and secular rule; a wanax oversaw religious rites as well as the distribution of goods. A particularly important role given that currency didn't seem to be in use yet. (SIDEBAR: This is obviously a bit at-odds with Charon's description of the dead as needing currency to cross the river. That was tradition at one point, but probably not yet. I'm going to fudge this by saying that currency was in use at the same time as the barter/redistribution by wanax system still existed.)

The wanax's second in command was the *lāwāgetas*, whose role seems to have been mostly religious. I haven't been able to find too much about what exactly this entailed so I'm probably gonna use it as I please. The structure otherwise consisted of a military aristocracy class (*eqeta*), and then common people, and slaves.

There was differentiation in roles among these as well, though, as it seems those that went into the various priesthoods had status that they otherwise might not have. Slaves either worked for the palace or for deities—there weren't really situations of, e.g., a farmer owning slaves, that I know of.

Civics & Trade

Among the many large scale civic projects of Mycenaean civilization are the palaces themselves, drainage systems, dams, harbors, workshop complexes for large-scale manufacturing, and roads, particularly a large network of them in the Peloponnese, seemingly for the quick deployment of troops.

Trade was a pretty big deal; typically imports were raw materials (metal, ivory, glass), and exports were finished products made from those things or more local ones, like perfume, oil, wine, wool, and pottery. Trade partners included: Canaan, Mitanni, Assyria, Egypt, and the Kassites, as well as the Italian peninsula, via which goods seem to have made it as far as Spain, with incidental objects also being found in Ireland and Germany.

Opium was a thing, and poppies were traded in the region as well.

Religion

There weren't really a lot of huge temples or anything, though there are plenty of records of worship, ritual offerings, ceremonies, and feasts. Both Priests and Priestesses seem to have had important roles in these.

Interestingly, Zeus is mentioned, but is not considered chief in the pantheon. Poseidon has a position of prominence, but he's there thought to be a Chthonic god, and also potentially associated with the Underworld's river (singular in this case). Hera is mentioned by epithet,

Artemis and Athena are as well. Demeter and possibly Persephone, as well as Dionysus appear, and 'Ares' appears under the name 'Enyalios,' though this may have been another deity altogether (SIDEBAR: and you *know* I'm using that).

The Erinyes, or at least one of them, also get mentioned. So it's sort of an interesting amalgam of things and proto-things. It seems like the later ages sort of retrofitted their pantheon structure onto earlier 'events,' and in so doing gave us the versions of the stories we have today. Further evidence that really it can all be manipulated however I want haha.

A Vague Timeline

Super Old: Prometheus

Beginning of Mycenaean Greece: Perseus

Roughly one 'generation' before the Trojan War: Jason and the Argonauts, Oedipus, Herakles.

Unclear, can probably be used anywhere in here: Theseus/The Minotaur/Ariadne (and therefore Pirithous), Daedalus and Icarus

About the generation of the Trojan War: Castor and Pollux, TW itself.

Collapse

Shortly after the purported period of the Trojan War, Mycenaean civilization collapsed. There isn't a universal, agreed-upon reason for this—rather, several have been proposed, including a Doric invasion, natural disaster, and so on. (SIDEBAR: and this will work fantastically for my purposes.)

Anyway after the collapse event, Greece eventually emerged into the Iron Age!

Proust Questionnaire Pt. 1 - Alekto

Q1. What is your idea of perfect happiness?

Peace and quiet, alone or with a small amount of very good-quality company.

Q2. What is your greatest fear?

Failure. I've had enough for one life.

Q3. What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

How much I have allowed my experiences to change me for the worse.

Q4. What is the trait you most deplore in others?

Arrogance. Those who think themselves above others never are.

Q5. Which living person do you most admire?

This is a difficult question, but I think I will say Hekate. She is... always herself, and who that is is someone admirable. I would not have survived what she has.

Q6. What is your greatest extravagance?

Attachment.

Q7. What is your current state of mind?

Focussed.

Q8. What do you consider the most overrated virtue?

Beauty.

Q9. On what occasion do you lie?

I don't. I would, to carry out my job, or protect the Underworld or my friends. But I am not a politician, and so I do not encounter the kinds of situation where deception would be protective.

Q10. What do you most dislike about your appearance?

My appearance is fine. ...I suppose I scare people, with my resting expression. But it is what it is.

Again / Always

She ends up in his office a lot, lately. Gods may not strictly need sleep, but most of them take at least a few hours every day, so they function at their best for the remainder. Some of them, she's heard, do it because they like to dream.

Alekto used to like to dream. Sometimes she'd dream something that would serve as inspiration, useful before she thought of *usefulness* as the term of interest. Back then, she'd just thought such moments of insight or creativity to be a delight, and no further justification was needed. But she doesn't dream things like that anymore.

Instead, she dreams things that wake her up in the dead of night, and so ends up in Hades's office, again, because he doesn't seem to sleep. At least, he's always here when she comes looking for him.

And he doesn't ask too many questions, for which she is grateful. He understands the gist of why she's here, and that she isn't too eager to speak, so he doesn't force the issue. Instead, he brushes her hair.

It's an odd little ritual; she doesn't actually remember how it started. She thinks, perhaps, he fussed over it enough times when she came bedraggled to him from the throes of a nightmare that she just brought one with her and shoved it into his hand one time, but this may be a fiction she's since invented. Maybe it was his idea.

Whatever the case, she now has a routine when this happens, and it helps her settle. She goes to his office, sits in front of one of the chairs, and waits. And Hades finishes whatever he needs to finish—it's never long, but she insists—and then sits behind her, picking up her long tresses bit by bit and working the bristles through them until they're smooth and neat. Then he gathers them all up into a tail, and fastens them high on her head with a band.

Ready? he asks, running his fingers through the gathered hair to ensure that all the tangles are gone. The question itself is a single sign, made in front of her with his free hand.

Alekto nods, slapping her hands against her knees and leveraging herself to her feet. She extends a hand to Hades, who takes it and stands as well. He doesn't need to, of course, but it is a gesture he never refuses. Just as she never refuses to show him her back. In the end, both of them mean the exact same thing.

And then they trek all the way out to one of the most remote areas in the Underworld—a trivial matter, when Hades can warp the realm to get them there in the space of an eyeblink—and Alekto dons the set of practice armor she leaves here just for this, the ritual of buckling and settling everything into place a small contribution to the process of settling her nerves. Sometimes, between that and everything before, she's already most of the way there by this point.

Sometimes, however, she's still rattled. Today is one of the latter days. She picks up her shield, draws her sword—the real kind, with a real blade—and comes to a stop several meters away from Hades.

He wields whatever she asks him to. It's not unexpected that one of the sons of Kronos is an expert hand at whatever weapon he should choose. What is surprising is that of all of them, he is

best at and favors the sheer, visceral power of his own body. Alekto finds she prefers some distance, personally. Being that close might shake her in ways she doesn't want to think about. She, after all, was not *born* to war—she came to it later, when everything else before her was ashes.

If tearing apart Titans with his bare hands has traumatized Hades, as it surely has, then it has done so in the past, rather than the uncertain future.

“Whatever you like,” she says, knowing he waits for her ruling; what she'd like to practice against.

But today the dream was bad enough that it isn't practice she needs. It's just the sheer kinetics of moving her body, of letting all the fear and frustration and grief out in a way that isn't going to rupture her from the inside, like it surely would if she left it, tried to lock it down and away, like she does with so many things, always.

Hades meets her blows patiently, remaining largely on the defensive. It's always an interesting challenge, trying to find ways around his guard, even if to hit him would not necessarily injure him in any significant way. In fact that makes it better, because she can try things without needing to think about checking her force or worrying about hurting him, and there are few people she doesn't have to worry about hurting, in this context or any other.

When she's finally exhausted herself, she stops, giving him a faint nod and returning her gear to its places. She can feel more than hear the thundering of her heart, feel the sweat she's worked up sticking her clothes to her body, feel the soreness beginning to bloom in her muscles, and all of it crowds out the noise of the dream's residuals.

It's what recovery feels like. What healing feels like, for her.

Thank you, she signs. She knows she wouldn't have this without him. The words are so paltry, compared to the gratitude they contain, but she can't bring herself to express any more than that.

You are welcome, Hades signs in return, a faint smile curling his lips. *Again. Always.*

Despite herself, Alekto smiles back.

Room Descriptions

Hermes: The rooms have a sense of airy loftiness to them, even in spite of being underground; the ceilings are vaulted overhead in a way it seems like the actual dimensions of the Keep shouldn't allow, and yet there's no corresponding sense of emptiness. Perhaps because of the sheer amount of *things* in the room. Standard seating—albeit in rich fabric upholstery—is supplemented with nearly a dozen cushions of various sizes, thick blankets thrown around atop them in a way that's half-artful, half-accidental.

Everything is colored in warm hues: red, orange, even a few purples and golds here and there, granting the chambers an impression of warmth that seems to settle against the bones, even before the fire roaring away in the large hearth is considered. The bed is large, covered in multiple layers of fabric, with yet more cushions, until it resembles nest perhaps more than a bed proper. The draping fabric canopy above only adds to the impression. A large, light wooden vanity with a mirror atop it sits against the opposite wall, the surface lined with nearly-organized bottles, jars, and vials.

Musical instruments seem to be the main feature when it comes to what *isn't* furniture, though the artwork on the walls—paintings, tapestries, sketches—suggest an appreciation for more than one mode of artistic expression. A few books are stacked on an end table, in no particular order.

The front room's window is thrown open, faint scuffs on the stone sill indicating the frequent passage of sandaled feet.

Pyri: There's a sense of clutter to the front room, lined as it is with shelves holding various crafting tools and half-finished projects in various degrees of complete or even *completable*—at least a few seem to have been left at inopportune stages in development, like a half-shaped hourglass, thick and blurry with bubbles in the amber solid and no place for sand to go. Yet it is displayed centrally, next to three-quarters of a necklace's worth of fine metal links, their delicacy and regularity masterful.

The workbench at which such projects are evidently completed takes up the entire far wall of the room, opposite the large hearth with its merrily-crackling fire. The surface of the workspace is covered in more tools, and sheafs of parchment with project sketches, weighted down with measuring tools or other incomplete projects or whatever was on hand.

The arrangement leaves little room for more ordinary furniture, and the only other piece of it is a lonely, squashy-looking chair, practical tan in the upholstery and at the moment to a host of books, loose paper sticking out of several of them.

The bedroom is a little more ordinary, though utilitarian in its design—a mattress on a narrow wooden platform sits in the corner, partway over a woven rug in sunny colors. An armor stand, fitted with a broken set of cheaply-made armor, sits in one corner, free of dust and polished in spite of obviously lacking use. The halves of a shattered spear are mounted above it. The only other piece of furniture in the room is a pleasantly-scented wooden chest with a thin, yellowed panel of ivory on its top face, decorated with fine patterns depicting various heroic figures locked in combat with deadly monsters.

Alekto: The chambers seem almost at war with themselves, the utilitarian fighting for dominance with the artistic. Mounted weapons, polished and sharpened, are evidently not merely display pieces, and pride of place above the hearth is given to a round wooden shield with a representation of a crow in flight painted onto it in red, similar but not identical to the standard Alekto regularly bears in practice and into battle.

And yet other walls bear luxurious tapestries and skillful paintings; the floors are strewn with enough rugs to make a proper carpet, exposing almost none of the stone floor beneath at all. The colors in the weaves are almost a mash, with no particular restriction on tone or temperature, and yet the whole seems to be more of a harmony than a proper clash, somehow.

Compromise is hard to find elsewhere, however. The seating is plain, but not as plain as the bed, minimal in both design and decoration. The desk near it is ruthlessly clean, polished enough that it would hardly be surprising if dust were afraid to get near it. Everything is where it belongs; even the small bookshelf near the bed seems to lend itself to tidiness, spines straight and scrolls tightly-tucked together. Two matching trunks reside at the foot of the bed, plain but immaculate, giving no clue as to what might be inside.

Hekate: For chambers belonging to the chief among the Underworld's Ministers, the rooms are almost shockingly spare. What is present is tasteful, gold-trimmed throw rugs arranged with an eye to aesthetics over the stone floor, artwork meticulously framed and displayed to its full effect. There's no dust, not on the low table flanked by couches, nor on the trunk near the bathing chamber door, nor anywhere else as far as the eye can see. And yet the space still carries a sense of neglect, a certain staleness in the air, or an emptiness.

The bed is immaculate, draped in linens of rich cream and aubergine, a few decorative cushions arranged near the head of it. Even this is at best a *semblance* of life, though—real signs of occupation are less obvious.

There are some, though, here and there. A bookshelf, worn in places with frequent visitation, if little lingering. The mantel over the hearth, with its row of trinkets, whirring or simply glinting in the light: a compass, an hourglass, an obsidian statuette depicting a sleek hound. Crude, the last, but worn smooth with the passage of many fingers over the line of its back. A thing well-loved, but set away now, as artifacts often are.

Charon: The most eye-catching feature of the chambers is doubtless what seems to be a *real waterfall* set into one wall—it's hard to say where the water comes from, but it cascades down a large, blue glass panel, into a small pool beneath, and from there, drains away again to who knows where. The pool is filled with stones, smooth and colorful, some of them faintly luminous, like stars in the tapestry of the sky. The furniture is pushed a distance away to keep it dry, the bookcase in the same area enclosed behind matching glass doors to protect parchment and papyrus and vellum.

In spite of the water feature's presence, there is also a hearth, albeit one whose flames burn a strange bluish-white. They give off heat nevertheless, the same as any other fire, warming the space to something more comfortable. The mats on the floor are woven from reeds rather than fabric, their colors relatively neutral and subdued.

The sound carries into the bedchamber beyond, a much more conventional space. A bed with plain covers, a bedside table with a few volumes stacked neatly, a chest, and little else. Well-kept, but showing little personal distinction.

Hades: Somehow even with the fire going in the hearth, the rooms manage to exude a sense of cool stillness. They're dim to match, as though the light from the flames is somehow weak, or afraid to reach too far into the chambers' corners and reveal what's there. It doesn't seem like it would be anything *too* untoward, however, as what's visible is remarkably... ordinary. A neat set of sitting room furniture, sized for its occupant, upholstered in deep, rich green. A low table, a ceramic bowl glazed in complementary hues, pretty if wobbly at the edges of its shape.

All of the fabric seems to be selected at least as much for its feel as its look. Unfamiliar textures are hinted at by the way the bed's covers seem to absorb the light rather than casting much of it back, where other pieces have a distinct shine to them. In fact, the entire space is... easy, on the senses, in a way that few spaces manage to be. Even the low light seems friendlier viewed in such a context.

Rich dark wood characterizes the furnishings, the largest of which is a set of floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, stuffed with a mixture of academic-looking writing and fictional stories, some quite evidently for children. They're accompanied by a desk near the window, which itself looks out upon the city below. Writing implements and paper are neatly stacked on the surface, and the upholstered chair resting flush to it shows considerable indication of wear.

Proust Questionnaire Pt. 2 - Alekto

Q11: Which living person do you most despise?

Apollo. Easily.

Q12: What is the quality you most like in a person?

There are a few I value greatly, but the greatest is surely honesty. Not merely the technical sort, but honesty that is also sincere.

Q13: Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

...I believe Hermes would tell you my favorite word is 'no,' so perhaps that one.

Q14: What or who is the greatest love of your life?

Pass.

Q15: When and where were you happiest?

It's hard to say, now. There was a time in the past when I was what I thought was sublimely happy. Then I lost it, and I thought the misery of that loss would never end. Now, I... I don't know. I think there is at least some part of me that is more fulfilled now than I was then. Perhaps it is an expanding part, but I couldn't say.

Q16: Which talent would you most like to have?

Making people happy.

Q17: If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

I think I am learning to live with my flaws, and so such wishings are not helpful.

Q18: What do you consider your greatest achievement?

The current structure and efficiency of Tartarus. To many I am sure it is unpalatable, but I find it a relief to know I am exacting the least amount of punishment that would remain effective.

Q19: If you were to die and come back as a person or a thing, what would it be?

Perhaps a harpy? I've been referred to as one often enough.

Q20: Where would you most like to live?

Where I am now.

Counsel

“Do you ever wonder... if you’ve done the right thing?” It’s not quite the question he wants to ask, but he doesn’t know how to phrase that one. Perhaps he isn’t even yet sure what it is.

Hekate expels a breath from her nose in an obvious huff. “I’m pretty sure everyone wonders that sometimes, Hades. Well... almost everyone. Not questioning your own decisions at any point is a luxury afforded only to the very arrogant or the very stupid.”

She takes another scroll down from a shelf, handing it to him. He obligingly tucks it under his arm with the others. The every-other-decade ‘pruning’ of the library is something she insists on doing manually, to get a ‘feel’ for the volumes, as well as examining them in the more usual way, before deciding what goes into storage in the hidden stacks and what remains in the parts of the room everyone can see.

“Which decision is it you’re currently wondering about?”

It seems to him that she must know which it is, but he answers the question anyway. “Bringing Seph here,” he says. “They just seem so... unhappy.”

Hekate hums, as if she’s considering this, and for a while, she doesn’t answer.

That’s all right though. He knows she’s thinking about it. Knows she’s not going to say anything unless she feels quite sure it’s what she wants to say. It’s one of the things that makes her such a good adviser. He doesn’t expect an answer before she’s had time to think, and so she never gives him anything half-thought.

“I think they probably are,” she replies, pointing to another scroll on a higher shelf, which he takes down for her, adding it to the group.

As answers go, it isn’t very helpful, but he supposes she might not be quite done yet.

Glancing back, she catches sight of his face and sighs. “Come on, then. Let’s put these down somewhere and have tea.”

“You don’t have to—”

“Yes, I know. But I want to, so it’s what we’re going to do.” There’s a tone she can take on, one that brooks no argument. In the earliest days of their acquaintance it sometimes annoyed him. Now he just finds it some combination of amusing and comforting. Hekate has a way of cutting across doubt and simply deciding. It’s an interesting balance, with her tendency to think things through so carefully, as if she has some intuitive knack for which situations require which faculty.

He hums, a touch amused in spite of the gravity of his worry, and nods obligingly.

Once the scrolls are safely stacked atop a library table, Hades follows her back to the workshop portion of the chamber, where she uses a rather complicated alchemical apparatus for the mundane purpose of boiling water. There’s something in there, about what it is simple or complicated to do with magic and the oddity of what she insists on doing ‘manually,’ but he

doesn't make the remark. Most deities have some things they prefer to do with their hands, or at least the long way, for various reasons. And her tea does taste very good.

While the mess of glass tubes and copper is doing its work, she turns back around to face him, leaning against one of her worktables. "Do you think any of your reasoning would have changed, if you'd known how they'd react ahead of time?"

His brows knit at the direct question. Like her, he takes his time to think on it.

"Maybe," he says after a long moment. "That's the thing. I don't—it's not as though I expected them to enjoy it here, but I think it's... harder to see than to imagine. Especially when I don't know exactly how the alternative would have worked out for them." Could it have been that whomever else his brother might have chosen would really have been someone they'd prefer? What is he to make of that?

"Sure," Hekate says, nodding. "This side of the equation is in full reality, and that one's still only something you can imagine. Of course it seems worse." She quirks a brow. "But you know... whether it was the right decision or not, it's been made. There's no going back."

"Well..." Hades clears his throat. That's not *strictly* true, and they both know it.

Immediately, she shakes her head. "Oh no," she says. "We're not going there. You swore to the Moirae, when you seized the domain. You can't possibly be considering that because *one person* is having a bad couple of months."

He knows she's right, and sighs. "I suppose not," he says quietly, leaning down against the other side of the worktable. "But there is a less extreme type of going back on it. It would just mean I owe something to Zeus. Probably something major."

"You can't," she says firmly. "Hades, you've *just* got things working right down here. Power over *you* is power over everyone and everything you're trying to protect."

He drags a hand down his face, then lets it fall back to the tabletop. "...I know. I just..."

Hekate takes the hand he's dropped, giving it a gentle squeeze. "You see someone having a bad time and want to make it better," she finishes. "I know."

He thinks that makes him sound better than he is, but he doesn't want to rehash the argument they have every time he says so. Instead, he squeezes back. "And so I must conclude I've likely made the wrong decision," he murmurs.

"Well, I don't know about that, but. As I said, the decision is made. The direction to look here has to be forward, rather than back." Relinquishing his hand, she turns to guide the hot water her apparatus has produced into a ceramic pot, into which she adds the tea.

"You think... there is some way we might make things less unpleasant for them?" He feels a faint flicker of hope needle through his chest.

Still turned away from him, she shrugs, flicking a few light blue braids back over one shoulder. "I'm not sure. There's only so much we can do if they're set on being miserable, but I don't think they are. Maybe we just start by trying to get to know them?"

Turning around, Hekate resumes her previous spot while the tea steeps, poking him in the wrist. “Maybe, if they get to know us a little, they might like it a bit more here. I think we’re pretty charming, myself.” She grins, flashing pearly teeth.

“Perhaps...” He’s hesitant to believe it would be as simple as that, but she seldom steers him wrong, in such matters. “A dinner invitation might be in order.”

“I think it might.”

Dossier - Hera

Name: Hera

Nicknames: Dove (only Zeus uses it)

Age: Eons

Species: Deity

Lifespan: Immortal

Date of Birth: March 23

Profession: Queen of the Gods

Residence: Olympus

Hair Color: Light golden-blond

Hair Length: Waist

Hair Texture: Soft waves

Eye Color: Sky-blue

Height: 5'7

Build: Slender

Skin Tone: Slight tan

Distinguishing Features: Perceptible aura of authority, mole near left eye.

Weapons: None

Magic: One of few practitioners of Fate magic, also quite able with many other kinds.

Skills: Leadership, persuasion, organization, intuition and people-skills

Talents: Singing and dancing

Hobbies: Writing letters, walking in her garden, impromptu visits to the mortal realm

Friends: Hera's status makes it honestly difficult to maintain friends, and she is perhaps closest to her handmaidens.

Sexual Orientation: Pansexual

Partner/s: Zeus

Other Family: Hebe (daughter), Ares (son)

Habits: Humming to herself, daydreaming, toying with her hair (though she suppresses this one)

Goals: She's all but forgotten them, save for the one where she keeps Olympus stable between its many competing gods and factions of gods.

Fears: More than anything else, Hera fears a second war between the gods.

Dossier - Athena

Name: Athena

Nicknames: No one really nicknames her

Age: Eons

Species: Deity

Lifespan: Immortal

Date of Birth: July 3

Profession: Goddess of Wisdom and Warcraft

Residence: Olympus

Hair Color: Mousey brown

Hair Length: Roughly two inches

Hair Texture: Coarse

Eye Color: Pale grey

Height: 6'0"

Build: Muscular

Skin Tone: Pale

Distinguishing Features: Powerful build, especially direct stride

Weapons: Any, though she favors spear and shield.

Magic: Athena's magic mostly enhances her physical abilities, though rumor has it she also has impressive control over earth and stone.

Skills: Strategy, warfare, research, combat, weaving

Talents: Eidetic memory

Hobbies: Reading, sparring, studying

Friends: Athena can be aloof, but she does maintain friendships with Hephaestus and Artemis. She used to consider Apollo a close friend, but the relationship has cooled somewhat. Gets along surprisingly well with Hestia.

Sexual Orientation: Asexual (Homoromantic)

Partner/s: None

Other Family: Zeus (father), Hermes, Artemis, Apollo, Ares, Hebe, etc (half-siblings)

Habits: Stims by drumming fingers or shaking leg.

Goals: Self-perfection by mastery of skills and knowledge.

Fears: Athena's a rather fearless sort, but she is wary of humans, in a way few of her kind are.

Proust Questionnaire Pt. 3 - Alekto

Q21: What is your most treasured possession?

I have a necklace Pyri made for me. I think perhaps it is the only material object I value beyond what it useful for, anymore.

Q22: What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?

Heartbreak. Resentment. Betrayal. Perhaps there are others, but if so I have not experienced them in their full measure, as of yet.

Q23: What is your favorite occupation?

I like doing anything that exerts my body. It centers me in my own skin, demands the participation of my senses, and won't let my mind wander. Sometimes I need all of those things.

Q24: What is your most marked characteristic?

Depending on whom you ask, I suppose it is either my protectiveness or my 'grumpiness.' In truth I suspect they are the same quality, seen from different perspectives, but I try not to concern myself too much with that kind of question.

Q25: What do you most value in your friends?

Loyalty. Only what I've earned—I don't want anyone to give me more than I deserve. But what I want more than anything are people who will remain by my side, even if that can be difficult.

Q26: Who are your heroes?

I have none. Not anymore.

Q27: What is it that you most dislike?

Liars. Whether to spare feelings or manipulate or whatever else. It's all the same in the end. If a lie saves a life, or something of the kind, that is fine enough, but most aren't so noble.

Q28: What is your greatest regret?

That I have reached a point where I have more regrets than I would care to name. I regret... having loved. Having trusted. Having invested so much into a person who would never have done the same for me, and who in fact betrayed me. It feels like my whole life until then was a waste, because of it.

Q29: How would you like to die?

If I do? In battle, on behalf of someone or something I love.

Q30: What is your motto?

I'm not given to pithy turns of phrase; I don't really have one.

Unseen

Olympus really is far too *much*.

Hades doesn't understand how anyone can find it comfortable to live in a city this overdone. He recognizes on some level that it is what most people consider to be tasteful in its displays of wealth—but then most people have a very different idea about that sort of thing than he does. To him it's just... ostentatious, from the prominence of the gold to the pervasive brightness of the color scheme as a whole. It's whites and yellows and pale sky-blues and all that sort of thing, illuminated by the sun until he just... doesn't want to look at any of it.

Perhaps this is why fate decreed he should live in the somber-hued Underworld, and Brontios should live here. Though... it hadn't been like this before, to his recollection.

Unseen in the shadow of a building, he watches the approach of the processional with dispassionate eyes. He hadn't really intended to be in its path—but then, he hadn't expected a processional, so perhaps he can be forgiven. Now that it's here, though, and the burgeoning crowd is taking up residence on either side of the street, he thinks it might be all right to stay.

After all, Demeter's child might be too afraid of him to let their real feelings be known, and so this might be the only chance he has to get some idea what they make of all this. Though... they might be particularly good at masking their expressions. Perhaps he just ought to ask Hermes, and go—

He's turning to leave when his attention catches, not on Demeter and the nymphs of her employ in the front, but on his nephew's concerned expression near the end. Hermes isn't typically one to make faces like that, even if he is concerned, so the openness of it makes Hades interpret it as somewhat urgent.

Searching for the source of the worry, his eyes alight on the person walking next to him. Ah.

The figure who can only be 'Seph' wears a familiar expression as well. Much moreso, actually—Hades would characterize it as 'sensory overload,' and before he learned to mask such evidence of discomfort, he made the same one quite often.

For a moment, he debates himself—he doesn't want to cast magic on someone without their consent, but they aren't really in a position to concentrate on giving it, and showing himself might well make the whole situation that much worse.

So he casts first and figures he'll ask later.

"Just keep walking," he says gently, well aware that they're *trying* to do exactly that even through the rest of it. "The worst will be over soon."

A processional. Who has a child prone to becoming overwhelmed by sensory stimulation and insists on a *processional*? He can't fathom what Demeter must be thinking. It sours his mood, not that he'd exactly come into this optimistically to begin with.

Still imperceptible aside from his voice, and that only within the radius of the spell, Hades slips away from the shadow of the building to temporarily attach himself to Hermes's. He knows the young god won't mind, and in fact can probably guess what's going on. He seems inclined to

leave it be for now, though—probably the wiser choice until Seph decides how they want to handle this new development.

And now, brace for anger, he thinks to himself. They'd be well within their rights, of course.

But their only initial response is a nod, and Hades understands immediately why. It's going to take some time to come down from something like that, and he's content to wait until they do. The ridiculous parade seems to move oddly slowly, perhaps in conformity to some concept of dignity he doesn't fully grasp.

Hades takes the opportunity to study his unwitting spouse-to-be for a moment. Nothing intrusive or magical, just... he has to admit he's curious. He's asked Hermes about them, even wrote a letter to Hestia, but of course all the secondhand information in the world isn't a substitute for meeting someone, even for a god as socially-awkward as he is.

They're not an especially-large presence, he thinks, in either size or the way they carry themselves. Then again, this is hardly the right time to judge the latter. No one oozes confidence in the middle of such an episode as this. But still, he thinks, it's something about their body language—it suggests a reserve, perhaps even a shyness. They're dressed in colorful linens; somewhere between what people on Olympus probably consider nice everyday wear and something for a more informal occasion. Not really what anyone would go for where their own wedding is concerned.

That makes him smile, though; he'd opted for something similar. Perhaps, at least, they'll be able to start from that kind of common ground about all this.

The smile fades, though, as the processional draws closer to where his brother waits. He should warn them now.

"If you would like me to drop the spell at any time, please nod twice. Otherwise, I will have to once you reach Zeus. He is likely to take offense to your being shielded from his presence, and I fear that would be of more harm still."

Their throat clears, and they straighten their posture a bit, seemingly at least a bit recovered.

"I understand. Do you mind if I study the spell in the meantime?"

Hades, still unseen, tilts his head to the side. "Study it?" he echoes. That's an unexpected reaction. "No, I don't mind. Go ahead."

He falls silent to allow them to do it, observing their face as their brow furrows in concentration. He can feel their magic reaching towards the lattice of his spellwork, but makes no attempt to withdraw or obscure. He must admit, he's curious as to what they might find, now that they've decided to do this.

After a while, the magic pulls back, and Seph lets out a soft breath.

"Did you learn something?" he asks. It's not a trivial question, nor a condescending one. He honestly has no idea what Seph already knows or doesn't.

"Yes, actually," they reply, a faint hint of something... he's not sure. He'd almost call it shy again, though he doesn't know if that's right. It seems to be the way to characterize the little smile quirking their lips, though.

“...Good,” he replies, not really sure what else would be appropriate. “I’m glad.”

For that, but mostly for the fact that they seem to be doing better now. At least they aren’t in tears. He’d half-expected tears, and wouldn’t have begrudged those in the least. Though... he wouldn’t have known how to help, either. At least this way he feels like—

Well, not exactly like he’s *done* something for them, because it’s nothing at all. But at least there has been an interaction between them that isn’t bad. Even if they haven’t guessed who he is. He’ll be sure to explain it more fully when there’s time, if they seem to have any curiosity about it. Otherwise, he’ll leave it be.

But then Brontios and Hera come into view ahead, and Hades struggles not to grimace. It no longer brings him any pain to see them—hasn’t for ages—but in the absence of that, there’s still plenty of awkward feelings to go around. There probably always will be, when it comes to his brother. But there are others, as well, people he doesn’t mind so much: Hestia and Hephaestus and so on.

"Quite an assemblage of notable persons," he remarks, unable to help the wryness of it. All here for a sham marriage. "...would it be too much to ask you what you make of this whole business?"

There’s a short pause. “It’s... kind of scary,” they admit, frowning and tearing their eyes from the grouping of Olympians ahead.

Hades suppresses a wince. In a way, this is exactly the answer he expected, so it does no good to wish he hadn’t asked now. It just means he’ll need to be all the more responsible and accommodating about all of it. As much as he can.

"I understand," he says, then amends. "Well... to some extent. I suppose I've never been in your position exactly, but it's not enviable. I know that much." The words probably don’t come out in the way he means them to—in this state he doesn’t even sound quite like himself, and the usual difficulties with putting feeling to tone are only compounded by that.

By then, they’re close enough to see the others clearly, including the empty space he is surely expected to occupy.

“The spell will fade out now,” he warns, stepping from Hermes’s shadow. Trying to figure out how to make an appearance is going to be all the more annoying now, as no matter what he does, he’ll be late, but... he’s glad of it, in this case.

Even a sliver of the real Seph was well worth whatever this oversight will cost him in his brother’s ‘esteem.’

Perhaps... perhaps they will be able to find themselves on the same side in this, himself and this unwitting spouse of his.

It’s almost too much to hope for, but despite knowing better, he hopes anyway.

Dossier

Name: Artemis
Age: Roughly seven hundred years
Species: Deity
Lifespan: Immortal
Date of Birth: Midsummer
Profession: Olympian Deity (Hunting, Moon, Childbirth)
Residence: Olympus

Hair Color: Tawny brown
Hair Length: Shoulderblades
Hair Texture: Smooth curls
Eye Color: Medium brown
Height: 5'9"
Build: Leanly-athletic
Skin Tone: Dark olive
Distinguishing Features: Light scarring on her right fingertips, marching gait.

Capabilities

Weapons: Artemis is perhaps the archer among the gods, a better shot even than her brother Apollo. As such, she rarely bothers with any other weapon, but she's a fair hand with knives if she needs to be.
Magic: Her tracking magic is also second to none, and she has some ability to manipulate water and earth, but for the most part her magic is physically-focused.
Skills: Artemis is of course the consummate hunter, but she also has knowledge of medicine, and has in fact guided many people through the process of childbirth as well.
Talents: Dancing, animal training, general athletics, and has impeccable night vision.

Personal Details

Hobbies: Artemis is fond of wandering the mortal world, especially on hunting expeditions. Otherwise, self-improvement is her preoccupation, and she spends a lot of time on it.
Friends: Artemis can be a bit of a loner, but she does get along with Athena. She's also close with her brother Apollo, but their relationship is complex in some ways, and she wouldn't call him her friend, exactly.
Sexual Orientation: Asexual/Demiromantic
Partner/s: None
Other Family: Zeus (Father), Leto (Mother), Apollo (twin), many half-siblings
Habits: Artemis is very competitive, and given to turning things into contests, especially if she feels someone isn't paying proper respect to her skill. She also has a habitually-blunt manner of speaking.

Goals: Artemis is fundamentally concerned with improving herself, and becoming better at everything she does. She likes being unquestionably the best at things, and so whenever she chooses a pastime, she can become obsessive about practicing it until she's excellent.

Fears: Artemis fears being thought of as unnecessary or unimportant, or losing the approval of the people whose approval she has decided matters to her.

Dossier

Name: Aphrodite
Age: Roughly 1000 years
Species: Deity
Lifespan: Immortal
Date of Birth: Midsummer
Profession: Olympian Goddess
Residence: Mount Olympus

Hair Color: Black
Hair Length: Mid-Back
Hair Texture: Natural/Curly
Eye Color: Dark brown
Height: 5'5"
Build: Generous
Skin Tone: Dark Brown
Distinguishing Features: Always impeccably attired, perfectly symmetrical face

Capabilities

Weapons: Aphrodite's greatest 'weapon' is her charisma. She has never desired nor seen the need to use any more physical implement to do harm to another.
Magic: One of the most powerful magicians among the gods of Olympus, Aphrodite specializes in 'mind magic,' the kinds of enchantments that can temporarily induce madness or rapture, or bend others to her will.
Skills: Not really in need of 'practical skills,' Aphrodite has developed only very few and basic ones, aside from her ability to read others and persuade them to see things her way.
Talents: She is a talented dancer, and her poetry and penmanship are both exquisite.

Personal Details

Hobbies: Writing poems and letters, socializing, gossip, reading.
Friends: Aphrodite actually finds it difficult to maintain friendships, but she has tentative ones with Athena, Hestia, and oddly-enough the quiet god of fire and smithing, Hephaestus.
Sexual Orientation: Pansexual/Panromantic, polyamorous
Partner/s: None at the present time.
Other Family: Zeus (Father), Dione (Mother), various half-siblings.
Habits: An inveterate gossip and schemer
Goals: She doesn't really plan for the long-term as a rule.
Fears: More than anything, Aphrodite fears irrelevance, and losing the adoration of mortals and gods alike.

Proust Questionnaire Pt. 1 - Hades

Q1. What is your idea of perfect happiness?

A quiet evening, with a bit of free time, and the company of the people I love.

Q2. What is your greatest fear?

Becoming my father. Or failing in my stewardship of the Underworld. Losing my family... I suppose I am afraid of a great many things.

Q3. What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

Death. And also the impulse to violence. I take measures not to indulge that instinct, but it is always present, much as it shames me.

Q4. What is the trait you most deplore in others?

Cruelty. Many things are flaws I can accept, but that isn't. Directed towards anyone, regardless of what they've done.

Q5. Which living person do you most admire?

I have tremendous respect for all of those I choose to be around—it is one of the reasons I wish to be around them. It would be very difficult to pick a single person I most admire, for all of them have profoundly-admirable traits.

Q6. What is your greatest extravagance?

I have... a very large sunken bathtub in my chambers. I quite enjoy scalding baths in it, which perhaps counts as an extravagance?

Q7. What is your current state of mind?

As ever, I am concerned about the goings-on in my realm and elsewhere. It's been more acute than usual, of late. I am especially worried for my unwitting spouse, and in a separate matter Lethe and those at risk for being afflicted with the same curse as she.

Q8. What do you consider the most overrated virtue?

For deities, honor, in the sense that it is understood as the virtue of rightly-applied violence. But for humans, piety—the blind obedience to the will of deities. I understand why it is often necessary for their survival of course, so it isn't 'overrated' in that sense, but it is unfortunate that it is needed at all, so to speak.

Q9. On what occasion do you lie?

When doing so will appease my brothers with the least amount of collateral damage.

Q10. What do you most dislike about your appearance?

I seldom consider it, but I suppose my eyes. Some find the color unsettling, but it seems to be a feature I cannot change for more than a little while at a time. And... it bothers me that I no longer share a natural eye color with my mother, as we used to.

Piscine

Charon settles on the stone at the center of the lake, turning to smile slightly at Persephone on the bank. Treading on the surface of water is hardly the most impressive of deific talents, but they suppose it might come as a bit of a surprise, considering that in the same situation, most would likely fly. And he could have done that too, really, but he savors the connection to his element that the other method achieves.

"By all means," he says, voice carrying easily back to her with just a tinge of amusement. "You're invited to follow in the same manner. If you trust me enough to try it, that is."

"I'd rather swim it, though." There's a smile in her voice too.

They chuckle softly. That is certainly another way to feel a connection with the water, as it were, though it seems unlikely that such is her purpose in doing so. "Well, if you're entirely sure. The fish won't do you any harm."

They're not even fish, as such, but they do look and behave like them, so perhaps it is worth saying.

She wades into the water, her tunic soaking in water immediately. Most of the fish remain nearby the rocks and consequently him, but a few drift back over towards her as she moves to the right depth, then begins to swim.

Part of it is the quiet stillness of the water, of course, rendering her motions even more noiseless than they would ordinarily be, but they can only admire the smooth grace of her strokes as she cuts through it, submerging briefly as she approaches the tiny 'island' on which they sit. The green and white linen of her tunic billows in the water as her dark hair does, and for a moment—just a moment—he wonders how she would look, amidst the columns and corals of the sunken city.

But the flicker of imagination disappears as she pulls herself up onto the rock beside them, exhaling a satisfied sigh as she settles. Her tunic, sodden, sticks to her skin, outlining the shape of her body in a way he doesn't think she intends. As... diverting as this fact is, Charon clears his throat, shifting his eyes pointedly out over the water. It would be impolite to let their eyes linger.

"Would you like me to dry you?" they ask politely.

"Oh sure; thanks." she doesn't seem too concerned about it, which throws them a little. Given her upbringing, they would have thought—well. Perhaps it is better this way; modesty is neither here nor there as a character trait, as far as Charon is concerned, and they don't want her to be uncomfortable. But it is fairly chill in the Underworld as a rule, so drying off might be prudent.

With a touch of magic and a moment of time, he pulls the excess moisture from her clothes, hair, and skin, depositing the resulting sphere of liquid back into the lake with a simple motion of their arm. "Better?"

"Yes, thank you." She smiles a bit, and he nods.

The light from beneath doesn't quite disperse; the fish loosen in their conglomeration a bit, but many of them remain in the general area of the outcropping, swimming in whatever way seems

to take their fancy. Charon has always been a little proud of these; they may not be technically alive, but there's something about them that is lifelike, the product of his extensive familiarity with the behavior of their living counterparts. There are several distinct 'species' within the lake, and each corresponds to a real type of fish, sans of course the need to eat or mate or anything of that kind. Maybe it's a bit strange, giving them behavior without the impetus, but in a way they're more art piece than imitation of life, so he doesn't think it too strange.

He is not, after all, a creator-god. Even at the height of his power and the height of his arrogance, that was something of which he simply wasn't capable.

Humming softly, they slip their feet out of their sandals and dip them in the water. Some of the fish brush up against him as Persephone follows suit, and one passes beneath her in a similar way, bringing a faint smile to her lips.

"It's nice, isn't it?" They shift their feet back and forth in the water, almost subconsciously relaxing at the feel of it.

Her eyes follow the motion, then widen in what they take to be surprise. "Uh, Charon?"

"Hm?" He looks down, following her gaze, and understands. Webbed toes are perhaps not an ordinary feature. A soft huff escapes them. "Oh. That." A short, almost inaudible sigh follows. "I suppose that particular secret's out, not that it's really all that secret."

"Wait, what secret? I don't understand." She seems genuinely confused, brows puckering in a way that puts a line above them, and he has to *try* not to reach out and smooth it away.

He supposes he can understand the confusion. Shapeshifting isn't entirely uncommon among the gods of Olympus, but it's not exactly the same thing as this, and she may be picking up on it without quite understanding why, or what the difference amounts to.

It takes him only a moment to decide to explain it as well as he can. She's been kept from so much information, intentionally or otherwise, and even if it can be a bit uncomfortable to think about at times, for them personally, someone should explain it. He knows his friends would, but it's only natural to do it now.

And maybe some part of them wants her to know from them first.

"Ah. Well, some of us have alternate forms. 'True' forms, some would say. Most are a little different from how we ordinarily look—the latter is in part convenience, in part convention." It's certainly a lot easier not to startle humans when one appears mostly human, and other deities, those without more monstrous aspects, aren't immune from the same foibles as mortals often have.

They lift a hand so it hovers between themselves and her, and she watches the form of it shift and adjust. His fingers elongate slightly, short, dark claws appearing on their ends, and a thin membrane of pale webbing between them. A faint dusting of scales in his trademark blue and silver appears on the back of his hand, and they stretch their fingers out so the webbing pulls tight, then open and close their fingers over into a fist.

"I, for example, have an affinity with water. It's in my blood, I suppose. As a result, my other form is rather piscine in nature, and I can achieve a few in-between states, such as this one. It's... I suppose in some sense it is shapeshifting, but the other form is very specific and unique to me. I am not copying something else that exists, I am... inhabiting the other side of myself. Both forms are equally mine, so I don't much like to call one 'true,' as it implies the other is false."

And it isn't, really. False. It is just... not the whole truth, as it were.

"Why do you hide it?" As ever, her questions are incisive, and insightful, and because of that a little difficult to answer.

"Aside from the fact that it would be a bit of an awkward way to greet the new arrivals," Charon replies wryly, "it is fairly inconvenient for land travel, what with the tail and all. But even at the halfway points, it's..." he purses his lips, struggling for the right description.

"One must be careful, with chaos. It is powerful, but less inclined to reason. And for me at least, the instinct that takes over in a void of reason is... I prefer not to live like that, suffice it to say. This part of myself is the one I prefer for most situations."

A profound understatement.

Returning his hand to its former shape, Charon sets it in his lap along with the other. "If you would be so kind... I would prefer it if you didn't mention this to anyone else. Anyone outside of the immediate group, I mean." He turns slightly to be looking directly at her, almost afraid of what he'll find.

"Of course. I promise." She offers a small smile in their direction, and Charon hums, the set of their shoulders perceptibly relaxing.

The relief is... profound. It isn't as though they have been forbidden from that form exactly, but there are many outside of the Underworld who would take it as evidence of his backsliding, and he would prefer to keep the consequences of that well away from the friend who has so patiently and gracefully sheltered them all this time.

"That is a nice thing to hear," they murmur softly. "I will choose to believe it."

Proust Questionnaire Pt. 2 - Hades

Q11: Which living person do you most despise?

My father. Though I don't know if I can call it hatred any longer. I think, perhaps, I just pity him.

Q12: What is the quality you most like in a person?

Kindness. It is a simple preference, I know, almost mundane. But I think that's where the true things are revealed: in the mundane, the everyday, the habitual.

Q13: Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

I don't know if there are any specific ones, but I take care to emphasize often than the things I say are not commands. This is because my position might otherwise lead people to assume they are by default, and I don't want that.

Q14: What or who is the greatest love of your life?

I think perhaps I have too much life left to yet say that, but at the same time... I think my daughter certainly is. But also my nephew, and my friends. I have a life that has been graced by many great loves. Fate has been kind to me in this way.

Q15: When and where were you happiest?

Here and now. I feel a lot of nostalgia for my earliest days, at times, but this is the place and time where I belong.

Q16: Which talent would you most like to have?

I should like to be more facile with people. As it is I more often frighten them than anything, but perhaps that is my lot.

Q17: If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

I often wish I were the god of anything but death and the Underworld. And yet... if it came down to it, I'm not sure I would change that.

Q18: What do you consider your greatest achievement?

The Underworld was not especially well-functioning when I arrived. It's still not ideal, but it runs about as well as it can in the circumstances. I didn't do that alone, but I'm proud of it all the more for that.

Q19: If you were to die and come back as a person or a thing, what would it be?

An ironic question to ask *me*, don't you think?

Q20: Where would you most like to live?

I think I am content with where I live now, in truth. It's not most people's preference, but it is home to me. Mostly because of the people, of course.

The Garden

Makaria's never properly been into a garden before. Hasn't even seen one, up until she saw Dionysus's, the other day. Honestly, she hadn't been so sure they'd let her get any closer; she can understand that sometimes, things aren't for sharing. But Dad had told her it was okay to ask, as long as she respected the answer, and now here she is!

Asking is hard, sometimes, but this time it had been worth it, for the flowers.

Her eyes are all but magnetized to the roses—she recognizes the plants only from Auntie Hekate's botany books. But she's always wanted to see them, and to think there's all different colors right here in front of her now...

"They're so pretty!" She can't help but reach out to brush her fingers softly over a petal, smiling at the texture of it.

"Mind the thorns, Makaria," Empusa warns softly.

"I *know*, Em!" She'd read *all* about roses; besides, she's not six anymore—she doesn't have to be reminded of things all the time. Em means well, but still!

Crouching by the bushes, Makaria makes careful inspection of the details, trying to remember the names of the parts she's read. There's the main stem, that's connected to the bush, and then... the smaller stems have a name, too.

She's vaguely aware of Dionysus and Em talking about something, but at the moment her inspection has most of her attention, at least until she hears a whuff overhead and looks directly upwards.

Kerby is looking back down at her, his tail swishing slowly back and forth.

"You want to learn about roses?" she asks him, and he makes a soft not-quite bark in one of his throats.

Makaria knows this means yes, so she nods. "Okay. So I read this in a book. This bit here is the stem, and these little stems that shoot off and hold the flowers are called peduncles! And these are leaves, obviously, and these are the thorns. Don't stick your paw or face in the bush or they might hurt you, okay?"

She gets the agreeing-noise again and nods. Makaria is well aware that Kerby can at least mostly understand the things she says, though really big things sometimes confuse him. Then again, really big things sometimes confuse her, too, so maybe they're just confusing and the adults are the weird ones for acting like those things are normal.

"Anyway. This part under the flower is the hip. Daeira says some people make tea with it. And these little green thingies are se—sep—hm. Sep-something. I'll have to look them up again." Pursing her lips at the elusive green thingies, she gently lets go of the flower she's holding and stands. "Let's go over there!"

They make their way over to the pond area in the middle of the garden, and Kerby contents himself with sniffing around the banks. Makaria crouches next to the water, reaching forward to

brush her fingertips over the surface. She reaches out with her little bit of magic, too, studying what's in front of her, at least until she hears the sound of approaching footfalls.

A glance upward proves it to be Dionysus, and she smiles, a little shyly. Talking to new people can be so hard sometimes, but he seems kind. So maybe she can tell him what she's noticed and have a proper conversation.

"Even the water feels different." Makaria's fingertips rest on the very surface of the pond, still for now. "It's Charon's water, but not like normal. How do you grow things?" Her own observation jumps to a different question before they can add to it, and she straightens, shaking her hand to cast off some of the excess droplets before she pats her hand down on her long tunic-dress. Questions are easier to go off of, in conversations. She'd read that.

Fortunately, Dionysus really knows how to jump off of a question! She doesn't understand all the words in the explanation, but she can look those up later. For now, she just listens to them, and studies the way their face looks when they get really excited about something.

Makaria's smiling through the whole thing, and when she's finally exhausted her queries, she giggles. "When you get excited talking, you remind me of Dad," she says. "He gets excited, too."

She turns away again, for a moment. Beside the pond is a tree, its branches now heavy with budding blooms, and it isn't long before Makaria has approached it, reaching out to lay a hand on the trunk, tiny pale fingers splayed against the bark. She can feel the life in it, if she concentrates really hard. It's stronger than any of the other plants she's ever touched in the Underworld, and this makes her smile a little.

"You're a good tree," she whispers to it. Then she tips her head up towards the branches, peering at the flowers growing among the foliage. They're very pretty, even if the roses are still her favorite. They smell nice, too.

"What's Olympus like?" she asks, looking briefly away from her inspection to meet Dionysus's eyes. She's heard about it, of course, from Dad and Charon and Hermes and even Auntie Leks once. But she wants to know what he thinks, too.

"Just looking at it is kind of the opposite from the Underworld, but they're actually pretty similar." It's hard for her to tell exactly what similarities they're talking about, but maybe everywhere gods live is kind of the same in some ways. It would be, right? Even if only *because* gods live there.

She nods slowly. "Charon says that, too."

Makaria studies them with evident curiosity. "I'm not from here either," she adds after a moment. "Well, I am now, but I didn't used to be. Dad says I'm from the mortal realm, but I don't remember it because I was little when I came here. I'm not dead, though." She shrugs; it's not something she really bothers to think much about. Dad says she's Makaria, and that's what matters.

"Well, it seems like you like it here, so that's good, right?" Dionysus tilts his head to the side, a faint smile pulling at one corner of his mouth.

Her expression, oddly pensive as it had been for a moment, morphs into a bright smile. "Yeah," she says. "This is a good place. My dad is here, and the rest of my family, and Em." She looks back over her shoulder at Empusa, who smiles and waves, though Makaria's not sure she heard.

"And Kerby, of course. He's my best friend. And now you're here, and the garden, and everything." These are very good additions, to her mind.

There's a moment's pause, as she examines the nearby plants, and then she pushes a long strand of white hair behind a pale ear, turning her eyes back to him. "Um. Would it be okay if I took one? Of the plants. I want to show my dad, and tell him the stuff you told me."

There's a certain half-there line barely visible between her brows, and the tilt of her mouth is uncertain. She doesn't know if it's okay to ask something like that, but she hopes so. Even if he says no, it's all right, really.

Dionysus hums for a moment, then nods, walking to the rosebushes, to the white ones. He uses a small bit of magic to sever it a ways back from the flower, the cut it makes clean and precise.

Holding the rose by the end, he crouches and extends it towards Makaria.

The smile that spreads over her face feels huge on her face, like it's taking up the whole thing, and she very carefully takes it from them, pinching between the thorns with tiny fingertips and bringing the flower close to her chest. "Thank you so much, Dionysus," she says. "This is the best."

She's going to tell Dad all about this as soon as she sees him!

"Do you think..." she pauses, chewing her lip as she thinks over her words. "Can I come back? I want to—would like to see it again, and learn more about the plants, if you can teach me. But, it's okay if you don't want to!" The last part is more emphatic than loud; her eyes round slightly with the vigor of the emphasis.

"I can learn with books about plants, so it's okay." She definitely doesn't want to guilt him into anything—not ever!

But it seems her worries were for naught, as m might say. "Of course you can! I'd love to have your help." Dionysus smiles; Makaria can't help but grin back again. Can her face get stuck like this?

"Thank you!" she pushes herself up on the balls of her feet with excitement, dropping back almost to her heels and repeating the little bouncing motion a few times to try and let her happy out without running around or anything. "You can ask for my help whenever you want! As long as I'm not in the middle of something Dad or Em asked me to do, I'm free. You can even wake me up if you want!"

"Makaria," Empusa calls softly, closing her book over and tucking it into her satchel. "It's time. Thank you for having us, my lord."

Makaria sighs loudly and frowns. "I have to go read about history now," she says, wrinkling her nose. "But, thank you for having me!"

She half-bows politely, then heads back through the garden to join her tutor, and the two of them wave goodbye to Dionysus, taking their leave with Kerberos in tow.

Makaria skips all the way to her history lesson.

Proust Questionnaire Pt. 3 - Hades

Q21: What is your most treasured possession?

I suppose if I were to pick something material, I would say my mother's bracelet, but I don't really consider myself to possess much, and I also believe that nothing of true value can be 'possessed.' Needless philosophical hair-splitting, perhaps.

Q22: What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?

Loneliness.

Q23: What is your favorite occupation?

When I can find the time, I like little so much as reading.

Q24: What is your most marked characteristic?

Death.

Q25: What do you most value in your friends?

Patience.

Q26: Who are your heroes?

It may be something of a trite answer to some, but if I have ever had a 'hero' it is most definitely my mother. In a more literal sense than most. I also find my friends heroic, in their own ways. But that is perhaps mostly in a metaphorical sense.

Q27: What is it that you most dislike?

The pain of those I love.

Q28: What is your greatest regret?

That I was unable to save her. That I am sometimes paralyzed by the fear that I will be unable to save others.

Q29: How would you like to die?

A hypothetical I have never considered due to its impossibility.

Q30: What is your motto?

I'm not... very good at things like this. With apologies, I must confess I have no idea how to answer such a question.

Burn

Amnissos isn't what Alekto would call crowded, exactly, but there is a certain bustle to it. For the moment, she is pleased enough to have finished the business side of today. The honey-drizzled cake is sweet, and she takes small bites to savor the experience of eating it. She considers food to be an art form, and worth appreciation on more than one level, regardless of how humble its origin.

Also, it is delicious, and she wishes to prolong the pleasantness of that, for no other reason than that it is pleasant.

She and Persephone pass the temple's construction site, and she notes that their eyes are drawn to it, a similar open curiosity evident as has been for much of the outing. They have been rather rapt as an audience for her babbling—both verbal and gestural—about everything from trade to children's games. The impression she gets is that they have little exposure to anything mortal, and also lack the disdain many deities have for the same, so Alekto is, for once, only too happy to explain things.

Well... maybe it's not really all that unusual. She just usually doesn't have occasion to do such explaining, given that the people around her all know these things.

"Temple," she says, making conscious effort to modulate her tone. She's usually fairly successful at it, probably because to a certain degree she can still hear herself. It would be much more challenging without the feedback. "This one will be dedicated to Poseidon."

Persephone blinks at it, scanning the as-yet unused stone, much of it cut but some still needing the attention of a mason. "Are there any temples to you?"

Alekto huffs. The thought is so absurd it doesn't even sting. "No. Aside from the occasional one to Hermes, none of us really has any. Not anymore. You think people wish to draw the notice of the Furies?"

Well, on the other hand, she does get prayers. It's just a different sort of thing. No one builds shrines to vengeance. It's more of an at-need sort of thing. So she should clarify.

"...I suppose they do sometimes, but not regularly. So no temples."

She pauses, then adds: "Come. We can get a better look from above."

She leads them up a nearby slope, to a hill overlooking the temple-to-be. It's easier to get the sense of the large entrance that extends most of the way back, and then the two symmetrical wings of rooms off to the side. Most likely to be used in the literal staging of larger rituals, which are as much performance as prayer, in whatever way these particular humans think will be most pleasing to the Lord of the Sea. The clergy themselves will be housed on the grounds, but not within the worship space.

Persephone's curious gaze takes all this in, then they shift their attention towards an altar, less grandiose than the temple will eventually have, but one very much actively in use. A few people are leaving offerings and prayers *now*, actually.

"Sometimes a temple is just an altar," Alekto finds herself saying. She isn't sure what it is about them that makes her more inclined to converse, especially because much of that conversation must still be conducted with her voice. She doesn't *mind* that, but she does always worry how she sounds, when she can only barely tell herself. And yet...

"Those are the sorts Hermes usually has. There are a few to Hekate, too. I suppose when your domains often involve travel, there's not much point to a larger stationary place of worship."

She shrugs. "Or maybe they just don't want to put anything that would draw the attention of a Chthonic deity in the middle of a city or town." That is almost certainly at least part of it. None of the deities who live below are the kind with proper temples. It's simply the way of it.

"But people pray to you, right?" They turn to look at her, eyes a little wide.

There's something so... disarming, about their manner. She can't quite put her finger on it, but they never seem to think the worst of her, even when she gave them plenty of reason to. But when they look at her now, she sees only benevolence. A little clumsy, maybe, stilted and occasionally awkward, but she is all of those things herself, and does not begrudge them in others.

It makes her want to—

"Yes," she says, not letting herself finish her own thought. "Though perhaps not as often as you think. Having worshipers and getting prayers aren't precisely the same thing, though." Alekto shakes her head. She needs to remember that none of this is permanent. That someday soon, in all likelihood, they'll be returning to Olympus, and she and the rest will be nothing but a footnote in their life, perhaps an amusing anecdote for a party.

Some part of her doesn't believe Persephone would ever do that, but the rest of her is too accustomed to 'nevers' becoming quite painfully real.

"Prayer can be..." She pauses, gathering her wits back together so she can resume the explanation. Distraction enough from the direction of her thoughts. "A strange experience, I suppose. Mass gatherings for the purpose, or sites like temples, only tend to complicate things. But fortunately not everyone has to deal with that dimension of it."

Alekto settles down on the hillside, extending her legs in front of her and studying the humans moving about. There's a nostalgia, to watching them like this. Some part of what happened that doesn't seem entirely too sour to stomach, even now. "I, for example, most commonly receive prayers either from people seeking vengeance, or people trying to keep me away from them, when they know they've done something that might draw me to them. Hardly the same thing as veneration, in either case."

"It must be painful, to not be able to give them what they're asking you for." They follow her eyes down to the workers and the supplicants. She only just catches the words, and for a long moment, she's sure it seems like she doesn't, because she has to really contemplate the words.

"Painful?" Alekto echoes, testing the feel of the word on her lips. She tests it on her hands, too, extending her index fingers and jabbing them towards each other twice, the kinetics of it sharper than the quiet tone of her voice. The feel of it isn't quite right, so she twists her fingers as she brings them together, instead. "Maybe."

Controlling her expression, she turns to Persephone. "But what I do is part of a cycle. If that cycle does not complete, their very souls might disappear, a death more final than any suffering. So I do it."

The words are small comfort, but she chose this. And she knew what she was doing when she did. It makes it difficult, for her to feel herself a fitting companion, for someone so... well, Hermes isn't for once entirely wrong, having deemed them 'Sunshine.' Much as that phrase makes her feel... a very complicated mix of things.

She hid herself away from the sun a very, very long time ago.

But perhaps not all stars burn the same.

Flight Pattern

Hermes hums. "All right, so." Setting his hands on his hips, he tilts his head towards the sky, eyes narrowing halfway into a squint. "Weather's good for it, as you can tell. Won't be too cold even if we go pretty high up. But, uh, here's the thing."

His lips purse, and he turns his eyes back to Dionysus. "The last time you, uh, 'flew,' it was because I was carrying you. Happy to do that again if you prefer, by the way. But I could also try teaching you the most basic flight spell if you want to do it yourself. Just... be sure you're confident in your magic. Those are the options."

He definitely doesn't want to be responsible for them dropping out of the sky. He's mostly sure he'd be able to stop that from being a disaster, but it'd be better not to need to worry about it at all, obviously. And Sunshine would know his own capabilities best, even if Hermes *has* been helping teach him.

That training hasn't really progressed that far yet, but Hermes does think he could learn it. Otherwise he wouldn't have offered.

Well, maybe he still *would* have, if only not to seem like he was forcing the idea of carrying him. That'd be a little awkward. But it's not actually like that, so it's probably fine, right?

"You can teach me to fly? I'd love that!" Dionysus smiles, bright as his namesake—well. Not really namesake. Nicknamesake? Is that even a thing? This is why Alekto writes the songs and Hermes just plays them. He's not really a poet.

Not that he needs to be writing poetry about his best friend anyway. That would be weird.

"Theoretically," he replies with half a grin, pushing the odd thought to the side. Metaphorically. "Whether it works or not depends on you more than me, but I think you can do it."

He considers the best way to approach this for a moment, but settles on his original thought. Dionysus has been practicing elemental manipulation already, so it's probably easier to give him an application of that, rather than have to explain and practice a bunch of new groundwork first. Flying by manipulating air currents and density isn't really the most intuitive method, but it will do for a first crack at it, he thinks.

After a few pretty hilarious failures, he manages to get himself hovering reasonably steadily. It's slightly unsteady, and Hermes watches carefully to make sure the awkward midair wobble smooths itself out before he breaks into another smile.

"Hey," he says, feeling a little surge of something like pride. "You've got it!"

Wearing a broad smile, Dionysus looks down at his feet, currently almost a meter off the ground, then turns the currents, moving smoothly from a hover pattern to propulsion. Quite a lot of propulsion, actually, enough to push him swiftly from the cradle of the rock formations and into open sky.

"Whoa, hold on there, zippy," Hermes calls, jumping into the sky after him with a laugh. Here he is slacking off and about to get left behind. Absolutely not while he's still alive and kicking—the sky is his, and while he's happy to share it, he's not about to be outdone on Sunshine's first day of flying.

Well, and there's the actual safety to consider, but why worry about that before it's a problem?

He catches up easily, falconine wings and more than a bit of his own magic propelling him with all the swiftness of an arrow after Dionysus.

And then they're *both* ascending, and it feels as much like absolute freedom as it ever has.

The two of them tack to the east for a little while, flying along the coastline, much as they had when Dionysus left Olympus, though obviously that's not where they're going this time. It'd be nice if visits were allowed and Hermes could ask whether he wanted to, and be able to go with whatever answer, but he thinks that as things are, even mentioning Olympus would just... make things worse. Rather, he decides to direct them both out over the water after a while, until there's nothing beneath them but a rolling expanse of blue, crested by crashing waves, seafoam riding the surface of the deep azure beneath.

The wind pulls and tugs at them, almost an entity of its own, tracing a salt-tinged touch over their faces in a caress one moment, only to whip back with a sting when interaction with their magic changes the currents abruptly.

Hermes loves this. Every part of it. The skies are his home, more than anything ever has been. It's here when he feels the most intense sense, not of belonging, necessarily, but of comfort. When he feels the most like everything he is, all at once. Because he is Olympian, and he is Chthonic, and he is the god of travel, of freedom, of moving and of all the flying things in the world, of the winds themselves, it sometimes feels.

The wind shifts as he wills it, bringing the both of them up in a glorious swell, and he stretches his wings to catch all of it that he possibly can. Laughing, loud and joyous, he turns his eyes to Dionysus.

"You want to try some tricks?"

The smile he gets in return is radiant. "I absolutely do."

"Then follow me," Hermes declares, a sly smile turning the corner of his mouth.

He tucks in his wings and *plummets*, nosediving towards the sea in utter freefall.

Dionysus turns the currents around him and follows, trying to catch up. Hermes is dimly aware of him straining the magic, pushing faster in an attempt, not merely to keep up, but to *win* the race to the sea.

That's something he has to admire.

The same awareness lets Hermes notice when the magic of the other young god's spell gives out and collapses, leaving his friend trapped in a true plummet.

"Hermes!" The panicked shout follows before he can react, and it's then that he pushes himself to action.

Turning the current with a push, he angles his dive to intercept, approaching Dionysus with maybe a little more urgency than is strictly necessary, but he wouldn't leave his friend to actual fear when it's so easily remedied. Even he knows when something isn't so easily brushed off, and even he is terrified of falling, in a way.

His arms close, one under Dionysus's knees and the other around his back, and another current turns them the right way in the air. "Got you," he says, pulling the younger god to tuck in against his body for more security.

Sunshine is quick to circle his arms around Hermes's neck, presumably for the same reason. He's not exactly wrong to—they're approaching the water with tremendous speed, still, and for most people, this would be past the point of no return. They'd just have to hope to soften the collision with the water.

But Hermes isn't most people. He snaps his wings open, hissing so softly it's inaudible over the rush of air as his muscles wrench and strain, and his magic blasts an updraft beneath them as well, slowing their descent just enough that, when they do make contact with the water, he can let out a breath of relief and grin as his sandals skim a cresting wave. The spray kicks up from beneath, leaving a fine mist behind on their skin and clothes, and it feels—perfect.

Something about this moment is perfect, and he knows it will linger in his memory, probably for every eon he will live.

He sighs, almost wistfully, and turns his face to the sun as they begin to ascend with powerful strokes of his wings.

"Feels good," he murmurs, taking in a steady breath, then realizing how that might sound. "Not the, uh... falling part, obviously. Just... being in the air. Feeling the sunlight. That kind of thing. It's nice to do something *fun* every once in a while."

It's his best guess for why the moment just... clicks. Why it will live in him for ages.

The Titanomachy

For an event that changed the course of the universe, surprisingly little about the Titanomachy is common knowledge. Perhaps this is because it is a memory of the elder generation of Olympians, for the most part, and none of them have proven especially eager to discuss it, or share the details of it with anyone outside that small group.

What is generally shared is the following: the Titanomachy was a war against the King of Titans, Kronos, and his allies, many of whom were the parents of those warring against them. The Olympians who would come to be known as the first generation of ‘gods’ were led by the one who would become their king—Zeus.

The initial provocation for this turning of child against parent is known to be something involving Rhea, Kronos’s wife and the mother of Zeus and his two elder brothers. It isn’t clear precisely what she did, or what its result was, beyond that it set the sons of Kronos against their father.

Those who care to speculate about such things suppose that perhaps Rhea angered her husband somehow, as he was famously known for a powerful and destructive temper. It might be that he was set off by something, and the rage that followed was enough to provoke his sons to quell his power. Others, perhaps slightly more historically-informed, consider this explanation to miss something important. There is a rumor, unsubstantiated but significant, that Kronos was told by the Moirae that his own son would overthrow him and take his place as the mightiest of his people. That he would lose crown, throne, and power in the same stroke.

It is not hard to imagine that such a prophesy, decreed by Fate, may have weighed heavily on his mind, setting father against sons long before the reverse became true. And yet it is quite difficult to determine the truth of this, either the rumor or the effect it might have had.

The decree, of course, has since been substantiated: Zeus resides on the throne of Olympus, and Kronos has been exiled to a sub-realm of the Underworld, where he resides under Zeus’s authority and Hades’s watchful eye.

And yet the mysteries do not end here. What led to this particular arrangement after the Titanomachy? If it was an internal family dispute, how did the other gods and titans become involved? If so many of the involved titans still live, how is it that so many of their domains and powers are now possessed by their children? How did the transfer not only of power but worship take place?

Were the titans ever worshiped at all? It seems almost heretical to suggest otherwise in the court of Olympus, and Zeus hardly countenances any such suggestion, and yet not even he provides direct refutation to it. What implications that might have are unclear; if prayer is new to the so-called ‘first Olympian generation,’ is it therefore possible that it might not be quite so much the natural way of things as it seems? Might it even be *contrary* to nature?

Perhaps that much will never be known.

Departure

Empusa stirs, fingers twitching against the bedclothes, as she feels Daeira move beside her.

For a moment, she doesn't open her eyes, remaining still and trying to draw out the last moments before she must awake and confront what today means. She's done so many times in the past and will do so many times in the future, but it never gets simpler. Never feels easier, only more familiar. One can get used to dread and worry, in the same way one can get used to pain or having an artificial leg or a new routine, and yet it shares the most in common with pain.

Her leg, she likes. Her routine, she's flexible about. This... this is neither of those.

"Love?" Daeira's voice is somehow clear and lucid, even so soon after they've woken. Only rarely does she catch them groggy; she almost wishes she had this morning. It would mean it was a lazy morning, the kind they could spend in each other's company without anything hanging over their heads but the ordinary things.

Reluctantly, Empusa cracks her eyes open, sighing quietly. Her own voice comes out nearly as clear.

"Yes."

She sits up, lets Daeira help her stand even though she doesn't *strictly* need it. The assistance does make things easier, and it's a small way they have, of showing affection and care. It's something she's learned, since being with them: you can love and miss things that you do not need. And somehow, you can survive missing and loving things you *do* need.

Her partner pushes some of her unruly hair out of her face, carding their fingers through it gently. "How does it get so messy? You barely move at night."

Empusa sniffs. "You might know if you had any."

That gets her a quiet chuckle, and when Daeira opens their arms to her, she steps into them with a long, soft sigh. Even after all this time, their presence relaxes her like nothing else does.

"I wish you didn't have to go," she murmurs. She doesn't always say it; she tries to be strong for the person she loves most in the world. And she knows that saying it makes things more difficult, every time. But sometimes she just... doesn't have that strength. Sometimes she has to say what's in her heart, even if it *is* difficult.

"I know," they reply gently, still trailing fingers through her hair, easing the knots out, bit by bit. "But someone has to figure out what we can do for the Consort. You know that."

"Yes." The poor thing hardly deserves anything that he's gotten, and yet it is hard for Empusa to know that this means her beloved will have to again wade into the dangerous territory that is spying on Olympus. They are good at it—she has no illusions that anyone could do it better. Not even Hades himself. And yet still that pride carries in it an anxious note, a bone-deep filament of fear.

That this will be the last goodbye.

As if sensing it somehow in the way she holds them, Daeira gives her a soft squeeze with their arms, holding her as close as it is possible for their two bodies to be, at least in their present state of dress. She sighs, and for a moment, the worry flees in the face of this warmth. This love she never thought she'd find. Hadn't even known was out there, for so long.

It is really any surprise that she should hold it—and them—so precious? There are those out there who, with love gone, could love again. But Empusa knows, deep in her heart, that she is not one of them. She might love other people, in other ways, but she will never love anyone else like *this*. There just isn't room.

But that is also the reason she can ease her hold and step back when Daeira does the same. Because this, their job, their calling, really. This is part of them. And a part of what she loves about them. They wouldn't be themselves without it. "You'd best figure it out, then," she says, injecting a mock-sternness into her voice and using her thumbnail to neaten the edge of their golden wing of eyeliner. Well, not really; it's immaculate as it is, but she pretends to, for the excuse to touch them and look into their dark eyes. "Get us something we can use for Dionysus, and come back to me in one piece."

Daeira chuckles, low and soft, their eyes crinkling at the corners as they have so many times. There are lines there, if she looks closely. Beautiful ones, that mean her beloved has smiled and laughed and been happy enough times that it is pressed into their very skin.

"As you say, my lady. I could never stay long away from you, anyway. I dream only of you, need only you."

Empusa huff-laughes, pushing at their sternum with a shake of her head. "Now you're just being dramatic. Go. But come home. That's all."

Their smile softens, and they lift her hand to their lips, brushing them over her knuckles briefly. "I love you," they murmur. "That's all."

Questionnaire - Hypotheticals (Charon)

1. You're minding your own business when the person you least want to see walks into the room. Who are they, and how do you react?

That would be impossible, as that person has long since died and then returned to the cycle of life. More than once. I suppose if I did ever see him again, I would believe myself to be in a nightmare, and do everything I could to free myself of it. Though, in principle, I should not be having nightmares. So perhaps a spell, to the same result.

2. How would you react if you witnessed a victimless crime?

I have to say that depends on exactly what it is. If it seemed like the person committing the crime might accidentally harm themselves, or be at risk of coming to unrelated harm, such as a publicly-intoxicated person likely to be swindled or attacked, I would of course want to intervene. But I generally try not to impose my will upon others.

3. What would you do if someone brought up your biggest insecurity in front of a crowd of strangers?

Leave at first possible opportunity, most likely. There are things I prefer not to discuss nor hear discussed.

4. How would you respond to an apology from somebody you still can't forgive?

With as much grace as I could muster, I hope. There is... anger in me yet, but I can accept that much as long as others do not feel its sting.

5. How would you feel after a one-night stand?

I avoid such types of entanglement at all costs, so probably some mixture of confusion, guilt, and horror.

6. How would your best friend describe you?

I believe he would say that I am someone who has learned kindness and patience, and in his generosity he would find this equally if not more impressive than someone who had such traits naturally. I disagree with the latter, but I hope he is right about the former. I do try to trust him on such matters.

7. Are you more likely to ask for permission or forgiveness?

Permission. I already have too much to atone for to risk needing forgiveness again.

8. What criticism could your worst enemy would make of you, that you would secretly agree with?

That I am halfhearted, weak and fundamentally unable to stand on my own two feet, without the generosity of others. That it would be better if I had died, back then, instead of—well. Perhaps sometimes I still agree with that. Not always, anymore.

9. If you were to enter into a romantic relationship, what would you expect from it?

I find it... difficult to imagine myself doing such a thing. If I did, I suppose all I would fundamentally want from another person is honesty and faithfulness, whatever that comes to mean between us. I would hope also for some grace and forbearance, but I cannot expect such things, only wish for them.

10. If you needed advice about something, but the topic was embarrassing or shameful, what would you do?

...ask Hades.

Prognostication

By the time they've both finished their drinks, darkness has well and truly fallen outside. Hekate glances out the window and makes a thoughtful sound, standing and taking both cups back towards the kitchen area.

"Dionysus if you would be so kind as to grab the blanket over the back of the chair in the corner, I'll get the rest of what we need."

It's easy to spot what she's talking about—a thick, woven woolen blanket is folded several times and draped over a squat armchair sandwiched between a bookshelf and an end table with a collection of metal instruments, all of them of measure or divination in some way or another, though that much is probably not obvious to the uninitiated.

He takes up the blue and white fabric and stands by the door while Hekate collects several rolled parchments, a few of the devices from the end table, and a thick book of star charts and similar references from a high shelf. Everything but the parchments, she lets float behind her, meeting his eyes with half a smile and gesturing towards the door with her chin.

The two of them make their way outside, where the air has cooled considerably. It's not uncomfortable, just perceptibly different even from earlier, and the breeze seems to have picked up, setting the chimes to a glassy symphony in response.

Dionysus spreads the blanket on the ground, stepping back a little so Hekate can arrange the other items as she needs to, she thinks. But she leaves everything floating but the rolls of paper and the book, setting these to one side and sitting on one half the blanket, before reclining onto her back with a sigh. There's something about this that brings her a certain kind of peace, taken in small doses, at least.

"I like to just look first," she says, patting the spot next to her. "They're stars, after all."

He takes the spot she's indicating and lays down, making himself comfortable. The grasses underneath them are lush and soft even before the blanket's considered, though of course that is also charmed for it, radiating a bit of extra heat rather than simply trapping it.

"Do you own anything that isn't somehow magic?" he asks, a touch of wryness in it.

"Hmm. I don't think so," she replies, amused in return and tipping her head to the side to glance over at him just as he's doing the same in reverse. She smiles; he has such beautiful eyes, really. Something about them reminds her of something. The truth is, she knows what they remind her of, but those are thoughts she does not allow herself to examine for too long at one time.

Her nearer arm rests close, palm facing towards the sky. It's an invitation, but not one she voices. She has to be delicate about these things. For her own sake as well as for his.

It's with an evident uncertainty that he moves his hand closer. Perhaps he doesn't want to presume—he can be shy at the oddest times, about the oddest things. She can tell he's trying to make it natural, even, like something that could be mutually accepted as an 'accident' if she doesn't want it.

Silly of him. Sometimes it feels like she's never wanted anything more than these little things, each of which feels like exactly what it is meant to be. But there are the dangerous thoughts, again, and she not so able to avoid them as she might like to be.

She pauses a moment, just to make sure, but then closes the remainder of the distance, wrapping her fingers gently around his own. It feels... comfortable. Easy. Right, even. It seems unlikely to her that anyone has made much habit of offering him things like this. It would explain some of the tentativeness, and some of the other little bits and pieces of his life he's alluded to.

She knows how strange it can feel. Getting used to other people showing you affection, of any sort. Hekate resolves to give him all the time he needs.

For a little while, they just watch the sky. It's a different view; from that on Olympus, according to her charts. Dionysus doesn't mention it, maybe because he's not sure, but by comparison there should be some missing constellations, and some stars here that appear differently or not at all there.

It's beautiful, though, she thinks. The mortal world suffers all the darkness of existence, not chased away by divine light, and in this there is a backdrop that makes what light there is stand out all the more. There is of course a metaphor in this, and she isn't even sure if she intends to make it. But there it is nonetheless.

"It's nice, right?" Hekate asks, a subtle wistfulness coloring her tone.

"It is," he replies, and it's plenty, for the moment.

She expels a long, steady breath, then sits up, gesturing for him to remain as he is. It's probably time that they began in earnest. "I've got charts and references here. But really what it comes down to most is feeling. So, what I need you to do is... sort of reach out, almost. Try to project your question towards the sky. It might help if you imagine Fate's a person, but they can only talk via mediated methods, and can only hear when you really *need* them to."

She knows it hardly makes any sense, when put into words, but magic is often like that. Some of its parts are so logical as to be mathematical, while others require feeling and instinct alone. This is certainly the latter, at least when approached in this manner. She'd thought it would be more instinctive, given what she knows of the kind of magic he already does regularly.

"Whenever you're ready, reach out with the question. Then tell me anything you feel or notice, about the sky or about yourself. Don't worry about remembering—I'll make sure I get everything down, and then we can interpret."

He closes his eyes for a moment, and she waits, writing implement poised over parchment, her magical senses focused fully on what Dionysus is doing.

"Where is my father?" His voice comes out a whisper.

For a long moment, there is silence, and she sees his mouth curling down.

"Stay with it," she urges. "Don't give up. There's an answer; sometimes you just have to wait for it."

Still... the minutes ticking by without any perceptible difference in *anything* are likely not encouraging. It can be especially difficult when it's something like this, that feels natural to almost no one, even if they do have the talent for it in there somewhere.

She isn't so sure if her urging makes the difference or not, but he does seem to keep focused, his eyes moving across the sky, lips moving what she thinks must be unconsciously in the same silent query, over and over again.

And then, quite abruptly, she feels the magic *catch*—and Dionysus sits bolt upright with a wide-eyed gasp.

Hekate wants to ask if he is all right, to barge her way into the magical interaction and be sure of it. She knows what it feels like, to touch even for the briefest moment the incomprehensible thing that is out there in the universe. Fate itself, so far beyond them in every possible sense of the word. Knows how it feels like everything else is shattering, even oneself, for just a moment becoming fragments no more tied together than any other two random things in the whole of existence.

But she doesn't, because she knows that it will pass. And hopefully, when it does, he will have at least the beginning of the answer he seeks.

Another sharp intake of breath, and he's back with her, the connection gone. She can't help but look at him with a furrowed brow.

"Are you all right?" It's not quite the right question, really. But she has to ask it, because even so the answer matters.

"N-not exactly. That was... too much, I think." He seems disoriented, still breaths unnaturally short and shallow. She's sure if she pressed her finger to his neck, she'd find his pulse galloping like a frightened horse.

The line between her brows deepens, and she nods slightly. "One moment." With a gesture towards the house, she summons another blanket, this one smaller and softer, and leans over to drape it carefully over his shoulders. It's not enough, somehow, and maybe nothing would be, but still she has to make the attempt.

Kneeling in front of him, she makes sure the blanket is snug, then takes his hand again with a careful, gentle touch. "Take what time you need. It'll be good if you can tell me what you experienced, but don't do that until you're ready." She brushes her thumb across his knuckles and settles, willing to wait as long as it takes for him to feel settled again. More than that, she just... wants to be here. To get him anything he needs. To help.

He nods, and takes his time. She can hear his breathing gradually even out, feel some of the tension in his fingers ease. And then, like he's reaching for something already half-gone, he slowly begins to speak. The sweat and warm iron, the taste of wine and loneliness, the feel of smooth stone beneath him, and the hope that reaching out to something—someone—will help.

When he's done, Hekate purses her lips. "Well, I suppose it's fair to say he's alive, at least," she says. "The first part made it sound like he might be in some peril, but he was certainly alive. I wouldn't take the order to imply anything about chronology. That could be in the future, or well in the past." She doesn't know if that's reassuring to hear. She hopes it is.

"And the other things?" No doubt he has his own guesses, but Hekate is certainly willing to contribute hers.

"Well... the last one makes me think of a posture many humans take when they pray," she says, "Going down onto their knees. Their temples are often made of stone, at least the really important ones. So perhaps he was praying for something."

It's not much, considering how many temples there are and how many humans pray, but she supposes it isn't *nothing*, combined with the other clues.

"Sadly," she continues, folding the parchment in her lap and handing it to him, "this isn't always the clearest method of divination. It's one of the most powerful, though, and one of those that allows the asker to choose the subject matter. You can do that with lotteries or entrails too, but those are weaker forms of the magic."

She smiles, a touch wry. "At least we're not trying to interpret dreams, though. Those are all the worst of all worlds, except when they're incredibly powerful. It's how I got started, though, so perhaps I'm predisposed to despise it." And feel a lot of other ways about it, none of which he makes any better, but she doesn't say that part.

"What were the dreams about?"

Hekate huffs softly, shaking her head. What a vexing question. Still, she should give him something. Wants to, in fact. It's just a matter of how much.

"Well, there's only so many I've been able to figure out. One was about a stranger, someone who would come to me in the Underworld. I could never see his face, but I could feel his hand. It changed, sometimes, which of us reached out for the other, but I always remembered his hand, because it was quite warm, and then all of a sudden it chilled. That frightened me, when I was a girl." Perhaps the least trying of her dreams, because it is the one that has resolved, and for the better.

Dionysus tilts his head, and she shrugs. "It was Hades, of course. The end of the Titanomachy and our meeting. His taking on of the Underworld as his domain. One of the more literal dreams I ever had, as his temperature really did change. So some of them have been significant events in my own life. Others significant events in general. Most often those places where they intersect."

Perhaps one day, I'll be able to talk to you about the dreams with you in them.

He nods, apparently satisfied, and she takes that as a sign that for now, it is enough.

So Hekate expels a breath, beginning to gather up her things. "Well, it didn't go how I expected it to, but sometimes these things are like that." Wiping the reed off with a bit of cloth, she tucks it away into a pocket. "I think, though, that we've had rather enough excitement for one night. Perhaps it is time to return to the Underworld."

"Of course. Thank you for bringing me here, though."

She smiles warmly. "You're absolutely welcome. I hope events haven't put you off too much—I promise it doesn't usually go like that."

"I'm fine, really," you reply.

"Good. I'll take a follow-up look at you tomorrow if you'll permit it. Nothing seems to be awry, but it doesn't hurt to be safe."

She's absolutely going to be safe, when it comes to him. That much, she well knows already, no prognostication required.

Siege

His body is weary. It has been a long day, in the sun. On the wall, eyes squinted to peer into the horizon, where the body of the Achaean army lies. It has been so many long days, doing much the same. At times, it is almost like the tension is forgotten, like it has been there so long, a rope poised on the precipice of snapping, that some almost think it just... false. That perhaps some slack remains in it after all. Like perhaps they will all go home, one day when they've had enough. When their pride has been satisfied and the tenuous bonds of alliance are loosened by the need to return, each to their own affairs.

Kings have states to administrate, after all. How many years can they spend trying to scrape out an answer for one wounded man's pride? How many lives will be lost, have already been lost, because a youth and a woman fell in love, at an inopportune time and place, and refuse to give each other up to soothe stung egos? He was a young man once, impossibly in love with an impossible woman, and he knows what it is to cling to that love with all his might. To feel that it must be the most important thing in all the world.

Or, of course, one could see them as every bit as selfish and callow as the jilted. Letting others die because they will not be parted. It is certainly something only a Prince and a Queen could do. And only such personages would bring armies to the very feet of their city. He knows, too, what it is to be a soldier, pressed into someone else's war, in the name of people more important than himself, who think little of what his life is worth.

Who is to blame, or why, is one of those things that he used to ponder a great deal.

He, too, has been taken away from a home. A king, of sorts, though that title will always sit ill with him. He is king of so little. There is no grand palatial estate, no fortress that goes with such a title. But there is a temple, and a tiny, insignificant, unprotected island he must shield with his own body. And his spear, and his bow, and everything he has.

If not for his presence here, he knows, that tiny island with no means of defense would simply be overrun, annexed into a state with a real King, if for no other reason than to prove a point.

Everyone has a point to prove, and they're all unfathomably stubborn about it.

Perhaps, for those in the right, that is not such a bad thing. And yet, it remains difficult, at least for him, to ascertain where the *right* is. The *wrong*, on the other hand, is obvious and everywhere. Perhaps that is why it's all he can see. Why he's had to stop himself from thinking in circles trying to blame. When it becomes a matter of *more* and *less* blame, something has already gone wrong.

He prays, every night and sometimes during the day, to an impossible woman. Not for himself; this isn't really her area, and he knows that if she could have helped him, she would have already. Besides. He desires no solution that is only a solution for him. The problem, the pain, is bigger than that. But he clasps his roughened hands together, no longer able to feel the calluses from plowing but only from weaponry, and prays for those he has left behind.

And it keeps him going. He feels, always, in the back of his mind, that she is listening. That she hears.

It is enough.

He leans his head back against the wall, stretching his feet out to catch the last amber light of sunset through the window. He feels the warmth, and remembers music. A joyous wedding, the fading light, the smell of fresh furrows in the earth. And her eyes—always her eyes, deep and green and perfect. How immaculate her appearance had been. The strange joy he'd taken in seeing her disheveled instead, laughter in her eyes and a smile on her lips.

Do you know, I wonder, that after all this time I love you?

There is no answer, nothing direct. But still, he feels that he is heard, and it's enough.

“General.” The voice that reaches his ears is a young one. Too young, honestly, to be in the thick of all this. But familiar. “The King requests your presence. There's to be a war meeting.”

Of course there is. There's always a war meeting.

Iasion expels a quiet breath, his tired body protesting it as he stands, so soon after he'd thought to rest. “I'll be along,” he says, allowing none of it to filter into his tone.

Maybe, someday, he'll be able to rest again. But not yet.

Hypotheticals – Alekto

1. *You're minding your own business when the person you least want to see walks into the room. Who are they, and how do you react?*

It is Apollo. To my own shame, it is likely that I simply attempt to leave—as quickly as possible. There is no vengeance that would make enduring his presence worth the strife.

2. *How would you react if you witnessed a victimless crime?*

That depends very much on what the crime is. Fewer are ‘victimless’ than people tend to think. I would most likely inform the relevant authority, if I believed it to be a just one. Then, if it is my charge to punish, I punish. If it is not, then I don't. Deciding what is worth which is the job of judges and juries, and I do not take those responsibilities for myself.

3. *What would you do if someone brought up your biggest insecurity in front of a crowd of strangers?*

Leave. And avoid that person—or telling them anything of importance—for the rest of our lives. When someone shows you who they are, believe them.

4. *How would you respond to an apology from somebody you still can't forgive?*

Depending on the severity of the transgression, I would try to maintain civility. But I am... not terribly skilled at that, and I believe that the things I ‘cannot forgive’ are generally quite severe. So probably not as well as I would like, is the answer.

5. *How would you feel after a one-night stand?*

I... cannot imagine myself doing such a thing. Not because it is immoral, or anything so foolish. Just because it... isn't in my nature, I suppose. The trust required is not compatible with being strangers, for me, and I would not want to disrupt an otherwise-functional relationship of some other sort with such intimacy.

6. *How would your best friend describe you?*

I suppose they would say I am too serious, and need to relax more often. I tolerate this sort of opinion in them because they have no actual interest in changing me, and their presence itself tends to... alleviate some of the worst of these tendencies in me.

7. *Are you more likely to ask for permission or forgiveness?*

Permission. As should everyone be.

8. *What criticism could your worst enemy make of you, that you would secretly agree with?*

That I allow the past to keep a stranglehold on me, and am overly sensitive for someone who needs to do the job I do. That I am unworthy of the good things in my life, and do not appreciate them enough because I am always looking backwards.

9. *If you were to enter into a romantic relationship, what would you expect from it?*

I don't know if... if I can see myself doing that. I suppose if by two successive miracles, I could find it in myself to try again and someone else could tolerate me in such a capacity, I would want... openness. Trust. To know that I am loved, *for* who I am and not in spite of it.

10. *If you needed advice about something, but the topic was embarrassing or shameful, what would you do?*

Broach the subject with Hades. If there is anyone who will both know what to do and not judge me for the topic, it is him, and those are the essential criteria.

Stitched Together

The day of their scheduled outing with Dionysus, Pyri is up perhaps too early, fumbling around in their small wardrobe trunk for... who knows what, honestly. It's not like they own a bunch of different clothes. It's basically just short tunics in a couple different colors and sandals and a few pieces of jewelry they made themselves.

And any of that would make perfect sense to wear, so why are they even ruffled about it?

Well, whatever. They're going to spend today with Dionysus, and he's their friend, and that's what matters. It's going to be fun—or at least Pyri hopes so. He's very clever, sometimes they think maybe *too* clever to be hanging around them of all people, but he'd said he'd come when they'd asked so... here's hoping they picked something he'd enjoy.

Admittedly, packing the picnic lunch is a bit laborious, once they've settled on their clothes. Pyri's never been all that handy in a kitchen, but this is pretty simple stuff at least. They do end up getting food all over their clothes and having to remember the cleaning knack to fix that, but it could have been worse.

By the time they arrive at the Keep's entrance, it's only two minutes early. Leaning the basket against a thin hip, Pyri heaves a sigh of relief. They made it. Maybe they won't come across as a complete walking disaster. They know everyone else is fine with it, maybe even likes them that way, but they just don't want to inflict the full experience on *him*, exactly.

Just about the same time they arrive, they hear treads they recognize as his, and turn around too quickly.

"Dionysus! Hey." Their lips curl into a smile. "You let your hair out. It looks really good like that."

They aren't really sure why they feel the need to say that, but it's true, so maybe it's okay to say it just because of that. As it sometimes does, the fact that they can't keep hold of their tongue makes their neck a little too warm.

At least he doesn't seem offended. Dionysus smiles, white teeth bright against deep brown skin. "You're not looking too shabby yourself." There's a... playful? The tone of the rejoinder sounds a little playful, and they aren't sure how seriously to take it.

They look down at themselves, not really sure how to gauge. Pyri has just always been Pyri, and though they have the sense of... dissatisfaction with it, sometimes, they only understand where part of it comes from. "Huh. I think I just look the same as normal, though? Unless you mean I just always look not-shabby. That'd be nice of you." They grin.

He'd say something nice like that, of course, and it resolves the matter as far as they're concerned.

"Anyway." They set their free hand on their hip. "Let's get going, yeah? Shouldn't be too much of a trip; we can use one of the Stitches to get there."

There's a twinkle in Dionysus's bright golden eyes that they don't really know how to interpret, but that's fine. He'll say something if he has something to say. For now, their job is to guide him where they're going, since it's not the most straightforward trip there's ever been.

He falls into step beside them obligingly, and they trek out to the bank of the Styx to follow that trajectory for a while.

Pyri's always felt the Styx as spiky. It doesn't really make any sense. But their river feels somehow both clear and hot, even though the flames are heatless. Kokytos feels deep and quiet, and Lethe feels heavy and empty at the same time. Well, not the people, of course. There's a couple similarities, maybe, but they don't feel exactly the same.

But it's not something they spend all that much time thinking about, really. They just feel what they feel, and spend their walk humming an old song of Hermes's as they go.

Dionysus is quiet, mostly observing his surroundings, which makes sense because they don't think he's ever taken this route before.

The familiar terrain passes by easily, and then they come to a stop, right where Hekate taught them. The ground is covered in slightly-limp rushes and other greyed-out grasses, not so unusual here. Though... Pyri likes to imagine that everything brightens up a little bit when Dionysus is there. Maybe it actually does; they haven't shared this observation with anyone else to check.

"You might not know this," they explain, turning to look back over their shoulder at him with a smile that pulls at their scars. "But the Isles are kind of... separate, from the rest of the Underworld. It's almost like trying to get to the mortal world or something. You gotta physically move, but also do some magic. It's easiest at a Stitch."

"Separate how? I thought it was part of the Underworld?" Dionysus lifts a brow, expression quizzical.

"Mhm." Pyri gives a bit of a nod, turning around in a full circle with their index finger pointed at the ground. A line of bright orange light encircles them, etched into the dirt. "It is, sorta. But it's like... well, you can have a whole blanket that's just a continuous piece of cloth, but you can also have a whole blanket that's more than one piece of fabric sewn together, right? It's still 'the blanket,' but now there's also separate pieces in some sense. This is kinda like that."

They tilt their head to the side, studying his face for any sign that they're making sense. "And you can get from one piece to another by following the Stitches. Maybe the metaphor kind of gets worse there, but it's close enough I think."

The air around them crackles slightly with magic, and the temperature spikes for a moment, before the light flares and fades, taking the extra heat with it. Most of their magic runs hot too, unsurprisingly. Especially the obvious stuff, like the fireballs. Obviously.

But instead of any of that this time, the waters of the Styx tremble, ripples appearing on the surface seemingly with no provocation, and then it splits, right in front of Pyri, and recedes in both directions, such that a narrow path forms on the riverbed, walls of dark water on either side.

"And here's our Stitch! Now we just walk across and it's like an entrance to the mortal realm, basically. As soon as we're through, there's the Isles, you know?"

They're rather pleased with how well the magic went, actually. Sometimes they wonder if they're making any progress at all on that front, and then something like this will happen, much more naturally than it used to, and they'll feel better about it. In this case, they feel the urge to share that, somehow.

"Pretty neat, right?"

Dionysus nods slightly, and that's all it takes. Pyri beams, already leaping into the next part of the explanation. It feels good, to have something to say that's new and interesting to him, and more importantly, they want to tell him about their home. Maybe it'll start to feel more like his if they do.

"Anyway, this part's pretty unnerving sometimes. There's a bit in the middle where the actual change happens, and it can be kinda dizzy the first couple of times."

They offer their hand towards him, still a little warm in the face from the magic. Does this spell normally make skin feel prickly? "If you want to hold on, that's fine by me. We can walk it together. Or you can hold the back of my shirt, or we can hold an end of the basket each. Up to you."

Dionysus doesn't hesitate, taking their hand. "Thanks, Pyri, I appreciate this."

They don't know what their face is doing, but the tingling is in their hand now. His has a few calluses, maybe from weapon work, if it's anything like the reason theirs is that way. It feels good, that they're the same in this small way. "Not even a little bit of a problem, Dionysus. It shouldn't be anything too weird, but if anything feels off, just give me a squeeze and we'll work it out, okay?"

He nods; probably he's not too worried about it, but they could understand not being too sure about unfamiliar magic. Especially if *they're* the one casting. They aren't exactly Hekate.

Travel arrangements sorted out, they make their way down into the riverbed. The ground is soft, but not completely sodden beneath their shoes. That's because they pulled all the excess water away, of course. It's not totally safe to touch, especially for anyone who isn't Chthonic.

Conscious of the fact that they have to manage travel for the both of them across the Stitch, Pyri looks straight ahead, focusing on nothing but the path in front of them, which is mundane and magical at the same time, and keeping their bubble of influence steadily wrapped around Dionysus as well as themselves, as they've been taught.

It's not too hard, and when they reach the exact connecting point, they exhale softly. "Okay, here we go," they say, darting a glance at Dionysus. "Watch your step here."

They take the next one in sync, and literally, the world around them transforms, from terrain to atmosphere. The undertones are golden, now, and the ambient light level increases enough that their eyes need a moment to adjust.

They climb out of the riverbed, and Dionysus lets go of the connection with Pyri. At first their eyes flick to his face, unsure if maybe that had been unpleasant after all, but if they're interpreting his expression properly, it's more like he's just surprised by the sudden change.

"Different, right?" There's a tinge of amusement in their voice, but they're more than happy to just let him take in the new environs.

Motes of golden light dapple the air around them, shedding an amber tinge onto the relatively-robustly green grasses beneath their feet. The sense of life is probably stronger here, though they wouldn't know too much about that. It's quiet on the senses, in a way, mellow somehow.

And yet, Pyri's always felt there's something a little weird about it, something that makes them a disinclined to spend more than an afternoon here at a time. That's the thing, though; some of the other have said it's the closest to Olympus the Underworld gets, and no part of them is Olympian, so it makes sense that they'd be a bit uncomfortable in it. But if that's the right logic, he wouldn't be.

A small city looms on in the distance, its buildings made of pale stone like most in the Underworld, but tinged with that same unusual warmth. A warmth that permeates the actual ambient temperature as well. There is no chill here, just a comfortable tepidness.

"Very different," he says after a moment.

"It's because there's another god in charge here," they reply with a nod, though their nose wrinkles a bit. "Sort of." It's kind of hard to understand even for them, and they've had it explained before.

"But isn't this still part of the Underworld?" He arches an eyebrow just slightly in their direction, again. They have to hide a bit of a smile at the face he makes when he's thinking hard about something. Probably if they give the explanation he'll understand it much better than they do.

Pyri shrugs. "Well, yeah, but. He's basically a Minister? I don't know. I only met him once and he didn't seem to like me much. Point is, Hades is still the king, but the other guy has influence here, too. Kronos, is his name."

The others speak of him with something between neutrality and outright distaste, so they've never felt much inclination to learn too much more, either.

They set off towards the settlement, and as the pair of them draw closer to it, they can make out the buildings better. The architecture is very different from the rest of the Underworld, more 'grandiose,' is the word Charon had used for it. They'd also said Olympus was kind of like it, but not exactly.

"Are we going in there?" Dionysus asks, examining the view with interest.

Pyri shakes their head. "No. I'd ask if you wanted to, but we don't actually have permission for that. I just asked Hades if we could visit the Isles. If you want to go into the city you have to ask Kronos or he doesn't like it, and I think that's a pain for Boss to deal with, so I didn't. Sorry." It might have made sense to ask for that too, actually; they hadn't thought of the possibilities in any but the most general terms.

At least he doesn't seem to mind.

Instead, the two of them settle on a hill overlooking it, and Pyri spreads a woven blanket on the ground, taking one spot and giving Dionysus plenty of space to choose from for your own as they unpack the contents of the basket.

"Hope you're hungry, because even I can't eat this much stuff by myself."

"Definitely." The words come with a sense of enthusiasm, and he readily reaches for the items they take out and assembles himself a meal from them.

"Excellent," Pyri says, a bright smile returning to their face. "A man after my own heart. That's how that phrase goes, right?" The phrase is a little stilted, because it's unfamiliar, but they're sure they've read it somewhere, and he'd know.

"I'm pretty sure, yes," he replies easily, popping an olive into his mouth.

"Good. I stink at idioms. Not totally sure why. I just don't always get them, I guess."

They spend a bit more time getting their lunches assembled, and Pyri crosses their legs beneath them, chewing over a bite of the sandwich they've constructed before blinking down at the field and catching sight of something interesting.

"Hey, look." They gesture down the hill with their chin, where a group of spirits, maybe about a dozen, laden down with supplies, are setting something up in the field below them. It's not obvious what it is, at first, but after a few minutes it's clear that at least some of the items are targets.

When they seem to be done, they split into a few different groups, some of them beginning a jog, others warming up with various stretches before grabbing bows or javelins.

Pyri's familiar with this exercise: they're here for a little friendly competition.

Dionysus seems focused on the archers for a moment, and Pyri follows his eyes curiously. At the moment, they seem to be mostly warming up with practice shots, aimed at targets quite a significant distance away. This bunch is all quite good, but Hippolyta is the best, hands down. Hand down? They don't recall which. Either way she's going to beat everyone else by a mile, probably.

And that's obvious from the way she doesn't miss a single bullseye in the first match. The congratulations from the other participants seem respectful, mostly nods or polite bows, that sort of thing, and she accepts them with grace.

"I love this kind of stuff," Pyri admits, a broad grin on their face. "I remember I always used to watch sports and so on, when I was mortal. Or at least I feel like I did. It feels like... nostalgic now, you know?" They tear off a hunk of bread, chewing it over with a pleased hum.

"Wait, what?" Dionysus's obvious confusion sets them back a moment, before they realize they might have accidentally omitted important context for the remark.

"Hm?" Pyri looks back up at him, swallowing their food. "Did I not mention I used to be mortal? I died, drank from the Lethe like everyone else, so I don't remember it. But then Boss offered me the job of River of Fire. So I took it. Apparently he actually asked me twice—before and after the forgetting thing, to make sure I definitely wanted it."

They huff softly. "So here I am."

"So you used to be a human?" The confusion remains, lightly, in his tone, and Pyri doesn't blame him for that. They're kind of a weird case.

"Mhm." They nod, then shrug. "I guess in a way I kind of still am? I don't know. The difference between a human and a god isn't all that clear to me, except like... the powers, obviously. I don't think I feel that different?"

The categories have never troubled them too much, really. But it does feel nice to share, and have someone be curious about it. Still... they're not here to talk about themselves. And not all of the thoughts are all that nice. So maybe a topic change is in order.

"Anyway!" Pyri stuffs the rest of the bread in their hand into their mouth, chewing it over too fast before swallowing. Sure enough, they wince as it goes down, then cough lightly. That was silly. "Right, uh. You wanna go join for a while?"

"Which one?" Dionysus sounds intrigued, and that makes them feel like they've done the right thing, bringing him here. They'd planned on field games, but it's a nice stroke of luck that the others are here.

"Whichever one you want, obviously," they reply brightly. "I know most of them. No one will mind a couple extra competitors."

They tilt their head at him expectantly.

"Sure, let's throw some things." He offers a slight smile, one that makes them feel... weirdly happy, and they jump up, excited for more of whatever that is.

"Awesome; I can't wait. Let's go!"

Dossier - Hestia

Name: Hestia

Nicknames: Once upon a time, her father called her his 'little ember.' She remembers this fondly.

Age: Eons

Species: Deity

Lifespan: Immortal

Date of Birth: November 21

Profession: Goddess of the Hearth

Residence: Olympus

Hair Color: Dark Brown

Hair Length: Shoulderblades, when loose.

Hair Texture: Tight natural coils

Eye Color: Amber-gold

Height: 5'6" (168 cm)

Build: Fat/Thickset

Skin Tone: Light-medium brown, warm undertones

Distinguishing Features: Long eyelashes, slightly-callused fingertips, often stained with paint, ink, or soot.

Weapons: Herself

Magic: Mostly practical magic for living, though as a goddess and a major one, Hestia is not to be underestimated from a combative standpoint, either. Mostly for those purposes, she uses fire and heat.

Skills: Hundreds upon hundreds, all in various stages of development.

Talents: She isn't particularly 'naturally' talented at anything, really.

Hobbies: Changes over time, but in general: handicrafts, long walks, and visiting the mortal realm, especially to see its animals.

Friends: Nearly everyone she meets, to some degree or another. In particular, though, she has mentored Hephaestus and Aphrodite. Artemis occasionally drops by to see her, though doesn't like attention called to this fact, and Athena occasionally consults Hestia when something is troubling her.

Sexual Orientation: Aromantic Asexual

Partner/s: None

Other Family: Demeter (Sister), the PC (nibling)

Habits: Moving her hands, tidying any space she happens to be in.

Goals: Learning new things, maintaining the peace between her various acquaintances, being a good mentor to her human worshipers and deific mentees alike.

Fears: The past repeating itself, war among the gods, the pain and sadness of people she loves.

Hypotheticals – Hermes

1. *You're minding your own business when the person you least want to see walks into the room. Who are they, and how do you react?*

Maybe it just depends on the day. But most days, I probably just say 'hey, Dad,' and move on, you know?

2. *How would you react if you witnessed a victimless crime?*

So you mean like... witnessed as in, 'saw but did not commit'? That'd be novel! I guess my response would depend on how good it was. I can definitely appreciate a top-notch pickpocket job, for example, but I'd probably be tempted to correct a rookie. Wait... is theft a victimless crime? Do I have victims?

3. *What would you do if someone brought up your biggest insecurity in front of a crowd of strangers?*

Laugh it off, and arrange for something unfortunate to befall them in the near future. Not attributable to me, of course.

4. *How would you respond to an apology from somebody you still can't forgive?*

Uhhh, huh. I don't think I've ever really considered this. The only people I can't forgive are the kind who'd never apologize anyway, I think. So maybe if they did, I'd be able to forgive them after all? I don't really like holding grudges. I just get even and call it good, you know?

5. *How would you feel after a one-night stand?*

'Would'? I think you mean 'do.' And it kinda depends on how good it was, obviously. I mean... sometimes there's this kind of icky feeling where I'm like 'Hermes, what are we doing with my life?' but that's more like—actually never mind. Don't write that last part.

6. *How would your best friend describe you?*

What have you got to ask Seph for? I'm exactly what you think I am! Easier to read than a scroll that's mostly pictures!

7. *Are you more likely to ask for permission or forgiveness?*

Forgiveness, obviously. But honestly I don't ask for either one very often.

8. *What criticism could your worst enemy would make of you, that you would secretly agree with?*

Uhhh, hm. Are we talking about the same person as in the first question, or just a hypothetical worst enemy who hates my guts? Eh, I'll go with the second. And the answer is: I'm a flighty little bastard with serious trust and commitment issues who can't decide where he belongs, even though the answer is plain as day. How's that? I can be honest!

9. *If you were to enter into a romantic relationship, what would you expect from it?*

Uhhh... slow down there. You lost me at 'romantic.' I don't know anything about that.

10. *If you needed advice about something, but the topic was embarrassing or shameful, what would you do?*

His Deathliness. I guarantee you everyone but him will say exactly the same thing. He just has that energy, you know? Like he's not going to judge you for anything short of kicking kittens or something. Even then he'll be more decent about it than a kitten-kicker deserves. This metaphor is getting away from me, but you get it, right?

Knowing Better

Hermes's playing grows a little louder, and if Hades didn't know better, he would suppose this was his nephew's way of nudging him along to the obvious. Though, come to think of it, perhaps he *doesn't* know better. That would, after all, be a quintessentially *Hermes* thing to do.

He cocks his head to listen, a contented smile passing vaguely, momentarily, over his features. It seems to have caught Persephone's attention as well. The expression she wears suggests she might be trying to place it.

He's never been all that good at reading those sorts of things, but she does have the kind of face that makes each of them so very vivid.

"One of Hermes's compositions," he notes, feeling a flicker of enjoyment when the look shifts to another, like comprehension dawning. It's nice to be correct, of course, but more than that he just likes the fact that she looks content, a tiny conundrum resolved.

Perhaps... it wouldn't be so terrible to take a step along with the nudge.

So he turns, smoothly bowing at the waist and extending a hand in her direction as he rises. Ingrained body language; courtesy extended to someone who deserves all of it but has received so much less than that. "Stop me if this is entirely unsuitable an idea, but might you care to dance, Persephone?"

He's not oblivious in *all* senses, and does know that she doesn't touch people often. That there's a reserve to her that she finds it hard to break through. He doesn't know if she'd say something if she were uncomfortable, and so the only reason he can bring himself to ask is because he thinks, now, he'd be able to see it in the tilt of her lips and the angle of her brow.

And still, he does want to offer. Though which one of them is being granted a *chance* by that offer is... ambiguous. A chance for her to choose, or a chance for him to—

"I..." He watches her throat work as she swallows, the cartilage there dipping and returning to place in a way that appears nervous. He almost regrets asking, until she finishes. "I'd like that. To dance, I mean."

He doesn't know what her face is doing this time, but he's at least reasonably sure he's not reading revulsion there. And he can and should take her at her word.

She reaches out, accepting his hand, and Hades draws her towards him with as much gentleness as he knows. There's no hesitance to it; these motions are not quite his oldest instincts, but they are well-practiced, and he hopes that perhaps in being so he can impart some of his comfort with the situation to her.

Though... is it really *comfortable* he wants her to be?

"Would you?" he murmurs, the tone of it not quite what he'd intended. It's raspier, rumbling deeper in his chest. Hopefully not too much. He opens the hand clasped around hers, curling his fingers to brush their tips down her palm. She's warm. Warm with life, and so very beautiful. A traitorous thought, but not one he refuses to let himself have, this time.

Such things are a torment, but a sweet one.

Though perhaps not the sort of thing he should be doing, with someone not quite as assured in her choices as she ought to be. He does not wish to impose anything upon her.

His hands find the proper places for dancing. Persephone is a bit slower to come to it, like she's struggling to remember exactly how it goes, but he doesn't say anything about it, letting her remember and touch him on her own terms. Even if, perhaps, it feels like the warmth that settles at his shoulder burns, just a little. Remonstrance, perhaps, for the direction of his thoughts.

He'll accept that.

Once she's settled, he dips his chin to her gently, and guides her lightly into the flow of the music, his motions steady and sure. He much prefers the lead, and so for now that's what he'll do, considering there are no objections on Persephone's part.

If the music had been slow, he might have hesitated to ask, if for no other reason than it might have been too easy to enjoy this proximity too much, or in the wrong way, or something like that.

But as it is, the dance is whirling, energetic, the sort of thing that matches Hermes's music in tone and tempo. Something he hasn't done in a while, truthfully, but something he learned so thoroughly he'd never forget. Even now, he can almost hear the echoes of his mother's laughter, free and clear as he'd spin her a little too enthusiastically when the capricious mood took them during a lesson.

But it's a thought easily chased away by the present, the dull twinge in his heart as much a part of him as his magic or his arm or anything else.

Persephone is much shorter than himself, but then so are many people, including a few of those he's done this with, on various occasions, and the adjustments are automatic. Though, he's never really noticed before the sort of... satisfaction he feels, an odd little spark of it that seems, though not *dependent* on her height next to his own, but exacerbated by it.

If he didn't know better, he'd say he liked how small she was in his arms. And really, maybe he doesn't know better about this, either.

It quickly becomes clear that Persephone has done this kind of dance before, but that perhaps it isn't her favorite activity, or else she hasn't had opportunity to practice in a while. The placement of her feet is a little unsure, and she seems to be thinking about the steps as they go, rather than recalling them in the instinctive way that comes with much repetition.

But that's all right. The foundation is there, and Hades is sure that, if he gives her the opportunity, she'll find a way to fall into a more natural version of the dance. The complexity of his moves gradually increases, until the two of them are moving fast enough that there's little choice *but* to rely on how it feels, on the way the music sounds. She misses a step here and there, but his lead is confident—more than many things about him.

He doesn't know how to describe how it feels. Perhaps he'd say it's something out of a dream, except he can't remember the last time any of them were this... sweet. This unironically lovely. It almost makes him wary, in turn, that the moment cannot last, that something must go wrong, and *yet*.

She laughs, and the part of him that habitually doubts is silenced.

The sound comes out free, unrestrained, and perhaps even slightly—for a moment, concern flickers over his face, but it's banished a moment later. She seems fine. Perhaps even better than fine, and it makes him feel...

He lifts her on the next pass, large hands shifting to wrap around her waist, and her laughter almost becomes a surprised yelp before dissolving into more of the same. There's something about the sound that makes him feel freer as well. Like maybe it really is all right just to exist in this moment, and not worry so much about the next.

But then he recognizes the swelling end of the song at around the same time Persephone does, and the both of them manage one last bit of coordination to come to a stop at the very same time, pulled in together as the type of dance calls for.

She's so close. He can feel her breath on his chest, through the fabric there, until her head tilts up to look him in the eyes. He has no idea what expression he's making, but somehow it feels like it can't be anything other than wonder, and perhaps an amount of... *esteem* he should not let slip.

"That was fun." Her words almost startle him, but Hades maintains his composure, clearing his throat softly.

"It was," he murmurs, reluctantly releasing his grip on her so she can move to a safer distance. Safer for his heart, anyway.

"I—"

There's a thought formulating, something she must mean to say, but she doesn't even get all the way through deciding what it is before the ground lurches beneath them.

Clicking his tongue, Hades catches her by the arm as she pitches forward, the moment broken in favor of concern, and the abrupt realization that the situation has changed. The dream is over, as it were, and reality intrudes once more.

The painstakingly-tiled floor beneath their feet buckles, stones splitting as the tremors grow more insistent. With the faint feeling of irritation, Hades draws upon his magic and commands the shaking to cease. His realm obeys, and the courtyard is still once more.

He releases Persephone's arm, all trace of any levity completely gone, a darkened expression settled over his features. He looks her over, ensuring she's uninjured, then expels a breath.

Perhaps he should not have allowed himself the respite, as its end feels so much harsher than he expected.

"Come," he says, letting it go and moving his thoughts to the immediate future. The others will need him, and he them, that they all might keep the realm, and each other, safe.

Atropos's Mirror

Hello, everyone, and welcome to this month's edition of the Moirae's Mirror. I promised an update on the State of the Game™, and so here we are.

As you're aware by now, my life has recently turned upside down. I've moved to Australia, and quickly found that my housing situation was not what I expected it to be. The new situation, while more stable, comes along with responsibility to find a new conventional job, as well as a bunch of other government paperwork, like getting myself on Medicare so some health issues I've had for a while can finally get some treatment. It's a lot to deal with.

This doesn't have a lot of relevance for the game; I'll still work on it every day as I have been, and hopefully occasionally manage an extra-productive month once in a while. But those of you who have been at this tier for a while know that I have been planning for some time to port FoA to Twine. I've managed the prologue and about half of the first chapter, and I've reached the conclusion that it's just a little too much work. (Well, a lot too much, honestly.)

So I'll be keeping the project in ChoiceScript after all, and releasing it with Hosted Games. When I get to the sequel, that will be developed and released the same way.

This means, though, that there's going to be some pretty systematic changes I need to make to the current version of the game, changes I had begun implementing in the Twine version but hadn't changed in CS, since I thought that would be redundant. Among those changes are the personality variables, which have been changed, and the stats screen, which will now be rather different-looking as well.

I'm sad to lose the customizability of Twine, but I'm excited to free myself of the burden of moving six more very large chapters over to another system, reformatting and editing as I go. It feels like a weight off my shoulders just writing that already. This does mean that FoA's 'edit stage' will be considerably longer than I'd thought at first, but on the other hand, it will ultimately be shorter than it would take to me to move everything to Twine and edit, so overall I think this means the game will be to you sooner.

I think it will also allow me to deliver a better game, just in terms of writing. If I'm not caught up in UI design and trying to make everything accessible (which is very important to me), it's really just the writing that I have to worry about, and right now that seems like the best option for me.

So that's the future of FoA in a nutshell. I do apologize if I've disappointed anyone who was really looking forward to the Twine version of the game, but I think this is what is needed to get it done and out there in the world.

Thanks so much for sticking with me this far; ultimately, I'm excited for the future and looking forward to the steps that come next!

Dust

The both of them start forward, wandering the environment for a bit while Dionysus takes it all in. The weather is pleasant, Hades thinks, only a few puffy clouds high in the sky, irregularly shaped and slowly drifting on the same breeze that bends and whispers through the grasses. He has always liked this place, and it relieves him a little that it is as lovely on this day as it has ever been for him alone.

He stops at the crest of a hill, exhaling something that sounds to his own ears like a contented sigh. Odd, really; he's not a creature known for contentment. Below them, the ground is an ocean of blue-purple blooms, their hearts just a few shades darker than their delicately-layered petals. Perhaps this has something to do with it, though on the other hand he feels a small spike of nervousness here, too.

"Mortals call them crown anemones," Hades explains, his tone slightly cautious in spite of his best efforts to sound neutral. "You may already know that, all things considered, but they grow only in a very small area in the mortal realm, so I thought... there might be a chance you hadn't seen any before."

It's a foolish thought, isn't it? That there might be something in this realm that Dionysus of all people doesn't know of. Especially when he seems so much *of* such things. Of life, in a different way than his mother. A less-regimented way, the way of things that are alive and beautiful by their own merits alone, and not due to the art of cultivation. The way of wildflowers.

"This is really sweet of you, Hades. Thank you so much." And yet the warmth in his voice cannot be mistaken, not even by the lord of the dead, who looks always for the explanation that least vindicates himself. The joy his companion has in something so small is at once what he hoped for and entirely humbling.

Hades clears his throat softly, looking temporarily down at his feet. "You're welcome, of course." His tone is as calm as it usually is, he hopes. The embarrassment at his own relief well-hidden.

Whatever the reason, Dionysus smiles a little, and that feels like all the thanks he *really* needs, anyway.

They begin to descend the hill into the field, surrounded by the light scent of the blooms.

"I admit, I didn't have an especially detailed plan for what we might do once we got here," Hades adds, a touch ruefully. He picks his way among the flowers with care, attempting not to crush any, or worse, linger too long in any one spot. "I thought perhaps you might like to decide, so please. I am at your disposal, if there's anything you'd like to do."

"It might be a little childish," Dionysus replies, a touch of what sounds like sheepishness in his tone, "but I want to braid flower crowns."

Flower crowns? He's vaguely familiar with the concept, of course, but it isn't something he would have thought of off the top of his head, either. Not that that matters. It sounds like a pleasant-enough activity, if not one he will be able to participate in himself.

"I don't think that's childish," he says, with a shake of his head. "Or at least, even if it is, I don't know why that would be a bad thing. I have been discovering lately that children often have a much better sense of

things than I do." He lifts his shoulders in a slightly-wry shrug. Makaria has been a most apt teacher in this respect, to be sure. "Perhaps we should emulate them more often."

He waits patiently while Dionysus chooses an appropriate spot—a thick patch of the crown anemones. Seating himself among the flowers, he releases a long, soft breath, visibly relaxing. Hades supposes it must be quite pleasing, to be once again in the middle of his 'element,' so to speak. Surely the Underworld cannot provide this same sort of comfort. It's a bittersweet thought, but he tries to focus only on the sweetness.

So he smiles a little, but doesn't sit. In fact, he tries to pick his most likely path forward, realizing now that some explanation might be necessary here, loath as he is to dwell on it.

"I... may need to keep moving," he begins, a little awkwardly. "If I remain in one place too long, I will, ah, kill them. The flowers, and such."

He flicks his eyes to Dionysus's, just for a second, and drops them away again.

"Isn't there any way I can help with that?" The offer is made with a tinge of what seems like melancholy, and that almost makes him flinch, but at the same time, there is such a kindness to it that he can't help but try to think of something.

So he considers it for a moment, mouth turned down in a thoughtful frown. Then he cocks his head, a stray thought leading him to try and more precisely gauge the level of Dionysus's power. Actually... he might be?

"Perhaps you are strong enough, now," he says softly. "At least if I don't touch anything directly. If you try to focus on expanding your sphere of influence a bit, I will make mine as small and weak as I can. I think that should keep them safe for a little while." It's a bit of a risk, of course, but if it isn't working, he'll know soon enough, and can return to walking accordingly. Still... it would be much nicer to be able to sit beside him than to have to orbit at a distance.

He feels the young god's power shift and expand, and in response, he contains his own as much as possible. It is considerable effort, but it will have been worth the faint strain if it works.

Carefully, Hades eases down across from Dionysus, unclasping the outer layer of his clothing so he can fold it into a neat square and lay it down, one more small barrier between himself and direct contact with the grass. It leaves both arms bare to the shoulder, the grey of the lower tunic only a few contrasting shades darker than his skin, but he's not concerned with the likes of sun exposure.

It's not quite the full experience of being *among* the plants, he supposes, but it's closer than he's been recent memory.

He makes an effort not to look quite so tense as he's sure he does, but his grip on his power remains as iron as he can make it. "I've—thank you. I've not been able to do this for... a very long time."

"Of course, I'm happy to help." Dionysus offers a smile in return. Like it really is that easy.

And perhaps it isn't so difficult, to do this part of it, but the gesture is so much more than just a little magic. Perhaps it would be impossible to really explain the significance. Perhaps it can only be felt. But he can at least say that much, can't he?

"You are unaccountably kind," Hades murmurs, his expression soft. "I don't know if I can express to you how much this means. To be able to linger here, without fear of destroying what it is I so admire." He shakes his head.

"But I am being too maudlin." There's a slight pause, first as he tries to decide what to say to move the topic *away* from his dramatic nonsense, and then extended because he forgets to think about it, too caught up watching Dionysus's process.

He observes with obvious curiosity as the other god begins the task of... looking through the flowers, it seems. It's a strange and delicate sort of thing, the way he runs his fingers over their petals, turning them this way and that, measuring out lengths of stem and doing it all with a certain fine surety that makes Hades think it must be something quite practiced. Of course, he could simply assume that, or he could ask it.

"Is this something you do often?" he inquires, leaning forward somewhat so his forearms are draped over his knees. He inspects the flowers, but makes no move to touch them. There's a temptation to, considering the way Dionysus does it, like some sort of secret is imparted just in the contact. But it would work very differently if he were to try and emulate this, he's certain.

"I used to do it more often as a child," his companion replies, "so it has a nostalgic feeling."

"Ah." That makes sense, of course. Hades's fingers tap out a rhythm on his leg. "Yes, I have things like that as well. It feels sometimes as if I almost must ration them, lest the effect become less potent with each iteration." His expression is a touch wry. "Not to suggest you need do the same; I have a lot more time between to be concerned about."

As he speaks, Dionysus begins to weave the flowers together. The pattern seems a familiar one, the only evidence that any time has passed at all the occasional contemplative hitch of those slender fingers, as though the muscle memory isn't quite always fast enough to keep up with him. Hades falls silent, and simply watches.

He wouldn't know how to tell a good flower crown from a bad one, if such a thing even exists. But he does get the sense that it looks reasonably sturdy, at least, and is mostly circular. The flowers themselves are lovely, of course, and their pollen has caught beneath Dionysus's fingernails, something which suits him with an aching perfection.

Then, to Hades's surprise, Dionysus smiles and leans forward. He cannot discern the meaning of this action until it's a little too late, and he feels the crown come to rest in his hair.

A familiar sadness pulls at him as he feels the blooms wither and die, and he turns his eyes away from the other god, even as he feels the crown fall apart.

Dead flowers tumble over his shoulders to fall down amongst the living blooms, their color darkened to the hue of a bruise, and Hades doesn't quite know where to begin. "I'm sorry," he says, swallowing thickly. I should have been clearer."

"What do you mean?" There's a lack of understanding there that's not really for the obvious, but for its *implications*. And that's somehow heartbreaking all over again.

"I can't... touch things," he says, grimacing slightly when the words come out. "At least, not things of a certain delicacy. To be in my presence is to be pulled towards death. Not... pulled particularly hard, but if the tie to life is weak enough, then it doesn't matter. For me to touch something is to double the force of that pull, or worse. I cannot stop it. It is simply part of what I am."

He expels a breath. "Agesander, as it were."

The one who steals away all things.

Demeter wasn't mistaken.

But Dionysus, after a few moments' consideration, blinks and hums, the sound quite light. "Is it so bad?" he asks, a hint of warmth in his tone that shouldn't be there. "Death is part of life, you know? And you're the one who sends the souls back up to be born again, aren't you?"

There's really no accounting for such kindness. Certainly no expecting it; Hades feels entirely on the back foot, somehow.

"I..." He exhales softly, and for a moment feels some of the tension bleed out of him. "I appreciate the sentiment. Sometimes, I even manage to believe it. That you do is... comforting."

He knows that the work he does is important. That it is imperative that someone do it. And his own relationship with it is certainly more nuanced than the scorn and fear he is accustomed to receiving from others, and yet...

Hades looks down at one of the withered flowers, caught in his palm. "I am sorry, that I destroyed your work."

"It's all right," Dionysus replies. "I'm the one who gave it to you. Even if you only had it a moment, it was yours, and that's all I wanted."

That makes Hades look up, and he's met with a gentle smile. Genuine—another thing that doesn't quite add up. But even if he can't *fathom* it, he can certainly feel gratitude for it.

"I... thank you, Dionysus." Gently, he cradles the flower in his palm until it is only dust, then opens his fingers, letting the breeze carry it away.

Maybe that's not so terrible.