

Chapter 1

The sky is bleeding.

Not the crimson of a sunset, but the raw, pulsing red of a world burning.

Apollo's arrows burn through the clouds, streaks of bright gold and white. Each one finds its mark—an armored cousin, a half-brother with murder in his eyes, a monster summoned from the edge of Tartarus. His armor shines with a crest of the sun, beaming rays of light.

The battlefield roars with the clash of gods, metal screaming against metal, lightning splitting the air. Through the storm, he sees her. A colorful rainbow.

Iris.

Iris dances between blows like light refracts through rain. The silk of her mantle shimmers in every hue as she darts from one god to another, her voice cutting through the chaos as she carries Zeus' orders to those still loyal. Her eyes find his for a heartbeat, wide and pleading.

Don't do this.

But the sun blazes hotter in his veins. "You chose your side," he calls, voice molten, "and it wasn't mine."

Her lips part as if to answer, but the sky breaks open above them. Zeus's spear of lightning rips through the clouds, aimed at Apollo.

Instinct overtakes Iris. She travels between realms to defiantly brace her body in front of Zeus's bolt. She flings herself forward, the world blurring into searing light, her body slamming into Apollo's just as the strike hits.

Pain flares white-hot in Apollo's abdomen, the kind that wasn't meant for mortal nerves to bear. Looking down, a small, shiny dagger sticks out of where a mortal's liver would be, with Iris's hands wrapped around it.

Looking up, he sees the lightning spear had ripped clean through Iris's chest. Golden blood spilled from her body like a waterfall. She slumps to the ground, and he follows, clutching his stomach.

He smells ozone and ash. Iris's hand found his, fingers trembling. "I'll find you," she whispers, voice nearly drowned out by the roar of war.

And then everything was fire, and then — nothing.

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The smell of ozone dissipates.

Griffin blinks into fluorescent light—the kind that hums faintly overhead. The world isn't ash and lightning—it's coffee and burnt toast, the chatter of voices, the hiss of an espresso machine. He realizes he's gripping the counter hard enough that the barista is giving him a funny look.

"You okay, man?"

He forces a smile. "Yeah. Just ... dizzy for a second."

The bell over the door chimes, and he turns instinctively.

She walks in like sunlight after a week of rain, with a bright scarf wrapped around her throat, eyes scanning the menu overhead as though she already knows what she wants. The air shifted when she stepped inside, like the room had quietly turned to face her.

Griffin's heart gives a single, violent lurch.

She looks up. And for just an instant, the cafe is gone. There is only her face, framed by the memory of a sky bleeding red, the taste of ozone still on his tongue.

Her brow furrows like she feels it too—a half-second of recognition she can't place. Then she smiles politely, as strangers do, and steps up to order.

Griffin has no idea who she is. But he knew one thing with bone-deep certainty.

He had loved her before. And he would again.

The barista taking her order notices the blond man staring at her. "Is that man bothering you?" He asks. "He's been a little weirder than usual today."

While Amitola's chest is tight with a burning pressure, she doesn't feel scared. She almost feels ... happy? "No, that's okay." She forces a weak smile. The second one this barista has seen today.

He nods and goes off to make her cappuccino. When he returns, he writes a note on her cup that says, "Don't hesitate to ask."

Amitola senses a large, overbearingly magnetic presence next to her. "Hi, I'm Griffin," says the man charismatically.

Even though the butterflies in her stomach tell her to embrace him this instant, she refrains. "Hi, I'm—not going to tell you my name." She responds awkwardly and shyly.

His smile shines as bright—if not brighter—than the sunlight streaking in through the windows. Amitola's heart thuds, skipping a beat. "That's probably for the best. Too many ruffians out there."

She forces a laugh and grabs her cappuccino off the counter, whipping her shimmering scarf back around her throat protectively. Griffin doesn't follow her, but his eyes do until she's down the street and around the corner.

Her heart is pounding out of her chest. She gets a sense that she knows him from somewhere, but can't pinpoint where. One thing's for sure: He smells like trouble.

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Hovering over ancient ruins and thunderous clouds, Griffin sees himself among gods in a large marble temple atop a tall mountain peak. Each wall is etched with intricate stonework, and it's filled with huge statues and chairs made from a metal he's never seen before. It's gold, but soft to sit in. Plush.

He looks off to the side to find the woman from the cafe standing on the precipice.

Reaching out toward her, he tries to call her name, but he can't remember it. He doesn't know it.

Her shimmering scarf is now silk in her mantle, making her look oddly similar to Iris, the goddess of rainbows and messenger for the gods. But that can't be her. Can it?

Stepping forward, his armor is heavy, weighing him down from moving too fast. Each chink feels like it weighs 50 pounds. Each plate feels like 100.

The woman who looks like Iris goes to step off the precipice. Lunging, Griffin tries to stop her, but is still several yards away. He yells, but hears nothing. Everything is as quiet and still as the night sky.

Griffin watches as she falls over the edge, looking graceful, like a dove about to take flight. He wishes and hopes dearly for something—someone—to stop her. As she falls, he's finally able to make it to the rim of the intricate temple. He looks down, and sees her plunging through the open sky, scarf billowing in the wind.

Waking up with a start, Griffin can't shake the intense gravitation he feels toward her—the woman from the cafe. He needs to see her again.