

Chapter Seven

HECATE

Hecate despised her aptitude for dream walking. It felt like an invasion, sneaking around though the sleeping world and leeching thoughts from the slumbering minds of unsuspecting individuals. The humans believed her to be a dark hearted goddess, prone to witchcraft and black magic. Though she certainly did have a gift for such things, it didn't mean she could stomach using some of her ghastlier powers. Dream walking, though it could be used for good – as on this occasion – had the potential to be highly sinister. Dreams revealed souls' strongest insecurities, humans and gods alike. She did not like to snoop on these most vulnerable moments. But she sucked in a breath through her teeth, because right now she had no other choice.

She emptied her mind as fully as was possible. Whirlpools of stress were difficult to keep away. It took much longer than usual to maintain a sharp yet peacefully clear state. She shoved a mental shoulder into the wall of her own thoughts to knock them out of the way, and finally felt calm beginning to settle in. She unfocused her physical being. Much like the way one could cross their eyes, so they begin to see a fuzzy combination of two realms. The challenge here was keeping those two worlds (waking and sleeping) together, while being able to perceive them clearly. And then there was the matter of navigating. She imagined herself walking the line, beginning to cross into the dream realm. It was tumultuous, unlike what many might assume. Dreams were often heartbreaking, terrifying. And her journey tonight required her to keep an eye out for particularly anxious godly ones. No comforting or warm thoughts could distract her. She focused on the stronger beings, and threw her net out as far as was possible. She imagined no borders to the plane she walked. She searched for intangible feelings, while reminding herself to stay physically grounded on the plane. Once she found what she was looking for, she would need that grounded state to communicate with whomever she might find.

She honed onto the brightest energies on the plane. She wasn't sure how she knew, but the gods had a strength that couldn't be ignored. They usually called to her, more than the muted buzzing of human dreams. If she was honest, when she paid attention to human dreaming, she found them to be much more interesting. But she needed now to reach for flickers of distress in these blazing spots. She imagined strolling through them, one by one, like a museum. She caught flashes of dreams whirling with anger, love stories playing out. She passed slowly by each exhibit and felt nothing like what she was looking for. She tried to search for the emotions she'd felt at the beginning of the day, the confusion and fear and hopelessness. Nothing. Nothing. *Nothing*. She paused at what felt like the end of a very long hallway, feeling as though this had been a waste of energy. Until –

There.

She felt it.

At the end of this imagined corridor, a mildly pleasant dream writhing with turmoil under the surface. She cautiously approached the dream, metaphorically poking at it with her thoughts, asking permission to be let in. The dream yielded, and she saw a glimpse of Zeus' throne room. A party, and Dionysus sitting on Zeus' throne. It felt almost like a memory. A golden tinted re-imagining of days gone by. And underneath it all; hopelessness. Confusion. *Yes*, she thought. She twisted the dreamscape to replicate the forest herself and Demeter were hunkered down in. She centered Dionysus in her mind and approached carefully. He had sunk to the ground, and she was frightful she might have pushed him too far with such an abrupt change. She stopped in front of him, kneeling gently to his level.

“Dionysus,” she began. His head snapped up to take her in. She continued, knowing clear communication was important in the dream world. It may not stick in his waking mind if she wasn’t concrete enough with her language. She asked, “where are you?”

He stared at her, “what are you doing here?”

“I need you to help me.” She continued, “Where are you? Have you found yourself...misplaced?”

His eyes widened. “Yes,” he breathed quietly. “Have you heard anything? Have you spoken to my father recently?”

“No,” she shook her head, “but I believe we can help each other. It’s important that you tell me where you are.”

“New York. New York City. I woke up in the body of a *child*, Hecate! Can you believe that? Zeus is probably belly laughing on Olympus..” he trailed off, crossing both his arms and his eyebrows.

She sucked in a breath. Debated for a moment, how safe it might be to share with him. Despite Demeter’s warnings, she decided they did not have much to lose. The potential to gain an ally might be an invaluable opportunity.

“Demeter and I seem to have found ourselves in much the same situation. We are near Seattle, and we don’t have any idea how we ended up here. Have you gleaned any information about anything at all?”

“No,” he said, “I’m confused as ever, not to mention wrought with worry, which I suspect is how you sought me out. I assumed it was an unexpected, forced vacation from daddy dearest.” He paused. “I may have caused a bit of commotion in the throne room.” He shrugged almost shyly. “I’ve found Hercules, who has graciously agreed to help. Seattle, you said?”

“Yes,” she breathed, feeling the need to whisper though no one could hear them here. “We’ve decided to abstain from contacting anyone else. Safer.”

He nodded. “I’m on my way tomorrow to Olympic National Park. Silenus has a cabin up in the mountains. He and I have a system for communication when he stays there and I need to get ahold of him from Olympus. I believe I’ll be able to contact him via that channel. I’m hoping his discretion and uncanny ability to uncover secrets will come in handy; he may have learned something. He knows I would never leave without so much as a word to him. All of the Olympians seem to believe – or pretend to believe – that I’ve run off on my own accord. I had no idea anyone else was involved until this moment.”

Hecate wasn't surprised. She tended to stay away from humans and Olympians alike. And Demeter was always in motion, travelling the world keeping watch over the harvests. It wouldn't be unusual for her whereabouts to be unaccounted for – at least for a short time. But Dionysus, he was someone the gods would miss. As much as he was a thorn in their collective foot, he commanded attention. A favorite topic of gossip for many. They would notice if he suddenly disappeared. She didn't know Dionysus well, but he'd never caused her any particular trouble. She knew he had a powerful enemy in Hera, and that Zeus often tried to punish him for his debauchery. The possible list of gods who might wish to banish Dionysus was much longer than those who would have it out for her. Or Demeter. This only added to her confusion. The three of them were an unlikely group. Was there anyone else? How widespread was this fiasco?

"You aren't worried about contacting the wrong person by accident through this...channel?" Hecate couldn't help but ask.

"It is secure, and I trust Silenus with my life. He's the only option I have." Hecate nodded. Dionysus continued. "Perhaps you both should come with me. On the occasion that Silenus needs proof I did not escape on my own accord, you can speak of your experiences. You may add context to the conversation. If you are near Seattle, we could meet you. Hercules is arranging flights in the morning; I expect we'll be there by late afternoon."

"How will we know where to find you?"

"If you can make it to the city, find a location one-kilometer due East of the airport. Have Demeter procure a large bouquet of the brightest red roses she can muster, and Hercules and I will find you." Hecate's heart seized at the thought of journeying into the city center. She did not like the noise. Dionysus was staring at her. "Can you do that?" He asked.

"I won't look like this," she reminded him. He appeared to have recognized her, which meant her godly form returned when she began dream walking. Strange.

"I know, that's what the roses are for." *Right*, she thought. "So, you can do it?" He pressed.

"We will do our best," she said. Because that was all that could be promised. He nodded, and she began to pull her consciousness back from his dream. She felt badly for the disruption her presence had caused in his rest, so she thought of peaceful vineyards and pretty chirping chickadees, and she hoped Dionysus would be able to sleep comfortably through the night. With a wave, she drew back into her physical form, wishing Dionysus sweet dreams.