~~Darian~~

The journey was not as easy as he’d been hoping. It was a fool’s hope to think it’d be a casual stroll down in the country, but still, he had pictured himself in a simple tunic with Medusa beside him, walking at leisure wherever they desired. Instead, he was weighed down in armor with provisions and a bedroll strapped to his back, not to mention a shield, a sword, and a spear.

He looked at the beautiful creature next to him, his one saving grace on this fool’s quest. Medusa kept her snake eyes on the horizon, and her bow at an easy place to draw by her shoulder; he didn’t need to teach her to be watchful, she’d long figured out how to do that on her own. Maybe she wouldn’t mind if he strapped his packs to some of her snake length, like a pack-mule gorgon? The idea made him chuckle under his breath, but he kept it to himself.

“Not a sssoul for miles,” Medusa said. She hissed a lot less than she used to, but every so often her long tongue would get stuck.

“Traveling has largely gone unchanged since you were last here. People still hate roads and a take boat when they can, with roads as a last resort. No one travels far without a nearby city to rest at an inn. So out here, in the open country, it’s just us, the animals, and our quarry.”

“Are we hunting this Chimera?”

“In a sense. I doubt he’ll just decide to help us after all. We’ll probably have to force him,” he said. The idea of forcing the Chimera to do anything seemed difficult, or impossible. But that, he admitted to no one but the quiet of his mind, was part of the allure. The last time he’d dealt with the beast, it had become an epic battle, one that had nearly killed both him and Pegasus. So why was he looking forward to it? Much as he hated the Fates, he was still addicted to the thrill of an epic quest.

He knew he’d have to offer the Chimera to join him in his future meeting with Athena as a bargaining tool. The beast had just as much reason to hate the gods as he did after all. But if he did that, the animal could very well compromise the real purpose of the meeting: helping Medusa. He gritted his teeth and repeated it several times in his head. Help Medusa, help Medusa. The meeting with Athena is for her.

“How did you defeat him when you fought him?”

“I smashed the side of his face in with a rock… after I’d stabbed him a dozen times.”

She turned her head to stare at him, as did her snake hair. He shrugged and gave her his cocky smile.

“This Chimera sounds… terrifying.”

“Yeap.”

“And immortal.”

“Maybe.”

“B… but! But you are a hero blessed by the Fates, and I am no weakling. We can defeat him, I’m sure. I’m sure….” Medusa’s voice started to waver, and she unhooked her bow to hold it ready in both hands. She was nervous.

He wanted to tell her to brighten up, everything would be fine, but it’d be a lie. This fight was liable to get him killed if he made even the smallest mistake.

A smile crept onto his face. He had to look away to hide it, and force it down. But images of his battle with the beast danced in his mind, and made him smile yet again.

“Are you alright?”

“Fine! Fine, just….” He knocked himself in the temple a couple of times and shook his head a few more. “Fine.”

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It took a day of walking, but not long after dawn of the next day, the grassy hills and short forests broke way into a rocky basin. A huge crater as wide as Medusa’s whole island, and as deep as the mountain, was cut into the plains as if Gaia herself had scooped it open like a child playing with sand. Few trees and only some shrubs grew along the edge of the massive crater, and they stopped all together after thirty or forty feet deep into its awaiting maw. Nothing but rock waited below.

“That… is a huge hole in the ground,” Medusa said.

He couldn’t help but laugh.

“I remembered the Chimera saying he came from this land, deep in the earth. I’d seen this crater before when Pegasus and I explored this region. I remembered… that.” He pointed down to the base of the crater, deep and deeper into its shadow. There was a cave.

“We-we’re going down there?”

“I am. I… want to tell you to stay here, but you won’t.”

Medusa slithered closer to him and shook her head, eyes wide and frowning. “I won’t!”

“And it’d be really selfish of me to ask you stay behind, in case you got hurt.”

“It would!”

He put up his hands in surrender. “Alright alright, just stay behind me.” At least she’d agree to that.

The crater’s side, barely more than a cliff face, had enough of a slope with various flat steps that they could more-or-less walk down. Each step had to be careful, any mistake would mean falling down a mountain side. After spending as long as he had working in a quarry, the touch of stone on his hands was oddly comforting. He’d hated working in that quarry, but he was good at it, and it’d been, despite the curse of it all, a nice distraction from the life he’d left behind. Forced to leave behind.

It took time to reach the bottom, and the path took them down in a spiral around the crater. Darian kept looking behind him to see if Medusa was handling the slopes well, but he found himself surprised. Her long body had better grip on the rock and stone than his sandals did. He really needed to stop worrying about her so much, before his worry got him killed, looking behind when he should have been looking forward.

The lower they went down, the hotter it got. The ridiculous armor the Fates arranged for him kept him cool — surprising given its black color — but Medusa was another matter. Again he was worrying about her, and he glanced back over his shoulder to see if the heat was getting to her. He slipped.

“Darian!”

“Fine, fine.” Hating himself for his stupidity, for doing what he just told himself to not do, he leaned over the edge to watch the rocks he knocked over fall. They made more than a little noise, cracking against stone and knocking other rocks around to only repeat the chain of unwanted noise, all the way down to the bottom of the pit. He gulped, and waited.

Nothing, not a rumble or a groan. He would have wiped the sweat off his brow if it wasn’t for his helmet.

It took another fifteen minutes of slow descent to reach the bottom. The cave was natural, and low-hanging. He’d figured the monster would have lived somewhere with a much taller ceiling, but the cave was only four feet tall. He couldn’t fight in there; not that he’d want to. It was pitch black in its depths.

He looked at Medusa, and she looked back at him with the same surprise and a shrug.

“He can’t be a very big creature, living in there,” she said.

It took all his will to not burst into laughter.

The area around them was several hundred feet wide, circular, a good place for a fight. And there would be a fight. The ground beneath him was hard stone covered in a shallow layer of pebbles, making each step both slippery and brutal to fall on. The edges of the crater were sloped upward, so he might be able to use it as a wall for some maneuvers. The sun was starting to enter the canyon’s eye, so he’d have several hours of light if needed. He took stock of anything and everything he thought he might need, and pointed at them with his spear for his mental checklist.

He looked at his spear in hand, long, shaft of the same irregular color as the rest of his equipment, with a coil of silver moving down its body. He looked at his shield, the silver thread drawn onto its face, and checked its weight and balance against his arm; not big enough for a phalanx, but more than enough to defend himself in one-on-one combat. Stabbing the spear shaft into the ground, he reached over to draw his sword, and took a moment to look at the grip. It too looked like thread, and his fingers had good traction against the grip of the short blade. Short enough for a Spartan warrior’s more upfront and direct combat. He sheathed the sword, removed his pack, tossed it to the side, and removed his helmet from his head. He held the glorious, disgusting thing in his hands, and turned it over to look at the beautiful silver etchings in the obsidian design. It exposed only his eyes, and a vertical slit down the center to show a sliver of his mouth when worn. Atop its crown it displayed a great white crest, made of something Darian did not believe to be from a natural animal. He put the helmet back on, got to a knee, and touched the ground beneath him. The canyon bed was loose rocks, pebbles, and jagged harsh gravel. The air was dry, and deep in the crater, it was dead silent.

Images of what he would do flooded his mind, where he could roll, where his greaves would protect him against the rough terrain, and where they would not. Where he could sustain a blow with his shield, and where he could not. He breathed deep his battlefield, and stood back up.

“Medusa, I’m going to handle this fight, if I have to fight. Stay back, and—”

“I know, I know, don’t intervene.”

He turned to look at her, brow quirked. “What? No, of course intervene! If I’m about to die, I expect you to save me!”

He smiled — best in the world — and she erupted into giggles. Such a lovely sound to hear from a beautiful woman.

“Darian, this is no time for jokes! I….” She went silent.

Pebbles, rocks, and the grinding of stone against them. It started quiet, just a bit of background noise, but it grew closer, and closer, until the echo of rocks being knocked aside filled the cave before them. The crater held the sound around their ears, and soon it was like listening to a huge wagon fighting against the rocks of a cliff, dragging stone to scrape stone.

Shifting. Skin on rock. He stepped away from the cave entrance, readied his shield upon his left arm, and held the spear as a staff in his right. How long had it been since he’d stood on death’s door like this, and just waited for it to come to him? His blood was already pumping, his fingers felt cold and tingly, and his toes flexed down against his sandals. It’d been a long time since he’d had a good fight.

How quickly he went from dreading the fight, to savoring it. He couldn’t stop smiling.

A hand came out of the shadow of the low cave. A human-looking hand, but Darian knew better. Another hand emerged, and the beast followed them in a slow, cumbersome motion to ease his towering body out of the small hole. Then a head came out, a lion’s head, with two enormous horns behind each ear that coiled back into a magnificent display of animal power. It wasn’t the lion’s head Darian was worried about though, it was the thing wearing it.

The Chimera managed to pull his body free of his hole, and stand tall. The sight made Medusa gasp, and Darian took a step back. He gulped.

A giant. Not a tall human, or a wide human, but an actual giant. The Chimera stood at least ten feet tall, tawny skin not unlike Darian’s, but his skin was covered in more scars than Darian could count. He was naked except for the huge lion pelt on his head and back, and some animal furs for a loincloth. His hair was brown, long, as was his beard, and his body was a slab of muscle, defined and huge. A large, nasty gash cut into the brow and cheek of his left eye, but the eye itself remained, and it stared at him.

A long tattoo of a snake rode the brute’s massive right arm.

The giant looked between him and Medusa, and grumbled a low noise under his breath that Darian could feel vibrate the earth. “… Bellerophontes.” He reached up, took one of the goat horns that stood from the lion’s head, and pulled it back to let the pelt dangle behind him and around his neck where its lion arms were tied like string.

Well, he remembers you Darian, so that’s a plus, right?

“Chimera.”

“I had hoped to slumber beneath the Earth for an age, until you were old or dead, and I could roam the surface once more.” His voice was gentle, but also gravely, and deep enough Darian could not help but picture the ocean and its black depths. Hearing him speak surfaced dozens of harsh, terrifying, thrilling memories for Darian, and all at once, the small warrior felt like he was standing before something ancient. Ancient as stone.

Darian gave a quick glance back at Medusa; her jaw had dropped, and she was staring up at the beast. It was probably the first time she’d had to look up at someone in one hundred years.

“Sorry,” he said, “but hey, you’re alive. That’s good, isn’t it?”

The Chimera growled again, just enough that Darian could see a couple fangs in his mouth. His teeth were big, like a lion’s.

“No thanks to you.” He ran a couple of his fingers down his face along the gash over his left eye.

Darian found himself smiling. This was like talking to an old friend that you parted badly with. A falling out that ended with a battle. There was something enjoyable in that comparison.

“I came here to ask for your help, Chimera.”

He expected a laugh, or a smile, or some sort of human response. But then that was part of the problem of course, the beast wasn’t human. Instead, the Chimera stood there and glared at him like a lion stalking prey.

“Where is your companion?” He made a slow, sweeping gesture that ended with his palm open to Medusa.

“Pegasus is… that’s….” Darian stabbed his spear’s shaft into the sand and glared up at the giant. “That’s part of the reason I’m asking for your help. Pegasus has been captured.”

The giant stared at him, eyes as dark as Darian’s ebony shield, anger and animal savagery on his face. He started to pace, left and right with titanic, slow steps. Each step was like watching a hulking wall of meat and power move, and despite it, the beast made each step with dead silence. The giant kept his eyes on Darian as he walked, and he snarled something inhuman before licking one of his fangs.

“You almost killed me. But you expect my help?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“It’s a favor for the Fates.”

The Chimera shook his head, and clicked his fangs across his teeth. “They do not concern me.”

“But the gods do.”

The ancient beast growled and took a step forward. “What of it?”

Darian took a step back. “If I do this, the Fates arrange a meeting with me and Athena, to try and reverse her curse,” he said, and he tilted his head in Medusa’s direction. “I want to help her as much as I want to save Pegasus. If you come along, you get a crack at Athena once we’re done with her. After Medusa and I have talked to her.”

He had no idea how to kill a god. But maybe the Chimera did.

“Tempting.” The brute took another step forward. “I accept. On one condition.”

Darian took another step back. “Yeah, what’s that?”

The giant’s foot swung out like a monstrous hammer. He heard the air split as the titanic limb moved toward him, nothing more than a blur of speed and mass. Darian only had enough time to bring his shield to bear before the monster’s foot collided with it, and sent him flying. He was lighter than most men, but that didn’t mean it didn’t hurt to get sent flying through the air. Ten, twenty, thirty feet he flew until his back smacked against the slope of sand and stone. He laid there against the cliff face, frozen with shock, before his body slid back to the earth and fell to his knees. He couldn’t breath. Pain tore through him once the shock faded. His ears were ringing. The shield on his arm was still vibrating. He’d dropped his spear.

“Defeat me.”

Wonderful. Absolutely wonderful. He grabbed at the dirt with his free hand and tried to get his bearings. Everything was moving in a blur, the world was spinning, and his stomach was already fighting to upturn its contents. Get a grip, Darian. Nothing is moving, you’re just dizzy. Compensate, adjust, adapt.

“Darian!” Medusa said.

“I’m good, I’m good.”

For the first time, he heard the Chimera laugh. It was a powerful, boisterous laugh, and it shook the walls with its deep volume.

“It is a different battle when you’re on the ground, little human.” The Chimera traded his light, stalking steps for the stomping, quaking steps of a giant, powerful enough that Darian could feel the vibrations get stronger the closer the beast got.

When the giant made another kick, this time for Darian’s face, the small warrior managed to roll to the side. In the spinning motion of the roll, he got a heel into the dirt to keep footing while he drew his sword, slashed out as he moved by, and rolled forward again onto his feet. A splatter of blood marked the stones, and lined the edge of Darian’s sword.

He expected a scream, or at least a roar from the giant. All he got was a grunt.

“You were always a fast, tiny thing,” the Chimera said, and he walked after Darian with all the hurriedness of a tortoise. A long gash lined his shin, and dark blood dripped from it onto the monster’s bare feet, but for all Darian could tell, the giant didn’t even notice.

Darian took a deep breath, and looked at the sword in his hand. A xiphos blade, one-handed and elegant in its simplicity, gleamed in the sun. A beautiful blade, made to sit on display in a king’s throne room, not for the battlefield. But the sight of blood on its edge was splendid, poetic, and it fueled him. For just a split moment, looking at the bleeding sword, it was like looking at exactly what he was meant to be: a handsome warrior, fighting monsters, going to battle, for glory and to live immortal in the tales of Greece.

He could see the Fates’ threads around his hands and feet, making him dance, and he did not care.

White started to blur the edges of his vision again. It gave him focus, narrowed his attention to his goal, and demanded all his energy and power be driven into his objective. Glowing white eyes that marked him a child of the Fates and their games. One on one, him against a giant, without the wings of his old friend to carry him? Sounded like a challenge.

He jumped straight up, body soaring through the air, landed onto the Chimera’s chest, and stabbed downward.

The sword cut cleanly down into the beast’s shoulder — what a ridiculously sharp blade — and pulled down through muscle. Blood gushed over the blade and onto Darian’s greaves where his feet were planted against the giant’s stomach. He pushed himself away, flipped back through the air, and landed with perfect grace. Adrenaline pumped through him, made his fingers tingle and his breathing quicken. Time slowed down. The taste of battle was on his tongue once again.

The Chimera took a step back from the unexpected assault, and he patted his wound with his good arm. But, it only took a few seconds for the wound to close on its own. The cut was still there, red with blood, but the bleeding had stopped, and when the giant shook his arm about to test it, Darian could already tell the bastard’s wound was mostly healed. Killing a giant was no easy task.

“Another scar,” the Chimera said. He cracked a small grin, enough to expose one of his animal fangs. “White eyes.”

Darian bolted forward. He was fast, fast enough that he left a cloud trail of dirt behind him, and when he threw his weight down into a heel, he skidded forward underneath the beast. The Chimera reached down to try and catch him, but Darian slipped underneath his hands and got behind him. Darian swung the sword at the monster’s leg from behind, speed and weight into the slash. It was enough to pierce the brute’s skin and leave another gash.

The giant turned, and Darian rolled with it, barely low enough to get underneath a swing of the Chimera’s fist. Focus, dodge, underneath, stay close, slide on the ground. The Chimera kicked at him, and Darian jumped over it before landing on his knees and rolling underneath a following kick.

He could do this. He didn’t need Pegasus. He could chop this guy down like an axe to a tree. He could—

Everything went black. The ringing in his head increased a thousand fold. He remembered a fist coming down at him, and him bringing his shield up, but the brute force of the impact had smashed the shield down against his body and helmet. He was squashed into the ground like a bug.

“Hold still.” The Chimera took a single step toward him, raised a leg, and brought it down.

Darian managed to bring his shield up — he had no idea where his sword was anymore — and braced against the giant’s foot with both hands. He might as well have been trying to stop an avalanche. His arms started shaking the instant the monster started putting weight down against him, and Darian could feel his armor grinding against the stones underneath him.

“Heroes are meant to die,” the Chimera said, and he leaned his weight onto his foot. The bastard must have weighed almost two thousand pounds, and Darian could feel his bones threaten to break trying to keep the beast from crushing him under his own shield.

A familiar thud of sound eased the weight. Only when the giant removed his foot did Darian realize that he hadn’t been breathing, and he started panting with desperation when pressure against his back and arms was gone. It was like someone had lifted a boulder from his body.

When he finally managed to look up, he could see an arrow sticking out of the giant’s chest. And then another, and another. Each sank inches deep into the Chimera’s chest, and each earned a grown of pain and frustration from the huge beast.

“L-leave him alone!” Medusa said. “We d-d-don’t need to fight!” The gorgon had drawn her bow, and she’d fire several shots straight into the giant. When her arrows did nothing to hinder him though, Darian could see her jaw drop open and her eyes widen. She looked terrified.

“Serpent.” The Chimera roared, an actual roar, loud enough that Darian could hear it through the choir of pain in his head. He ripped the arrows from his chest, threw their bloodied and ruined shafts to the ground, and started to walk toward her.

The whole situation had gone from bad to a nightmare in a single moment. She’s trying to save you from dying, you stupid man. Get up. Get up! Darian rolled onto his knees, forced himself to breathe, ignored the cracked ribs and the concussion, and just moved. Do something you stupid, stupid man, before the only thing you care about in this world gets killed.

He slammed his shield into the giant’s leg. His weight was barely enough to even grab the giant’s attention, but barely enough was good enough. The Chimera turned around with a snort, reached down, and plucked Darian up like a toy, fingers around his neck. For a second, Darian thought for sure he’d been hiding his sword behind his back, and he was going to stab the Chimera in the neck. Or maybe he’d fallen on his spear and had grabbed the tip, hidden it in his palm, and was going to drive it into the Chimera’s eye.

But he didn’t have any of that, just a shield, and the Chimera was more than happy to yank it off his arm and throw it to the side. It was a really stupid plan, but at least he was focused on him again and not Medusa.

“Enough, Bellerophontes.”

The savage threw him, hard, and sent him colliding into the solid stone mouth of the cave the giant had been sleeping in. Darian flopped against the curve of stone like a fish before falling to the dirt. This time, he didn’t get up. He tried, pushed his hands against the dirt, but his muscles refused to lift him, as if the weight of mountains sat on his shoulders. Pain had blurred into a weird storm of highs and lows, each striking their own chord of misery, each knocking the wind out of him. And the Chimera was marching toward him.

“Your serpent friend can wait then, if you are so eager to die.”

He coughed up blood. The taste of it on his tongue was hilarious. How long had it been since he’d tasted his own blood? Probably the last time he fought the Chimera. The metal taste made him smirk, and he gave the giant the same smirk as the Chimera approached him.

The best smirk in the world.

The Chimera snarled down at him. “You mock me? Fine.” The giant put his foot out, and raised it. He was going to crush Darian’s head like a grape.

Fitting, Darian supposed. He’d crushed the giant’s face with a boulder after all. Gods, he really wanted to get up and save the day, to save Medusa, even if he died in the process. That would be the end he’d prefer.

He smiled at the ground, a small smile no one else could see. He’d known her for such a small time.

A loud whip snap, a blur, and a harsh wind sent the Chimera flying to the side. Darian didn’t see what happened, but when he looked to the side, the huge giant of muscle and scars was on a knee, and a massive crack had been made into the stone of the crater where he’d struck the wall.

“… wha….” Darian raised his head, and stared.

Medusa slithered between the two of them. Her snake hair had grown into a massive mane of giant pythons. Her neck had spread out into gigantic scales and the crown of a cobra. She was still wearing her clothes, but he could see that no human skin remained on her body; it was all scales. Her hands held immense claws, and her head had distorted into the long snout of a snake, but warped and gnarled with a hint of a human’s face.

“You will not touch him!”

That voice. Darian blinked at the giant snake creature, and shook his head, which of course sparked massive pain in his skull. Her voice was double layered, the soft woman’s voice he knew, and a monstrous, powerful voice layered on top. Like someone had taken a snake and given them the voice of a titan, the second layer of sound shook him to his core, awe-inspiring and terrifying.

“Serpent….” The Chimera pushed himself up to his feet, tilted his head to the side until Darian heard the crack from his neck, reached behind his shoulder to grab the lion head, and placed it back upon his skull.

He didn’t know she was Medusa, or probably who Medusa even was. Not that it mattered, they needed him alive; he was no good to them as a statue.

Medusa raised herself higher, and higher. With still twenty feet of her snake body on the ground, she could raise her head well above the Chimera, and she looked down at him with predatory snake eyes.

“We assssked for your help, not a fight!”

Her snake mouth had trouble with words, he could hear it, but when the words came out, her voice made Darian’s spine shiver. He remembered how her mouth had opened, exposed her giant fangs, and had devoured a boar the same as any snake would. He remembered how she transformed when she turned people to stone. To see her transformed in front of him now, so close, defending him, he could see all the details of her monstrous body. It made him tremble.

“You were a fool if you did not expect one,” the Chimera said. He leaned forward, and charged. His steps tore into the ground, destroyed earth and shredded it with the inhuman speed the hulking monster unleashed. Dashing forward, each step made the ground shake, and Darian blinked twice at the sight of the gravel around him vibrating.

“Medusa, get out of—”

Medusa charged into the giant. And instead of getting knocked back, she knocked him back and held on. Their hands locked, but it was the gorgon who pushed him back further and further, massive snake length gripping along the ground, until the brute was pinned against the crater wall. Trapped with his back to the cliff face, he wasn’t able to stop the enormous snakes on Medusa’s head, and a dozen of the long serpents snapped out at the giant. They bit into him, pulled and pushed against his huge muscles, and tore flesh open with their struggles. When he tried to use his bigger hands to overpower hers, her snake hair wrapped around his wrists and pulled his hands away.

The Chimera roared into her face, ripped one of his hands clear of her claws, tightened it into a fist, and drove it into the side of her skull. It was hard enough Darian could hear the impact, and it sent the gorgon down to the ground. The giant jumped, pounced on her, and mounted her before he started punching against her body. Each punch made a sickening thud of bone to flesh and scales.

She glared up at him, her eyes glowed yellow — but then stopped. She must have remembered he was useless to them dead. Darian almost called out to tell her to stone him anyway, but she braced a dozen feet of her thick snake body against the ground and rolled the two of them over before pushing him from her. When the beast tried to punch her again, she backed away, and started to slither around him in slow circles.

The Chimera kept his eyes on Medusa, but Darian could see a smile on his face, a smile he recognized. The dozens of teeth marks on his skin healed, but they also scarred, and joined what must have been centuries of battles. The creature’s skin was a canvas of history and death.

He charged again, making the ground quake like a rampaging buffalo, and he pointed his head down enough so the huge horns of his animal pelt stood up like a crown. Medusa caught them, but with the direction and force of the giant, she might as well have been run down by a minotaur.

Medusa screeched down at the giant when he collided into her chest, but she didn’t let him overtake her. She sank her claws into his chest and arms, and the two of them rolled over each other and skidded along the ground. Scales tore off, blood streaked where they left a crater of destruction, and the sounds of animals roaring and screaming filled Darian’s ears; all coming from Medusa and the Chimera.

Then she picked up the giant, and threw him.

Darian pushed himself back, eyes wide, and kept himself out of the way as the giant crashed into the ground, rolling back into the rocks. The impact made Darian bounce. And it only got worse when Medusa slithered past him with a speed he could not fathom her huge body capable of. A darting snake, except colossal in size, Medusa tore through the ground with the same ferociousness as the giant, and just as the Chimera was getting up from the impact, she snapped outward with claws and fangs.

The Chimera roared in pain, more blood trickling down over his massive chest as the serpent dug into him. He tried to punch her again, but she rolled them both onto their sides, and rolled them again, and again. The Chimera tried to control the motion, but Medusa took advantage. She raised the lower half of her body, swung it up and over the bastard, and wrapped it around one of his arms and his chest, underneath the other arm. When the monster tried to free himself, she wrapped around the other arm, and rolled again. Like when she had coiled the boar, she grabbed onto the massive brute, and circled him with more and more of her length. When the giant started to break away from her thick snake body, her snake hair — huge as pythons in her monster form — latched onto the brute’s neck and shoulders. Like a host of giant snakes at her whim, the snake hair helped pin him down with their bite, and forced him deeper and deeper into her tightening coils, until he couldn’t even squirm.

“You will lissssten,” Medusa said, and she leaned in close until the giant was only a few inches from her vicious, inhuman face. With the face of a snake demon, she looked far far scarier than the horned lion on the Chimera’s head. “You will lisssten or I will sssssnap every bone in your body.” She tightened more, and more, until Darian could see how much she was struggling to keep the brute coiled.

But it was working. The giant wasn’t breathing anymore, Darian could see it in his face. He twisted and turned in Medusa’s huge coils, but they didn’t have the same strength as before.

Darian breathed deep, ignored what was probably a broken rib or two, and blinked away the pain ringing inside his skull. Shield gone, sword gone, spear gone, he felt very naked. He grumbled, dragged himself up to his feet, and managed to start walking toward Medusa and the Chimera.

“There. Defeated. Don’t make her kill you, Chimera,” he said.

The giant tried to growl at him, but his face was turning blue, and each attempt to make noise was met with a tiny gasp that did nothing.

“Medusa, you can ease up a little, I think he’s done.”

The giant snake creature nodded, and loosened her coils enough for the Chimera to get some air into his lungs. He struggled a few more times, but no matter how big his muscles were, the huge, scar-covered giant couldn’t break out of Medusa’s grip. The fact her claws were holding him down and her snake hair had bitten into various parts of his neck and shoulders was a delightful addition to how thoroughly he was pinned and trapped.

“This was no duel,” the Chimera said.

“Of course not, you attacked me before a duel was declared! As if you’d care about a duel, animal.” Darian looked around, found his sword, retrieved it, and pointed it at the giant’s neck.

The giant grumbled, deep voice shaking the ground. So close, Darian squinted at him; the brute showed zero sign of being in pain, despite the many holes Medusa’s hair of pythons were putting into his skin. Truly a monster.

“I… am defeated.”

“Thank you. Now—”

“Not by you.” The Chimera gritted his teeth until his fangs clicked across them. “You are no match for me, Bellerophontes, without your wings. But your serpent friend is. I surrender.”

Medusa hissed, and in her fully transformed state, it was a raspy sound that filled the cobra hood she now wore. “You ssssurrender?”

The giant nodded.

“He’s telling the truth, Medusa.” It was written on the Chimera’s face, the same sort of surrender of one animal to another. Say one thing about a warrior barbarian like a giant, they were simple creatures.

Medusa hissed again and turned to look at Darian. She was angry, and the sight of her demon snake face made Darian take a step back.

And she noticed. She looked away, lowered her head, and sighed a snake’s sigh. Uncoiling from the beast, she loosened several rings of her long body before at last the giant was on his knees on the dirt, struggling to get air into his lungs with the same deep breaths Darian was trying to do. After backing away several feet, she brought her hands up to her chest, and suppressed her transformation. Scales vanished into her skin, her cobra hood melted into her neck, her snake hair returned to its usual size of tiny creatures, and her face became human once again.

“You have powerful friends,” the Chimera said, and he stood up after another minute before he started stretching out his arms and legs. The lion that was draped across his head and back had goat horns, not sewn on but part of the dead animal’s body. No such creature existed that Darian knew.

“The joys of being a Fates’ pawn.” He stumbled around, jealous of how quickly the giant healed, and Darian healed pretty damn fast. But after a while he found his spear and shield once more. “So, you’ll help us?”

The Chimera grumbled again, a sinister sound Darian didn’t like. “I’ll help her.”

Darian looked to Medusa. She’d managed to not destroy her clothes in the transformation, and she readjusted them to fit before slithering over to join the two of them. She met Darian’s eyes, but didn’t hold them, and instead looked to the brute.

“I beat you in a fight, sso now you’ll do as I sssay? What sssstupid reasoning is that?” She was upset. Her hands were in fists, her S’s were uncontrolled, and her snake hair was pointed at both Darian and the Chimera like they wanted to bite them. Worse, her scale eyebrows were furrowed, and her frown was penetrating.

Darian winced, took a step toward the giant, and leaned in to whisper. “She can literally turn you into stone with a glance. Be careful.”

The giant blinked down at him, and his eyes went wide. First time Darian had ever seen the huge man so much as show a different expression than annoyance or amusement.

Medusa slapped her tail against the ground. “Darian! This is not a joke. He nearly killed you! I—”

The Chimera got down onto a knee, putting a dead stop to Medusa’s words.

“I am defeated, Medusa. I serve you.”

“Why?” she said, and she slithered forward to glare down at the kneeling giant.

But the beast tilted his head to the side and blinked at her. “Why not?”

Medusa threw her arms up in the air, and slithered away to start climbing the canyon wall.

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~~Medusa~~

She glared at the Chimera. He looked at her. Darian looked between the two of them. Uncomfortable did not begin to explain how they all felt.

They sat around a fire, and roasted a fresh kill over its embers. They had settled near the tree Medusa and Darian had slept by the night before. The night was clear, and the stars shown brightly. Whenever the fire licked toward the Chimera, she could see on his face only calm. Whenever it licked toward Darian, she could see he was perfectly content with how they had settled the situation. It made her want to smack the both of them.

“Ssstupid boys,” she said.

The giant frowned, but said nothing. He was such a massive man, almost twice as tall as Darian, and probably ten times his weight. Scars everywhere, including a huge one over his left eye. The snake tattoo on his arm looked ancient, primal, and the dead beast the giant wore on his shoulders, a lion with horns, was one Medusa had never heard of before, let alone seen.

Darian inched a little closer to her around the fire. “I—”

“Ssstupid boys! All the fighting, and it meant nothing.” She moved some of her snake length into a coil and rested the wall of scales between her and Darian.

“It didn’t mean nothing! It just meant nothing to us. He’s from a different time, and he’s a giant, not a human. He follows different rules.”

She glared at the small man beside her. “He’s a dog!” Her words were laced with venom, but when she glanced the giant’s way, he hadn’t even flinched. He sat there, and watched the fire with steady eyes. The ruthless animal she had seen in his gaze was gone, and instead there sat a quiet, immovable object of power.

Darian shrugged. “Kind of, yeah.”

“He could have killed you. Killed me!” If his own safety was no concern of his, perhaps hers was. Anything to get him to realize how stupid the whole fight had been. Their lives weren’t toys to be thrown around, they were fragile and precious things.

The small warrior sighed and sat back down where he was. He looked sad. Good! Good….

She looked away and started to fiddle with her snake hair, entwining it with her fingers. The fight had been brutal, and she rubbed at her cheek where the giant had clocked her so hard she was sure he almost broke bone, let alone the host of bruises he’d given her elsewhere. But the three of them were all magical things that healed quickly, what was a few life-threatening injuries to them? The thought made her angry all the more.

She had defeated the brute though. The giant across the fire from her sat there because she’d defeated him so wholly, he had simply accepted it. Like a dog becoming a member of her pack. Animal! She frowned, glared, and even hissed a few times in his direction. Again he did nothing but sat there and stared into the fire.

Despite herself, she remembered the feeling of power when she had let the monster inside her out, how it had given her the strength to save Darian, and defeat the giant. She’d pinned him, tore into him, and broke him. Something inside her made her smile with the memory, but when she realized it, she got angrier again. It was not something to be happy about.

“… how are you going to find us what we’re looking for?” she said. She made deliberate efforts to hide her S’s. She was not an animal.

“Gaia will guide us,” he said, but when both she and Darian blinked at him, the giant reached for a stick and started to prod the embers beneath the roasting kill. He believed his words.

“Gaia,” she said.

“Yes.”

“… you speak to Gaia.”

He made a sweeping motion with his hand to the land around them. “I can ask of her aid. And when Gaia speaks, I know how to listen.”

“I know the stories, that giants are children of Gaia. But they’re just stories. These things aren’t….”

Both the men quirked their brows at her, and she lowered her head with a sigh. She was a god-cursed creature, Darian was a chosen apostle for the Fates themselves, and they rode one of Charon’s vessels. Why couldn’t the third member of their group be something as absurd as a child of Gaia herself.

“How old are you?” she said.

“Old.” The beast shrugged, as if nothing had existed before him.

His gravelly, deep voice did remind her of the Earth, that was true, and they had found him sleeping in what was nothing more than a big hole in the ground. He may as well have been carved out of the Earth. She thought she was old, and while Darian made her feel like a young woman, this ancient thing made her feel like a newborn.

She slithered a little closer. “And what… I don’t… what do you do?”

The giant blinked at her again. It was like talking to a big, stupid oaf. Not like, was!

“You’ve been alive for so long. What have you done this whole time?” she said.

“… what does any creature do?” He made another sweeping motion with a hand, this time to the country landscape about them lit by the stars. “The lions and goats and snakes, they do not do, they simply are.”

“We are not animals!” She slammed her hands against the scaled length she was leaning against. “We are humans! And you, giant, are close enough! You sssspeak, and argue, and wear clothes, and and… you do stupid things for no reasons! People do that, not animals.”

The Chimera laughed, a quiet laugh that rumbled into the ground. “Humans are just animals that think they are gods.”

Medusa looked to Darian for some help, but her lover shrugged, with a hopeless expression on his face.

“We’re not,” she said. “We’re not, we… we’re not.”

The Chimera tilted his head to the side again — with the dead cat on his head, it looked like the cat was looking at her inquisitively — and poked at the fire a few times.

“Aren’t you going to ask?” she said, and she motioned to her snake body.

He shook his head.

“You don’t care about why the person you’ve pledged yourself to is half snake?”

Again he shook his head.

She was really, really starting to hate this man.

“So, uh,” Darian said, “when are you going to tell us where to go?”

“Tomorrow. Gaia will tell us.” He nodded and poked the fire some more. He was confident in his words, like asking of Gaia was just a part of his life. The man was a rock of resolution and self belief.

Everything she knew she wasn’t. She wasn’t so blind to not see she hated him because he was what she wanted to be: confident in himself. The thoughts stung in her eyes, and she wiped them away.

“Can we trust him to not kill us in our sleep, Darian?”

The Chimera grunted again, and poked at the fire. He looked offended.

“I trust the Fates more than I trust him. They wouldn’t set me up just to get me killed in my sleep.” Darian grinned at the beast. And the beast grinned right back at him. “Besides, he lost to you. He knows you’re in charge.”

Boys! Boys and their stupid war games and their violence and their utter disregard for their own mortality. She threw her arms up in the air, slithered over to the other side of the tree, and coiled around the two bedrolls before laying herself down. She could hear some mumbling, but after a few minutes, the two men went quiet.

Darian climbed over her coils, and for a moment, she considered tossing him off. But she didn’t. Instead she waited for him to lay down on the bedroll next to her before she turned to face away. That ought to hurt him.

“You’re angry,” he said.

“You just realized?”

“No, but I’m confused.”

She looked over her shoulder at him with a glare. “Confused? You and him, you used violence, deadly violence like… like… children! Ssstupid children who resolve everything with their fists. Worse than children! Like warmongering barbarians! Content to throw each other into a pit of swords to settle your differencessss!”

The rage poured through her. Her stare was ice, and for a moment, she was sure she could turn him to stone without transforming. How could the man be so stupid, and so callous, and so juvenile? How could he forgive violence so quickly? How—

His eyes opened wide, and his body went still. He stared her, tightened his fists on the blankets, and sat up. After a while, he pulled his knees up to his chest, and held them against his tunic. No longer in his armor, he was free to rest his chin on his knees, and sigh.

Her heart stopped. She’d said something, something awful. She lifted her torso off the ground and slithered herself closer to the small man. All her rage, gone in an instant.

“What? What is it?” she said.

“Is it really like that? Him”—he gestured to the giant still sitting by the fire—“and me, just resolving everything with swords and spears?”

She tilted her head to the side, and brought it closer to the man. Her snake body pushed her torso closer to him, until her body was pressed to his back, and she put a hand on his shoulder while the other hugged around him.

“The two of you treated the fight like it was a casual thing. That’s why I’m angry. It’s not casual, it’s dangerous, and… life is precious and… and all that philosophy stuff they talk about in Athens.” She hugged him tighter, but when she put her face next to his, he turned away a little.

“I thought you were being ridiculous, when you said I’m too violent.” He shook his head and hid his eyes with his knees.

“I’m not—”

“How old were you when you first killed someone?”

“Killed someone? I… it was when I was cursed.” She tilted her head to the side, and tried to nudge her nose into his ear to draw his attention back to her. “Why?”

“I was twelve.”

She froze. “Twelve?”

He nodded, but kept his head on his knees.

“Just some thieves. They broke into my home, attacked my father, my mother, my brother.” He looked down at his hands, and squeezed on something he no longer held. “I was outside at the time, and I heard them, hitting my family, looking for money.”

“Did… you didn’t get the city guard?” Medusa squeezed him. She pulled more of her length over to him, and circled him with some of her snake length to protect him from the cruel world. She wanted to ask about his family, but it could wait.

“No. Didn’t even occur to me. I just… grabbed a knife, and let it happen.” He sighed, turned his head so she could see his eyes over his knee, and gave her a sad smile. “I butchered them. Got one in the back when he wasn’t looking. The other, he… yeah.” He slid hid forehead into the groove of his knees again to hide his face, and hugged his legs. “And I didn’t even feel bad, or… or anything. They were just meat.”

“Da—”

“Medusa, do you remember the faces of the people you’ve killed?”

“… yes.” Every one of them.

He pulled his head up, looked at the sky, and took a deep breath before looking to her. His eyes ripped her to pieces. Mournful eyes, but, he still had a small smile.

“That’s why I like you so much. I don’t.”

He moved to put his head back onto his knees again, but she caught his shoulder, and turned him to face her. Before he could say anything, she wrapped both of her arms around him, and hugged him tight. He squirmed a little, but she didn’t let go. She slid a hand up to his head, pulled it into the nook of her neck, and stroked his hair with her fingers while her other hand rubbed his back.

After a minute, Darian relented, and slipped his arm around her to hug her back.

“I’ll be your missing piece,” she said.

“My missing piece?” He forehead slid down to her neck, and he relaxed against her.

“Yes. I don’t know why, but your conscience is missing a piece.” She nuzzled her cheek against the side of his head, and her snake hair settled along his shoulder. “I’ll be your conscience then, and… and you can be my sword. I don’t have that instinct. I’ll get us killed.” She knew she would, eventually.

“Ok… alright, I like that.” He lifted his head and brought his nose to nudge against hers. His beautiful smile was back, but she only managed a glimpse of it before he was hugging her tight again and hiding his face in her neck. “You didn’t need a sword to deal with the Chimera.”

“Only because you were in trouble. If it wasn’t for that, I would have….” I would have ran away.

He breathed deep of her neck, and hugged her tighter. “Sorry I made you do that.”

“It’s alright,” she said, and she nudged her cheek against his. “It’s alright.”

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Medusa awoke with Darian snug against her. She’d wrapped her arms around him before falling asleep, but during the night she must have wrapped him in her coils too. Chuckling, she loosened her snake body from his, and looked to the rising sun.

The giant was sitting by the fire, in the same place and posture as when she’d left him.

“You didn’t sleep?” she said.

“No. Under the Earth, I will sleep for age. But now I am risen.” He stared into the coals of the dead fire, eyes hard as rock, breathing slow, and voice still as gravely as before. She could swear, hearing him speak was like listening to Gaia herself. Every word was a rumble of power.

She’d defeated him. Gods, she’d defeated such a brute! Her transformed state was even more monstrous than this ancient thing of muscle and stone? Her mind drifted back to Darian, when she had jumped in to save him, and that moment of fear she’d seen on his face. She must have been so terrifying to have scared him, even for that split second.

“Ssssso if you’re awake, you’re just… awake? No sleep?”

“No.” He tilted his head to the side, cracked his neck, and resumed staring at the coals.

Her new guard dog was as interesting as dirt. Maybe very old, special dirt, but dirt nonetheless.

“Morning,” Darian said. He rose with a stretch and reached out to grab her waist from behind.

“Morning.” She tried to slither around to face him, but he pulled her back down onto their bedrolls, and resumed snuggling. “Um, it’s dawn.”

“Mmm, I want more of this.” He squeezed her waist, holding her back to his stomach, and nuzzled his lips into her neck before kissing her spine. Like lightning, tingles went down her back and into her snake body.

“D-Darian! He’s right there….” She turned her head to look at the young man over her shoulder, and then nodded toward the giant. The Chimera didn’t look her way, or blink, or anything. He sat there like a statue, his ancient beast hide tied around his neck by its arms and drawn over his back like a cape.

“So? He’s like a dog, he doesn’t care.” Darian gave her ear a kiss, and she squeaked in response. But a few moments later he let her go, and sat up, chuckling. “So,” he said, and he got up with a jump before he started stretching out his muscles. “How does this ‘talk to Gaia’ thing work?”

“I will ask of Gaia,” the giant said. Still he did not move.

“Uh huh.” Darian wandered closer to him, no armor, no sword or shield, nothing. Medusa could feel her heart race faster at their proximity; one strong kick from the giant and Darian would fold in half. “When, where, how?”

The Chimera growled. Sitting on his butt, knees up and forearms draped over them, he was just as tall as Darian. So huge! So ridiculously gigantic, a tower of muscle, Medusa couldn’t wrap her mind around having defeated him. But when the giant looked her way, he gave her a small nod, a tiny thing, a precious gift. He really was her new guard dog.

“You lack patience,” the Chimera said.

Darian made a fist. Medusa could see the glint of anger in his eyes, but it faded into a chuckle a moment later. Those two had the strangest bond she would never understand.

“You’re not wrong. So, what should we call you? The Chimera sounds pretty ridiculous,” Darian said.

The Chimera shrugged.

“Don’t care? How about… um….” He looked to Medusa, and shrugged too.

Medusa rolled her eyes. “Chimera workss.” She rose to a full height, well above what either men could reach, and stretched out dozens of feat of aching, sore snake body before lowering herself back down to the ground to slither toward them. “Is that ok?”

“Whatever you wish.” The giant nodded her way again and looked back to the fire.

“Fine. Chimera it is.” She settled into a coil in front of the two men, and looked Chimera straight in the eye. She ignored the part of her that was scared of him, big and brutal as he was; he was her guard dog from then on, after all. “Chimera, ask Gaia and find out where this entity we’re hunting is.”

Chimera grumbled, so deep Medusa could feel it through the ground into her scales, and he got up. She backed away, but Chimera turned to the side, and walked out ten feet. Once he had some clear grass in an open area, he got down onto his bare knees again, and started to dig up the earth. His hands broke through the ground like water, and he scooped rocks and dirt to the sides until he’d dug himself a foot-deep hole.

Darian and Medusa blinked at each other, but gathered around and watched anyway.

Medusa gasped when Chimera bit a chunk out of his wrist. He grimaced with the pain — even the giant felt pain from that sort of wound — and spit the skin he’d torn off into the hole. Then he spit out the blood in his mouth, and followed it with the blood from his wrist, all into the hole. Only then did she notice the beast-like fangs he had, now soaked in red.

She almost reached out to try and treat the wound, but then she remembered the fight. The arrows she’d fired into the giant were ignored. The wounds this beast sustained were superfluous. And right before her eyes, she watched his wrist heal over in seconds. Her new guard dog was terrifying.

He hummed, a deep sound that filled the earth around them until it was rumbling. The blood vibrated and churned, the chirps of birds vanished, the whistling of leaves ceased, and the wind around them grew to a standstill. Dead silence, except for the trembling earth beneath them. Like a minor earthquake, it filled Medusa until her snake tail was tingling at its tip, and her teeth were jittering together.

The blood reached up out of the pool, and scooped some of the earth into its hole. Medusa stared down at the madness, and tried to blink away what must have been her imagination. But again the blood reached up, and with a wave of its red form, it scooped more dirt back into the hole.

Chimera put his right hand into the blood, drowned the head of the snake tattoo in the red, and let the sentient pool bury his hand until it disappeared into the ground. The red earth clung tight to his skin, and just like the Chimera, it rumbled. A gentle earthquake, a soft thing nothing more than pleasant vibrations underneath Medusa’s scales. But, watching the soaked ruby earth hug to Chimera and mold around his flesh made her whole body tremble. The Earth was talking to the beast.

They stood there for some time. Chimera rumbled deep in his chest in tune with the soft earthquakes, and his arm did not budge. The insanity of what she was witnessing settled into her belly, and she looked down at the ground after some time. Gaia, the Earth, mother to titans and grandmother to gods, was speaking to them. She lowered her body closer to the ground, and placed her hands upon the grass. Vibrations. Just like her voice in her chest when she talked. She smiled, and looked at Chimera. The beast looked back at her, and tilted his head to the side. She confused him. Well, he confused her! Two could play at that game.

A few minutes later, the giant removed his hand, and shook the red dirt free of him. Some red stayed, and Medusa thought it was some dirt still stuck to him, but he used his other hand to wipe off the leftovers, and two red dots stayed on his hand. Two red dots where the snake tattoo’s eyes were.

“Gaia has given me the scent of… your taint,” he said, and he gestured to Darian with his tattooed hand. “I will be able to track down the work of the Fates, as long as it is within the touch of the Earth.”

Medusa gasped. Darian frowned, and eyed the beast and his altered tattoo more closely.

“Alright,” Darian said. “So you can sense me?”

“I can.”

“And can you sense where our target is?”

Chimera brought the hand to his face, took a few short sniffs of the tattoo’s eyes, and nodded. “Two days hard walk to the North, on the coast.”

Darian stood up straight with a jolt. Medusa stood up straight too, and snapped up her bow ready to shoot. But Darian didn’t move after the jump; instead, he stood there, and glared at Chimera, hands in tight fists at his sides.

“Tiryns!?”

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~~Darian~~

His whole body ached, and it wasn’t from his fight with the giant — well, that too, but it wasn’t the main reason for his ache. His body ached whenever he thought about Tiryns, Proetus, and his wife Stheneboea. Every time he pictured that woman’s face, beautiful, disgusting, his fists clenched until his fingers cracked and his wrists hurt. Medusa must have noticed, she kept glancing his way, and when he turned to catch her glance, she snapped back to staring at the horizon and slithering forward.

He wasn’t surprised. He could feel the anger he was radiating. Worse, every so often the edges of his vision started to blur white, and he had to shake his head to suppress the rising bloodlust. He’d have to walk into Tiryns, with V carved into his forehead, every inch of his body demanding revenge, and not take it. If he tried to kill the king and queen, he’d be risking everything. But it was all he could think about. The sickening irony of being forced back into that cursed city while barred from the only reason he’d ever want to go back, was infuriating.

“Any idea what I’m even looking for while I’m in there?” he said.

Chimera was ahead of them, walking the grass and scouting the hills with a hand up to block the sun. “I do not.”

“How could you not know? You managed to track where something is that’s over seventy miles away!”

Chimera grunted, looked over his shoulder at him — the lion mouth on his head was terrifying — and shrugged. “Gaia can sense where, not what.”

Darian grumbled some more, and kicked at the dirt several times before he fell into stride next to Medusa.

“Are you… going to be ok?” she said.

“No.”

Medusa winced and pulled away. Her hair fell down flat again her shoulders, and she slumped. He’d snapped at her, the one damn thing going well in his life.

He reached for her hand. “Sorry. Really, just….” Just thinking about Proetus and how he betrayed me makes me want to rip out his insides with my bare hands. “I’m trying to calm down.”

The gorgon looked down at where his fingers were touching hers. She hesitated, something on her mind, but after a moment she nodded and took his hand into hers.

“Thank you. But your anger is… I would be angry too. This thing we’re chasing, whatever it is, is in Tiryns. That can’t be coincidence.”

“Exactly! This is a game, someone’s screwing with me. Either the Fates or whoever this thief is, they know about me, about Proetus and Stheneboea, about my past. But how would they know about Chimera’s ability to track? The Fates knew. So either this thief learned from the Fates, or this thief didn’t know at all, and they were just waiting at Tiryns for….”

“For what?”

“For… when I eventually show up and kill Proetus and his wife.”

Medusa frowned down at him, and Darian looked away.

“You shouldn’t,” she said.

“Why not? I told you what they did to me.”

“Not all of it! I only know parts.”

“I….” Damn it. “I was Proetus’s guard captain, alright? He picked me to be his right hand man, and I protected his streets, his life, his wife, his everything. I protected that bastard’s whole damn world. Everything! For four years I was the reason that man could step outside his walls and not get killed. Four years I trained his soldiers, watched over his treasures, guarded his walls, and for what? For what!? So the moment his wife accuses me of something, he can betray me? So he can try and kill me?” White entered his eyes again, blurred the edges of his sight but sharpened everything in front of him, like a target. “He would have seen me dead because he’d rather listen to his whoring, manipulating, conniving wife instead of his best friend!?”

He wasn’t holding Medusa’s hand anymore; he didn’t remember when he had let go of it. Instead, his hands were on his shield, and he threw the slab of ebony toward a nearby tree hard enough to it inches into the wood, through the bark. The sound of its crashing intrusion was deafening.

“Have you ever looked into the eyes of someone you thought was the most amazing person, the best friend you always wanted, and have them smile back, only to find out they were plotting your death?” His voice had risen to a yell, until he could feel it in his bones. “I want to rip out his throat! I want to slit hers! I want to see their blood flow, and then throw their bodies into the streets for the birds! He was my best friend! I want… want….”

Chimera and Medusa were both looking at him. The giant looked like stone, but he’d moved next to Medusa, and a bit in front of her, like he was protecting her from something, or someone. Medusa was staring at Darian with her mouth open, a hand up to her lips, and her eyes wide. Her snake hair had raised back and was glaring at him with tongues and fangs on display too.

He took a deep breath. Then another. He looked down at his hands, and made slow grabs at the air with them while staring at his palms. Palm. The other palm was holding his sword.

He didn’t remember drawing his sword either.

The small blade became so heavy, he let it go, and it stabbed into the grass to stand upright. Dramatic, it made him groan, and before the poetic weight of it could make things any worse, he picked the blade out of the ground, cleaned it off, and sheathed it. Getting the shield out of the tree was harder, but he knew he was strong enough to rip it free. And once he did, he put it on his arm, and started walking.

“D-Darian… wait.” Medusa slithered after him, grabbed his hand, and turned him to face her.

He looked down. No use in saying anything, nothing to be said.

She stroked his knuckles, and lowered herself down until she was eye level with him. Darian could tell the Chimera giant was near, maybe ready to jump in if Darian attacked Medusa. The huge, dumb brute had become Medusa’s new guard in no time at all. Something Darian thought he was only days ago. This journey was already bringing out a side of him he’d had hoped to leave buried in his prison quarry.

But Medusa pulled him closer until her face was only an inch from his, and her snake hair nudged into his neck and shoulders.

“I’m going to be your misssssing piece, remember?” She tugged on his hand, and kissed his forehead.

He tried to step back, but she didn’t let go.

“I… wanted to just leave this all behind. None of this idiocy. I don’t even want revenge, not really.” Liar, you know you do. “I just want to stay away from all this garbage, but when I think about Tiryns, it’s… it’s like a fire I’ve lost control of. If I see those two again, I can’t guarantee anything.”

“What happens happensss. I’ll be there to help you.” She pulled him back closer, and put another kiss on him again.

Gods, she was like soothing water on a burn. The fire in his chest faded away, and with time, he put his forehead against hers and kissed her back.

“You really have guts,” he said. “I must seem like some sort of scary, mindless killer.”

“And I know I’ve scared you before, when I’ve transformed.” She shook her head side to side, rubbing their noses together.

Shit, she saw that. “Sorry, I—”

“It’s ok. We have our dark sides. And they are frightening.” She motioned back to the giant behind them with a hand. “We’re all pretty scary.”

“A trio of monsters,” he said, and he laughed. “What a story for the Fates.”

“A monster wouldn’t go on a quest to save a friend.” She took his hand, and started slithering toward Tiryns once more. “Speaking of, you’ve told me nothing of Pegasus. Who are they?”

He chuckled and rubbed at the back of his neck. The woman could sooth his frustrations, his temper, his rage with just a few words and a soft touch. And then distract him from what bothered him. She really had the makings of a mother — something Athena’s cursed had robbed her the ability of. Already his thoughts went to dark places, but he shook his head to dislodge them and squeezed Medusa’s fingers a little tighter in his palm.

“Athena came to me, after I had been sent on the quest to kill this guy.” Darian gestured to the giant following them, who gave him a low growl in return. Darian grinned at him. “And she told me of a special well in Corinth. Pirene, water of the Muses.”

“Athena.” Medusa hissed, but did the same as Darian, shaking her head to dislodge the thoughts. “And what did you find?”

He shrugged and laughed at the memory. “I found no Muses, but sure enough, other creatures were there, strange and exotic creatures I never knew existed. They scampered away at the sight of me. Pegasus was there too, but he did not flee, and when I approached him, he approached me in return. A beautiful, white-winged horse. Wings so massive, they dwarf those of those Erinyes she-demons. A coat so white, it almost shined like jewelry. Dark, deep eyes. Intelligent eyes. Pegasus was no simple horse, but a… a… a friend. He couldn’t talk, but he could understand me, and we became closer friends than a man and his dog. We soared the skies together, explored Greece and beyond, all the way to Egypt and Persia and the frozen North. Together, we defeated him,” again he motioned to the Chimera, who again growled in return, “and others! We saved people from dangerous monsters, made friends with kings and queens, went on more quests to retrieve lost items of divine value, and defeated more deadly foes to save yet more cities of Greece. I became — we became famous! Together, him and I, we spent our days facing danger head on, saving people when we could, and… and bathing in the glory of people’s praise when battle wearied us. The whole world was in our hands, and we both loved it.”

He took a deep breath, and sighed long with the bitter sweet memories of his time with Pegasus. They really had been great times.

“I only discovered later that Proetus had actually sought my death, but by then I was an icon, an idol. People knew my name, they knew Pegasus’s name, and neither he nor Iobates could move against me.” A painful memory hit him of Iobates’ second daughter. No use in bringing her up now.

Medusa was still slithering forward, but she had turned to look at him and her jaw had dropped. Even her snake hair was raised and staring at him like he was some sort of magnificent, unknowable entity.

“All thisss… happened while I was on my island?” she said.

He nodded. “Yeah. I was no fool though, I wasn’t going to go fight a woman who could turn people to stone with a glance. And besides, I knew what happened to you, I saw no reason to ever try and hurt you.”

She squeezed his hand and smiled. “Why were you so different to everyone else?”

“Ego.” He smiled back and shrugged. “I don’t let the gods dictate what I think, I never did. And… and that was part of what lead to this.” He used his free hand to point at the V etched into his forehead. Bile started to rise in his throat again, and he couldn’t hide the wince that came with it.

“It’s ok. You can tell me about that later.” She patted his hand, and lowered her torso to slither closer to him, shoulder to shoulder,

She really was too good to him. If he wasn’t careful, he was going to lose that. He had to get control, dig his heels in and keep the insane fury inside his skull from blinding him. It wasn’t normal, or natural, the Fates had robbed him of something and replaced it with this bloodlust madness. Ever since he’d kill those robbers and saw the shocked, horrified faces of his parents and brother, he’d known something was wrong. They were terrified of him, of the carnage he’d embraced that day to slaughter those thieves.

He could still remember licking the knife to see what their blood tasted like.

“So,” he said, and he rubbed his eyes a few times to try and realign his thoughts, “to the East is Gallea and Pinna, a hard day’s journey. To the North is Tiryns, a couple day’s journey if we push ourselves.” He squinted at Medusa and frowned. “I suppose I could tell you you should wait for me with the satyrs, but I know you won’t.”

“I won’t!”

Darian rolled his eyes. “Alright, but I can’t take you into the city with me.”

She nodded. “Chimera and I will find shelter in the forests nearby. I am sure he can find us a place to hide.”

Chimera gave a loud grunt, but he nodded. With the pelt of the weird animal he wore over his head and down his back, it reminded Darian of their first fight. The snake tattoo, the massive teeth that framed his face from the lion’s mouth over his forehead, the goat horns on the lion’s head, he couldn’t blame onlookers from describing him as a three-headed beast. He was an intimidating, terrifying bastard.

“You sure?” he said. “I know I said you’d be safe with him, but… he is a beast.”

The giant rumbled, voice deep enough Darian could feel it through the ground, and he took larger steps to catch up to the two of them.

“What?” Darian said.

Medusa looked up at the Chimera, and then to Darian. She looked worried, Darian could see it on her face, but she took a deep breath and settled.

“If it comes to it, I will beat him again.”

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Night. They were all tired, or at least he and Medusa were. Chimera didn’t even understand the concept, he just walked and walked, and only stopped when they said they had to stop before their feet — or scales — fell off.

He made a good guard dog, Darian admitted. The towering slab of muscle and strength was a good hundred feet off, on the crest of a rolling hill, and he stood there with eyes scanning the horizon. They didn’t need to take shifts, Chimera would watch until the sun was up, and they’d be off again. He made traveling very efficient — if they could trust him to not kill them in their sleep.

Darian trusted him. He did not like him, but he trusted him. A dog, loyal to the leader of the pack, Medusa in this case. Maybe that was why it bothered him? Medusa had earned the brute’s servitude, and not him? He’d lost the battle — of course he did, even with the power of the Fates strengthening him, what was he to do against an ancient giant? It still ate at him though. His first real defeat. And if he lost against the Chimera, what other twists and turns did this fool’s journey have in store for him?

He poked at the fire. Medusa was laying down already, and starting to drift to sleep with her human half on her bedroll. They’d found a deer for her — she shot it herself — and she’d eaten it whole. The Chimera had watched, and even with the opportunity available to kill Medusa while she was preoccupied, he hadn’t taken it. So, at least Darian could trust him to not kill her once he was alone in Tiryns. He didn’t think the giant would, loyal as he was proving to be, but the reassurance was nice.

Darian bit off a chunk of the rabbit he’d finished cooking, and poked at the fire a little more. The flames licked at the wood, tasting it before enveloping it. He threw another stick in and watched it become consumed by fire. He knew that feeling, every time the blinding fury started to flow into him, it overwhelmed him like flame.

He sighed and looked up to the sky. Stars. What tremendous and loathsome entities looked down upon him and his life from there, manipulating, weaving, painting art with the blood of people? The Fates, beyond his reach in their realm of spirits and gods, toyed with him and strung him along. Lied to him, baited him into more adventures that ended with mountains of the dead. Would that happen to him again? And Medusa, would she be one of the corpses on the pile?

He gritted his teeth. Gallea and Pinna would sing tales about this, no doubt. Gods, a grand adventure about the hero Bellerophontes and two monsters, his new companions, on a quest to save the only friend he had left: Pegasus. Would they sing about Medusa’s plight? Of course not, no one wanted to hear about the misery of Medusa, a woman, a monster, only that Athena deemed her worthy of her curse. No, the tales would be about him, and they would be twisted into a story about him embarking on a quest to help the Fates. All the more to feed the wheels of blind faith, right? More people lined up at the temples, worshiping gods, worshiping the Fates, worshiping and praying and sacrificing to whatever idiotic—

No. Stop. Take a breath. Look at the fire, see what happens to those sticks when the fire devours it. Don’t let that happen to you.

He turned to look at Medusa. She was watching him, sleepy but watching him still, and she smiled when he caught her eye.

“Hi,” she said. So cute.

“Hi.”

“You shouldn’t think too much. I did that, after I was cursed. It took many years to get out of my own head.”

Medusa. Seeing her smile at him slowed his heart to a gentle thump, and the pain in his chest faded away. She’d been through far worse, and she was the nicest person he’d ever met. His missing piece.

The thought earned a chuckle from him, and he crawled over across the grass to lay down on his bedroll next to her.

“You’ve learned a lot about me in the past few days. Still like me?”

She sneaked the end of her tail behind him and poked him in the back with it, making him chuckle and reach behind him to grab it. Her snake skin was soft, far softer than it looked.

“Of courssse.” Her hand found his shoulder, and with him only in his tunic and sandals, she squeezed his arm and rubbed her thumb against the muscle. “You have muscles. What girl doesn’t love muscles?”

He laughed. “So does Chimera.”

“Bah, he’s nothing but muscle. I like you for a lot of other reasons.” She slithered her torso further along the bedroll toward him, and leaned in to put a kiss on his lips. “I can carry you like a toy doll, all for me.”

He supposed he should have felt a little emasculated, but it only made him laugh again.

She kissed him, plucking at his bottom lip with hers before reaching up to stroke his beard with her fingertips. Teasing his chin with her hand, she nudged her nose against his, and reached out with the arm underneath her to touch his chest through his tunic.

“It’s a shame Chimera is near. We didn’t get to touch each other at all last night,” she said.

Darian looked over his shoulder behind him. The silhouette of the huge giant stood on the top of the hill, outlined by stars. Grinning, he turned back to Medusa, leaned in, and started to kiss her neck.

“Darian… Darian what are you doing?” She pushed against his chest with one hand, and the other on his chin switched to his shoulder to press against him. He didn’t stop kissing her. “Darian! If you keep doing that, he’ll see!” Her voice had turned into a whisper, but a loud one; she was trying to be angry at him without alerting anyone.

“He’s not looking. Besides,” he kissed up along her jaw, and then down her neck to her collar, “he won’t care.”

“Darian! This is….” She started to squirm, and pushed against him a little more, but they were halfhearted pushes, and Darian only had to slip his hand behind the small of her back and pull her in to press her belly to his.

He had a sneaking suspicion that Medusa’s sexual desire went deeper than she knew. She said she worshiped both Athena and Eros; one embraced chastity, the other embraced sexuality. Quite the conflicted creature, Medusa, and he could see it plain as day when he caressed her spine where the wraps left it exposed between her shoulder blades. She melted against him, but guilt was painted on her face. And the guiltier she looked, the quicker and easier it was to warm her.

And she looked especially guilty right then, looking past Darian to the giant on the hill while he touched her body.

“Darian.” Her voice was a very soft whisper, and he could hear the heat on it. “Please, if you… don’t stop….”

“I thought you said I should feel free to come to you when I want sex?” He pulled a little away from her, but not to stop. Instead, his hand slid over her bare waist, up along her stomach, and under the band that covered her breasts. She was wearing an apodesme underneath the usual cross-chest wrap she wore, tight enough to keep her large breasts snug to her body, and when he pulled it up to let both of her huge breasts slip free of its constriction, he could see her relieved sigh. It must have been uncomfortable. The next moment, relief turned back into guilt, and she put her knuckle to her lip.

“I know, but… he might see.”

She was just so much fun to tease. Holding her between the guilt of doing what he wanted, and embarrassment about what they were doing with someone so close, it was unbelievably cute. And when he started to gently run his fingertips along the underside of one her breasts, her expression broke with raised eyebrows and parted lips. A tiny moan escaped her, and she shook her head, as if she could deny the noises she was making.

“If you stay nice and quiet, he’ll never know.” He cupped the whole underside of her breast, and its size overflowed his palm and fingers. She may have disliked her large, heavy breasts, and her big, puffy nipples, but he didn’t. He fondled her with a gentle touch, circled her swelling nipple with his thumb, and grinned at her when she shivered.

“But… but I….”

He did feel a little guilty, manipulating her like this, but when he gave her nipple the gentlest pinch, and she whimpered in return, arousal threw any guilt he had away. She was so damn beautiful. The way she chewed on a finger’s knuckle, looking at him with pleading yellow eyes, and the way her snake hair hugged tight to her body with embarrassment, it all set his blood alight.

He slid further down the bedroll, and Medusa watched him, eyes begging that he stop, but when he wrapped his lips around her other breast’s nipple, her eyes closed and her head rolled back a little. She stuck her chest out toward him, arching her back, and her hand reached down to slip her fingers into his hair. He suckled on her, slipped his hand behind her to find the scaled rump where her ass would have been, and pulled it to him to slip some of her snake length between his knees.

With his lips wrapped tight to her body, his hand behind her drifted back over her scaly hip, and then down her abdomen where they found the wrap she wore snug to her hips. He put his hand down against her belly scales beneath the cloth, and teased the soft snake skin with fingers sliding up until they found the lowest spot of her body still human: her sex. And with a teasing touch, he put his fingers onto her folds, and started to massage them.

“Darian, pleassse, thisss isn’t fair.” She kept looking down, then across over him to where Chimera stood, then back to him. But, a gentle kiss against her nipple destroyed her resolve every time, and her fingers in his hair only pulled him closer.

Her body was so soft. Her breasts, heavy against his lips, were supple and the most delicate texture, like silk from the East. He groaned into them, sucked her whole nipple into his mouth with force, enough to make her mewl and whimper, before easing his kiss into gentle licks around the swollen areola. Her snakeskin always surprised him with how pliable and delicate it was too, especially along her belly, gentle against his loincloth where he pulled her to him. Her labia were wet, warm, and he could feel her muscles starting to quiver when his digits grew closer to her clitoris.

Her hips pushed toward him, and he could see it when he looked up from her breast that she was aching with need. Her mouth was open, eyes half-closed, and where her snake length was now between his legs, she was rubbing her belly scales closer to him and pressing them against his thighs.

Her whole body started to tremble when his fingers slid further up her dripping folds, and found her swollen clit. She squeaked, and started to chew on her knuckle of the arm underneath her, but her other arm hugged him and pressed him tighter to her breast. He smiled into her perfect skin, buried her engorged nipple with licks, and used two fingers to catch her budding clit between them while stroking it up and down in a gentle motion. Her whimpers turned into moans, and her shivers turned into whole-body quivering as the juices on her pussy grew until they were dripping and coating his fingers and knuckles where they rubbed her.

“He’s going to hear you,” Darian said.

“No! Darian, you — nnh!”

He gave her nipple a tender bite, enough to make her squeak. At the same time, his soaked fingers on her clit rubbed faster, harder, until he could feel her pussy trembling with muscle spasms against his hand.

She tried to stay quiet, she really did. He could see her shake her head, and her snake hair coil on itself in denial, but when the muscle spasms came, her whimpers turned into moans. Juices flowed onto his hand, and he stopped stroking her to let her ride the waves while her pink muscles leaked more fluids onto him. He stopped suckling on her breast as well, but as he watched the gorgon cum, he gave the underside of her breast gentle kisses, and more of the same for her areola while she tried and failed to keep quiet.

“Darian, you… I’m so embarrassed,” she said. She frowned at him, but the mixture of surly and orgasmic bliss was too cute, and he chuckled.

He reached down, undid the loop of his loincloth, and slid it off. At the same time, he crawled back up further along the bedroll until he was face to face with Medusa again. He put his hand into the small of her back, and pulled her against him. With her snake length between his legs, and them both on their sides facing each other, his member slid under her wrap and rested against her belly button, his balls against her drenched lips. The sensation of her soft flesh and warm juices soaking him made his heart race and his breath quicken.

“He probably did hear that, yeah.” Grinning like a demon, he leaned in and started to put kisses along her collar, with his hand behind her and keeping her hips firmly against him. Medusa, despite herself, was squirming, and her leaking slit rubbed up and down along the underside of his cock. It wasn’t long before her warm fluids were dripping from his testicles, and he groaned into her neck at sensation of her body’s liquids coating him.

“You planned this!” She shook her head more, but her hand was still hooked behind him, caressing his hair, and her hips nudged against him in a slow, up-and-down motion that rubbed her folds against everything along the base and underside of his length.

“I did no such thing.” Evil grin.

“Liar!” she said, and winced with her volume before she started whispering. “I… I think he might be looking at us. He might….”

Darian pulled his hips back, used his hand to guide his member forward, and started to press against her entrance. He only pushed in far enough to slip in the tip of his cock though, and grinned up at Medusa when she pouted down at him. She looked so torn. She wanted it, he could see it in her raised, scale eyebrows, hear it in her little mewls, and feel it in her shuddering, soaked walls.

He slipped his cock a single inch into her squeezing insides, and then pulled back out, easing the head of his member out of her, only to ease it back in. Her tight muscles exposed the glans of his shaft, and he shuddered at the powerful, blissful shocks her hot, soaked flesh sent down his length. Gods, the feel of her trembling muscles squeezing and massaging the tip of his cock, swollen, ripe, each bit of friction against her pussy filled his center with tiny waves of pleasure. He wanted to fuck her, fuck her hard, slam her down and bury himself in her — but not yet.

“What… what’re you doing?” she said. They had both pulled away from each other a little, enough so they could look at each other while Darian kept his hand on her hip, and fucked the first inch of her insides.

He smiled at her, the most mischievous smile in the world, but said nothing. Easing his hips back, he slipped his cock free of her hungry body, and when he pushed forward again, the head of his shaft rubbed upward into her clit. She whimpered louder. Reaching down again, he guided it back against the tight, squeezing entrance of her canal, and pushed into her a single inch once more.

Medusa pouted at him harder. “Please… don’t make me… beg.”

“I thought you wanted to stop?” He pulled out of her again, and rubbed his soaked tip up and down against her drenched lips. Her folds felt amazing against his glans, and he pushed his hips forward again to run his length up against her clit until her lips were pressed to his balls once more. Warm juices renewed, drenching his testicles all the more as he rubbed himself up and down against her lips.

“But… but….”

The shy seductress. Seeing her squirm with need, trapped between arousal and embarrassment, was intoxicating. Drawing her out was normally so easy, but with the Chimera near and able to hear everything, it took extra convincing. He reached behind her again, tickled along her spine with his fingers, and pulled her close so her body was pressed flat to his at the hip, his cock flat against her pussy and their stomachs.

“I’m going to cum soon,” he said into her ear.

“W-wait… wait.” Frowning all the more at him, she reached down, took his length into her hands, and pointed it at her folds. She pulled her hips back to make room, and then sank herself down onto him.

He groaned as her wet muscles spread open around cock, and she squeezed him without pause on the way in. She whimpered into his own ear once she’d taken him to the base, and her drenched slit found his body. Taller than him, her body put her breasts against his neck and chest, but that only made it better. The feel of her heavy, soft breasts overwhelming his chest was like pillows of Elysium.

He grinned up at her. She was trying to frown, but sexual pleasure was ruining the expression. She was moving her hips whether she wanted to or not, and trembling between small nudges of her body toward him.

“You’re so mean,” she said.

“I can’t help it. You’re too damn cute.” He took her hip in his hand again, and rolled onto his back. Medusa squeaked with the position change, and put both her hands against the ground near both sides of his head. Laying over him, her huge breasts dangled over his neck, and he leaned in to kiss them again before setting his head back down and smiling up at her.

“If… we’re like this… he’ll know what we’re doing if he looks.”

“Yeah. He will.” He put both his hands on her hips, and started to rock her back and forth in a gentle rhythm. Her snake length and body was between his legs, and it made it very easy for him to push her down toward his knees, and then pull her back up toward his chest.

“But… but….”

“Here.” He reached up, took her shoulders in his hands, and pulled her down so she was pressed to him. “Stay low.” Then he put his hands back on her hips, and started to build a faster rhythm.

Medusa rested her head against the bedroll, several inches higher than his head, and relaxed her weight on her elbows, her breasts pressed into him and rubbing against his chest and neck. So close, he could tilt his head in, and bathe her sternum, the top of her breasts, all of it in slow, sensuous kisses.

‘Staying low’ was just a tease of course. He knew it, she knew it, no position was going to hide them if the Chimera wanted to watch them. But Medusa embraced it as her excuse to get into it, pushing her body against him and moaning into his ear. Moving her body with his, she squeezed on him in spurts, twisted her hips about, and pushed herself down between his legs to sink herself to the hilt. Balls deep, she hugged him tight and grinded her soaked, hot flesh onto him. Her snake length and lack of legs put her between his knees, but they had found a comfortable rhythm on her island, and they found it again. She slid up on his body until only a couple inches of him remained inside her, squeezed so tight he thought he’d burst, and she slid back down to sink him deep into her quivering insides.

He waited until she’d slid forward along him again before he reached out for her hips, and forced her down against him, hard.

She squeaked, loudly, and embraced Darian with her arms. “Darian! No… too hard… I’ll—” She squeaked again. He slammed her down, hard enough for them both hear the slap of flesh against wet flesh, and enough for Medusa to moan. “Please don’t, he’ll—”

He did it again. Her insides felt divine, shivering around his girth and soaking him with hot fluid. Her juices dripped from his balls, and started to soak into his tunic. He couldn’t stop though, he had penetrate her, skewer her, feel her insides tremble and massage his cock. Taking control, he kept a firm grip on her hips and raised her toward him, before slamming her down again. The creature in his arms gave up, collapsed against his chest, and held on. Her moans grew louder, and louder, until anyone nearby would have heard them. Her leaking juices splashed against his abdomen, and it only grew more wet when he started to thrust upward to meet her body when he pushed her down.

The gorgon clenched, her insides tightening until the warm, tingling pleasures of rising fluids started to build between his legs. Her own fluids poured, and Medusa’s moans went quiet while she came around his cock.

Her silence broke when he started to fuck her, harder, faster. She was cumming, but he was still on the edge, and his body demanded release.

“D-D-D-Darian,” she said between thrusts. No more sultry, deep moans; instead, her voice turned into high-pitched, loud groans. She held on, her body convulsing and shaking in spasms, and gushing her cum over his body.

He pushed her hips down again, and again. So close, on the edge of climax, he could feel the warm, tingling waves building up between his legs. The closer he got, the more sensitive everything became, and every thrust into her quivering insides sent pleasuring surges up and down his length. The girth of him swelled until he felt ready to burst, and he forced her down yet again. For just that last moment, with fluids building up inside him, he lost control, and started to slam her down against his body, desperate to reach release. The poor woman on top of him whimpered and squealed, her breasts squashed to his chest with her tightening hug. She was so soft, he felt bad being so rough with her. But he needed to fuck her, needed it like fire. Every clench of her shivering muscles on his swollen cock sent an overwhelming hunger into him, and he couldn’t stop himself from bouncing her on his cock hard enough to make her breasts bounce against his chest.

When his muscles started to squeeze, and his hips bucked when his warm cum started to pour up his length, he slammed her down one last time. The beautiful creature let out a sob, but when he stopped thrusting into her, she collapsed against him, trembled while he kept her balls deep, and grinded her hips side to side on her own. Her tight insides massaged his ripe glans within her, and made each spurt of his thick cum send powerful sparks of pleasure down his length and into his thighs. He slid his hands from her hips, up onto her back, and hugged her tight while the orgasm worked through him, earning another gush of his cum, and another, until he felt the warmth of his liquids leaking out of her to join the huge mess she’d made with her own.

They held each other, panting, quivering with pleasure, and bathing in each other’s glow. One of Darian’s hands sneaked further up her back to find her neck, and he slipped his fingers into her snake hair to stroke the vibrating limbs. Like always, the woman melted into him when he did, and he smiled into her neck as her supple, perfect body molded against his. He sighed in bliss, and flexed his cock and hips up into her drenched insides to try and coax out the last few drops of his seed; each motion made the gorgon mewl, and milk his length with rhythmic squeezes. Wrapped in each other’s arms, they continued to gently rub their bodies against each other, until Darian’s girth at last started to soften.

“You were rough again,” she said, and she put her weight onto her hands again to sit up a little and smile down at him. She had tears in her eyes, but her smile was huge, and before he could say anything, she leaned down toward his head and kissed him.

“Sorry. Couldn’t help myself.”

“I — oh!” Realization hit her. She rolled off of him, pulled her apodesme over her breasts, her chest wrap over that, and grabbed his loincloth. Frowning at him, she used his undergarment and cleaned up the mess of wetness on her body with it, before tossing it back at him. “There! Serves you right, doing that to me with Chimera so near.”

He blinked at the cloth, wet, and laughed. Using the fabric, he cleaned off the mess of juices from his body as well, and tossed the cloth aside before pulling down his tunic. He looked over his shoulder to check, and sure enough, the Chimera giant was still standing watch.

“He doesn’t seem to have moved.”

“You… you think he didn’t hear?”

“Oh I guaranteed he heard you.”

Medusa blushed so hard, he could see it in the night and firelight. She turned around again, but he slid over onto her bedroll and hooked a hand around her stomach. She didn’t remove it.

Holding her from behind, he leaned in and put small kisses along her neck. “I am sorry though, that was mean. But, when I see you get into it, I can’t help myself. I… if I cross a line, really, be straight with me.”

“I… I enjoyed it… a lot….” She caressed his fingers against her stomach. “But, I need a way to ssstop you, if I need you to stop.”

“A safe word.”

“Safe word?”

“Yeah.” He kissed her again, slipped his thumb up to catch her caressing finger, and caressed it in return. “A word you can say that’ll stop me dead in my tracks.”

“Stop doesn’t work?”

“Do you really want me to stop every time you say stop?”

She blushed — always so brightly — until he could feel the heat on her neck where his lips were. “No… ok, a safe word. Um… um….”

“You can tell me later, before next time,” he said.

She nodded, and her snake hair started to kiss and nudge into his jaw. He turned to kiss them back, and smiled when Medusa giggled before looking over her shoulder to him.

“I’m ssso embarrassed. I… I came, and… Chimera heard it all! … and it’s your fault!”

Darian smirked at her. She may have said so, but she was smiling and blushing at the same time again; he thought he might have even seen a little mischievous grin on her lips. So he smirked at her, hugged her tight, and hid his face in her neck.

“Sorry again.”

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~~Otrera~~

“Come now, dear. You were sent to guard me for when Bellerophontes arrives, yes? And that could be at any time,” the queen consort said.

Stheneboea was definitely a beautiful woman, curvy, with long blond hair and a sharp, queenly chin. An older woman, but that only added flavor to her beauty. And the men she had with her didn’t seem to mind at all.

The wing of the palace was well sealed off, with only the one door in, and Otrera stood at that door. She stood proud, hard, but her eyes drifted at the sight of the inside of the palace. Such a glorious, lovely palace of white marble pillars and beautiful vases depicting great epics, but also filled with delightful flowers. It all made Otrera sick, and long for her home in the woods.

She followed the guards into the queen consort’s room, her personal room, where Proetus’s wife could engage in whatever games she wished free from the eyes of anyone she did not wish to see. And there, the queen slipped off her cloak, her white chiton, and exposed her nudity to everyone without so much as a blush. She crawled onto her ridiculous bed of luxury, and beckoned for everyone to come join her.

The Amazon warrior was a stark contrast to the lovely queen, hard muscle, short height, long black hair, golden dark skin, and a host of scars over her body, most hidden under the leather armor she wore. The guards wore typical hoplite armor, greaves and breastplates and ridiculous helmets, but she was an Amazon, and she wore what would let her breathe battle, feel battle, and dance in its shadow. Where they weighed themselves down in bronze, her leather cuirass was custom fitted, connected to pteruges leather straps that dangled from her waist to her knees. The cuirass held a large, curved, metal band across where her right breast was hidden within the armor, and her left leg also held metal strapped to its thickest frame, as did her right forearm.

Let the idiot men don their thick, heavy body armor. What good was all that weight if you were fighting one on one? There would be no phalanx when the madness started. One-on-one combat was where Otrera shined; thus, she was the perfect body guard to a queen consort.

She was not, however, the perfect attendant to the queen’s sexual adventures.

“How King Proetus lets you get away with this is beyond me,” Otrera said. She knocked her spear’s shaft tip against the floor a few times, and rotated her left arm that carried her bronze shield. The pain was still there, but at least it was nothing more than a dull ache now.

“Proetus is getting old, my dear. Older, and far too busy with running the city for his simple wife.”

The queen chuckled, and let out a low, sultry sigh as she pulled one of the guards onto the bed. Naked, Stheneboea’s large, tawny breasts bounced with her enthusiasm. She really was beautiful, and Otrera couldn’t help but sneak glances her way. Amazons spent all their time with women, and sexual delights between her sisters of battle were normal. All the merrier if they’d captured a man to share. Were it different circumstances, Otrera may have joined the queen.

But circumstances were not good for a such reckless, wild abandon. Otrera had to stand guard, and try and ignore the blatant display of lust. Her eyes lingered on Stheneboea’s body, the soft curves that would be unwelcome among Amazons, but that didn’t mean those soft curves wouldn’t have felt glorious in her fingers, under the sheets, and against her skin. Otrera shook her head to dislodge the thoughts, but no matter how hard she tried, she couldn’t help but watch as the guard the queen had seduced, and another guard, and another guard again, joined Stheneboea on the bed.

Otrera was sure this snake of a woman had bewitched Proetus with more than just her charms, but it was of no concern to her. She had a mission, and Stheneboea was just a means to that end.

The thought of Bellerophontes skewered on her spear made her smile. The wait would be worth it.

“My dear, whatever did the small warrior do to you?”

The queen was looking at her. Otrera had drifted off thinking about killing that cursed man, but the queen drew her back. Stheneboea was straddling one of the guards — all the guards were perfect examples of strength and youth of course — and she had the other two kneeling on either side of her. Her hands were on their members, and she was stroking their lengths in slow, teasing motions. She grinned at Otrera, and didn’t break eye contact when she leaned in, and kissed one of their cocks. She took her time too, suckling it with playful touches of her lips.

Otrera tried to look away, but damn it, the queen was beautiful, the men were fit, and the sexual display was only ten feet from her. Enough, Otrera, do not let this distract you. All that matters is the mission. Besides, this woman is a conniving, manipulating, selfish bitch. Don’t let her ensnare you in whatever web of deceit she spins.

“He killed several of my warrior sisters, and he left me for dead.” She rotated her shield arm a few more times. It would never fully heal, thanks to that bastard. Not even after what Andromeda did for her.

“Oh, is that all? I thought perhaps he’d stolen your lover?” the queen said, and she laughed as she got comfortable upon the man she was straddling. With dancing hips, she sank the guard’s cock into her, and moaned loudly, too loudly. Otrera could see the woman was delighting in putting on the display just as much as the sex itself. What a hollow woman.

But the guards didn’t seem to mind. They groaned when she touched them, moved with her when she moved, and smiled with inflated egos when Stheneboea whimpered in delight and trembled in orgasm.

Idiot men, unable to see the queen was enjoying herself because of herself. If Stheneboea could have created the context of her dark, dirty defiance with toys instead of men, she would have.

Andromeda assured her Bellerophontes would come to kill the queen consort, and considering how much Otrera wanted to hurt the bitch on the bed, she couldn’t blame him. Maybe she could arrange for Stheneboea to die along with Bellerophon and blame him for it.

The thought made her smile.