

## The World

Let me tell you a story, dear reader. It is a story about two brothers and a sister. It is a story about the gods and how the world operates. It is a story not known to anyone else, and I am its sole raconteur. All I ask is that you keep your mind and peace until I am finished, such that you may reserve your thoughts for when the time comes. Now, let us begin.

Zeus, king of the gods, sat atop his throne. The day on Mount Olympus was as long as it was beautiful. But it was not enough, not for Zeus. He demanded a gift. A gift from all the gods there were. He yelled this from the highest point of the highest mountain, such that all would hear it.

“Hear me, all divine descendents of great Khaos! Seven suns and seven moons from now, I, ruler the sky, shall hold a banquet representative of my splendor. I expect you’ll understand my glory is to be celebrated, and as such I expect to be gifted as much as I am gifted.”

His announcement had come as a great surprise to all the gods. They scrambled to find items and objects to be considered of great value to lord Zeus. The eight of the current olympians had the hardest time finding a gift. Aphrodite, Poseidon, Hera, Demeter, Hestia, Ares, Hephaestus, and Athena refused to meet their king's gaze when he looked upon them following his announcement. That was until Hephaestus had come upon a great revelation. He asked his sister Athena to buy him time, as his work could not be completed in the seven days Zeus had given him.

Athena, quick and clever as the goddess of wisdom should be, flew up to the sky, and spoke to the sun and moon themselves. She persuaded Helios and Selene to slow their passage across the horizon, such as to give Hephaestus enough time to complete his work. Still, it was not enough, for although he is the most skilled inventor there ever was and ever will be, he lacked the ingredients necessary to complete his work. The twin models of man which sat on his iron were formless and rather dull.

This is where the other gods came in. They each gifted the model a speck of their divine beings. Aphrodite and her first son, Eros, each gifted their image; the once dull and ugly models of woman and man were now vibrant and beautiful. Hera, struck by the dazzling display, immediately gave them access to her domain of marriage. Demeter gave them the ability to grow just as her plants would, and Poseidon gifted them with the might of the sea within their veins such to nourish their growth. Ares then gave them the drive to fight and compassion to win, and his sister Athena then gifted them with strategy and knowledge to know when fighting was not always necessary. Lastly, the oldest of the Olympians, Hestia, strode forward and placed a hand on each of the person's cheeks. This was the first time man and woman ever experienced the touch of motherly love, and it solidified the drive for a healthy home within their hearts. The gods were extremely pleased with their work, and hid the humans quietly until the arrival of the banquet.

They would not have to wait long, as Helios and Selene galloped across the sky faster than they had ever galloped before. Sometimes they came closer to each other than they should have, and night and day mixed oddly with each other. This is what we now know as dusk and dawn.

When the time came for the olympians to unveil to Zeus their gift, the olympians sheepishly presented him with the two humans. The king of the gods looked down at the two beings before him. He studied each of them carefully, searching for any imperfections or shortcomings. Instead, he laughed and clapped his hands together with glee.

“Beautiful! Marvelous work my dear son. And to the rest of you, each gift given to them is a gift given to me. Truly, it is as if they were created in my own image,” he then added offhandedly, “Not quite as great, obviously, but still a triumphant effort.” Zeus counted each of the gods at his celebration, and found everyone to be accounted for. All but one.

“Where is the ruler of the dead and buried, my eldest blood brother, Hades?” Zeus frowned, “I sent for him, did I not?”

“He is not here,” said a mysterious voice, “Your brother battles for control and power in the Underworld as we speak. He hopes you understand his absence.” Zeus was taken aback by this.

“I see, this no-good brother of mine thinks he can deny his king’s command.” Zeus scowled, “I shall think up a suitable punishment for him, then.”

The air crackled with electricity as Zeus’s anger grew, yet the mysterious voice also grew agitated, and the wind blew with a cold certainty in response.

“Your brother is in the midst of a war, and you punish him for not attending a foolish banquet?” The venom in the voice grew harsher, “You have robbed him of aid by taking from him the support of the rest of the deathless gods. Even I had to abandon my post at his side to attend this idiotic feast.”

Zeus’s scowl deepened. “You think you can address the King of the gods with such a manner?” He hefted his great lightning bolt in his arms, “I will kill you for such insolence!”

The voice chuckled mirthlessly. “I’d like to see you try.” It responded coldly. And Zeus did try. He leaned back and hurled his bolt with all his might at the source of the voice. He did so with such swiftness that speed like it would not be seen until the birth of the great Hermes himself. Gods scrambled out of the way quickly and hurried for cover. When the smoke cleared, the grey skinned man who had been struck merely glared at Zeus, unfazed by his attack.

“You are a fool, thunder god,” spat Thanatos, Death incarnate, “I will split your domain and ensure my siblings will do the same or similar to all other aspects of you.”

Zeus’s eyes widened at his mistake, and he sputtered out apologies like a river flows water. Thanatos ignored his blubbering and looked upon his aggressor’s greatest gift. He pointed at the man and woman, “I shall take them and all like them when the time comes. Those worthy in battle shall aid your brother in his battles posthumous, and the rest will make home in his realm. They shall fall under his judgment and jurisdiction, and your time with them shall be fleetingly short.” With that, Thanatos turned his attention to the rest of the gods before him.

“This banquet is over,” he commanded, “return to your duties, all of you.” He vanished. The world went silent, and each and every god left quickly without a word spoken. Only Zeus remained, and for the first time since defeating his father, Cronus, he felt weak and small and not very special at all. This is the story of why we die, and where we go when we do. It is a greatly important tale, but it is only the beginning of our narrative. The rest is equally as fascinating and telling of our past, present and future. Let us tell of the next of these stories now.

Once upon a time, God was sitting atop his throne in the clouds, awaiting a guest. This guest was a man He had kept a close eye on, and had found rather irritating. Given His knowledge of all that there was to

know, He knew that the man was the brother of one who had stolen much from Him in another time and world. He knew the man would attempt to split his authority over mankind, but did not yet know how. So He watched the man everyday and every night, but could see no sign of malice or bedlam. The man merely slept through his days peacefully, not enjoying the world God had created for the glory of all. This upset God, as He did not appreciate having His gifts shunned and ignored. Instead of waiting for death to claim the man, God took him silently in his sleep, and sentenced him to hell. When the man awoke, he was angered and stormed up to the gates of heaven. The man stood at the pearly gates and demanded entry into the land of holiness. His screams and roars could be heard by all in the vast city. An Angel, Metatron, the scribe of God, met him at the gates, and denied him entry into the Silver Kingdom.

“Go back from whence you came. You did not appreciate the life which God gave to you, you will not appreciate the Afterlife he made for those who are worthy. You have shunned God’s splendor, now bear witness to his contempt.”

“I do not want any part of your god’s ‘splendor,’” the man spat, “I will not be condemned to the land of ashen fire and unbearable cold. I want no part in heaven nor do I wish for any part of hell. I will not sit in purgatory, either, you feathered mulch.”

Metatron thought the man's demand over, and decided it was best to consult God first. Metatron hurried to the throne of the lord, and was surprised to find another seat set across from it.

“I have known of the man’s arrival for quite some time. Bring him here, I ask of you.” The angel rushed to retrieve the man, only to find he was already there.

“Leave us, holy chicken, I will speak with Him alone.” Metatron merely looked towards God, who nodded once. Metatron left the throne room quietly, making sure to close the door behind him. The man looked upon God, and spoke with a level head for seemingly the first time since he had died.

“You have killed me unfairly and sentenced me to rot.”

“Unfairly? Who are you to say what is fair and what is not?”

“I am who I am, and who are you to think you can decide my fate? My destiny? My life?”

“Who am I? Look upon me child. I am He who created the light. I am He who created the world. I am what was, what is, and what is to come.”

“You are He who is a pain in my ass.”

“Look upon me and witness. For I am Odin, All-Father, who drank from the well of knowledge and sacrificed himself to himself. Now, look upon me again, and see that I am Krishna, and in my mouth see the night and moon and stars in the sky.”

“I tire of this. I do not care how many stars you have swallowed. I want my freedom. I want to be left alone.”

“The last being to ask me for freedom was Lucifer, ruler of hell and all that is sinful. I gave him his freedom, and he has made that which all men despise. Tell me, why should I let you rule?”

“I do not wish to rule. Lucifer and his demons are a vicious, cowardly lot. Your work is commendable, yet to deny men the right to deny you is tyranny, no matter how splendid your work may be. Let man be his own king if desired. Else, let him be his own torturer.”

God considered this. He thought long and He thought hard. He looked down upon the man after a while and said, “Very well. I will give you and every person this wish. However, I will only do it if you can prove yourself capable. Behold me at my truest form, and I shall grant you this boon.”

“I accept.”

And thus God did show himself, and the light of heaven shone brighter than it ever had that day. It shone so bright that it could even be seen from the blackest pits of hell. All saw the light, all except one man. It was the man in the throne room, as he had closed his eyes. God resumed his appearance, and beheld the man in a way the man had refused to behold Him. He granted the man his wish wordlessly. When he opened his eyes, he found himself in the same place he always escaped to when he was asleep. It was a library, filled with every desire and fear and want and need of all people. You have visited this library, and so have I. It is the library of Dream, and we see it every time we fall asleep. So be thankful, and know that we are free from all judgment when dreaming. Be thankful, and know that we are each a monarch of our own world.

The last story is the shortest, and most straightforward. Odin, the All-Father, sat upon his throne in Asgard, drinking mead and waiting. He knew of his other aspects failures, and pondered ways with which to escape his fate. The night stretched over the horizon and swallowed the sky whole, leaving only starlight and ember blazers to light the gilded city around him. He closed his one eye, and upon opening it, gazed down upon the sight before him. A woman stood there, wrapped in a brown shawl and a veiled face. She held nothing but a chain. Odin, the one eyed king of the gods, made the first move.

“I know who you are, daemon. You will get nothing from me. Leave this place, else I’ll have Thor bash your brains in.”

The woman responded by removing her veil, revealing silvery white teeth upon a speckled grin. She had a good nature about her, but her eyes spoke of danger.

“You are wise, Gallows God, I expected nothing less. But you misunderstand my presence here. You see, you have nothing I want.”

Odin was taken aback by this. “Then why have you come to me on this night?”

She responded again by smiling, it was as intoxicating as it was frightening. “My dear king, I merely wish to hold parley with you. How’s about a wager?”

“What kind of wager?”

“A dangerous wager.” She said excitedly. Odin did not return her enthusiasm.

“And why should I agree to such a thing?” He spoke coldly, moments away from calling for the Aesir and the Vanir.

She sighed, “Because it’s in your nature.” She said disinterestedly, “and because if you don’t, I will personally ensure your death come Ragnarök.”

Odinn was silent for a long time, until finally he said near inaudibly, "Come, then. Let us partake in this wager."

The woman laughed, "You are wise All-Father, wiser than even Kvasir, the god of wisdom. You are crafty too, only bested by Loki, Laufey's son."

"Speak your wager, and let us be done with this."

"Guess my name, and I shall save you from your fate. Get it wrong and I shall doom you and your people to the same."

"Very well. I will guess your name." The oath was made, and nothing could break it. The woman drew in a breath, and spoke with a voice like a chill wind.

"I am the mother of you all,

Of those who climb and those who fall,

I can be beaten but not broken,

My grasp over all is unspoken,

I felled Lucifer and Icarus, and to hell sent Adam and Eve,

My easy to shake grasp dispatched the Great Achilles,

Who am I?"

Odin thought. He closed his eye and considered each and every word over and over and over again. He checked his thoughts twice and thrice and went back and checked once more for good measure. Until, finally, he smiled.

"You are gravity." He grinned, "You carry those who climb and fall and hold dominion over all who live. It is how you have power over even I. You sent Lucifer and the first man and woman to hell and killed the Greeks, am I correct?"

The woman stopped smiling, and when she did Odin laughed; his voice booming through Asgard and echoing all throughout the nine realms. From the burning lands of Muspelheim to the freezing snow of Jotunheim.

"You are wise, Odin, All-Father-" his laughter rang harder throughout the entire world, "-but you are mistaken."

He stopped laughing. The woman said in a voice like a whisper, "Achilles was killed by the arrow, not by his fall." They stared at each other silently. The night was cold, and the torches of Asgard glowed dimmer than usual. The woman turned and made her way to leave.

"Who are you then, really?" Odin said deathly, as if he had just watched the string holding his life be cut.

"I am that which you could never have hoped to beat. I knew every word you would say and every threat you would make. I knew you would be too prideful to call upon those like Mirmir and Kvasir, who would have held the answers you seek. And I knew you would be too cowardly to dare engage me in combat. I

know every part of you because I am the hand at which you sow with. I am that which you can never escape, as nothing in the world can ever truly beat their own nature. I am Habit, All-Father, and I am afraid I'll be seeing you soon."

She vanished into the night. The torches of Asgard were snuffed out by a certain cold certainty that took the light and energy out of all things. Odin sat upon his throne, and drank his mead quietly in the dark.