

Chapter 1

The sky was bleeding.

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

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

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

Iris.

Iris danced between blows like light refracted through rain. The silk of her mantle shimmered in every hue as she darted from one god to another, her voice cutting through the chaos as she carried Zeus' orders to those still loyal. Her eyes found his for a heartbeat, wide and pleading.

Don't do this.

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

Her lips parted as if to answer, but the sky broke open above them. Zeus' spear of lightning ripped through the clouds, aimed at Apollo.

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

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

Looking up, he saw the lightning spear ripped clean through Iris' chest. Golden blood spilled from her body like a waterfall. She slumped to the ground, and he followed, clutching his stomach.

He smelled ozone and ash. Iris's hand found his, fingers trembling. "I'll find you," she whispered, 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 dissipated.

Griffin blinked into fluorescent light — the kind that hummed faintly overhead. The world wasn't ash and lightning — it was coffee and burnt toast, the chatter of voices, the hiss of an espresso machine. He realized he was gripping the counter hard enough that the barista was giving him a funny look.

"You okay, man?"

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

The bell over the door chimed, and he turned instinctively.

She walked 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 knew what she wanted. The air shifted when she stepped inside, like the room had quietly turned to face her.

Griffin's heart gave a single, violent lurch.

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

Her brow furrowed like she felt it too — a half-second of recognition she couldn't place. Then she smiled politely, as strangers do, and stepped up to order.

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

He had loved her before. And he would again.

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The barista taking her order noticed the blond man staring at her. “Is that man bothering you?” He asked. “He’s been a little weirder than usual today.”

While Amitola’s chest was tight with a burning pressure, she didn’t feel scared. She almost felt ... 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.