

Where The Mushrooms Grow

[total words: 967]

The wails of the goddess were heard from all four corners of the world, filled with defeat and longing for what she had lost. To mortals, she was merely a hopeless beggar that shuffled through the streets. The mask she wore of an old and wrinkled woman twisted with agony. Her cries were then reduced to snuffles, an exhale of breath, and she disappeared amongst the village buildings.

From the shadows of the blacksmith's home, Thanatos had taken another life. As he watched the once-healthy man drift into eternal sleep from a never-ending famine that swept the world of men, his ears jolted with thunderous pain. Thanatos instantly knew the sound originated from an immortal, which irritated him moreso. One could describe Death as antisocial, unwelcome company, or just flat-out hateful. But, for the most part, he was lonely and touch-starved, but no one ever expected him to admit it.

Taking one last look at the dead man as his soul descended to the Underworld, he turned and flew across the houses of wood and stone. A flicker of black, translucent wings, and Thanatos appeared behind the old woman, who kneeled beside an unassuming well. Drips of water and the sound of her quiet sobs mingled together.

"Demeter," Thanatos breathed.

She faced him, her disguise wavered, he saw the face of a beautiful and mature woman. Her clothes were no longer that of a beggar's, they were of a farm maiden's.

"Where is she?" The goddess whispered, poison melting off her words.

Death stepped one bare foot forward. "I had nothing to do with what happened," He stood as still as the moon, which he privately avoided the light of. "I had no control."

Demeter's expression softened. The black-robed man may be extraordinarily withdrawn, but he was not a liar. Death can never lie. Death is straightforward, and Demeter, the goddess of agriculture, and responsible for the thriving lives of mankind with her creations, knew that he would tell her the

truth.

“She was taken to his realm, with his strong chariot and his horses, he fled down through the cracks of the soil.” Thanatos gestured his hand towards the ground. “Your daughter, though, is content, safe, in his arms.”

A gasp slipped out from the goddess’s™ lips. Death continued.

“Hades is the better of the two brothers in terms of...treating lovers with respect. Be at ease that it was not Zeus or Poseidon that stole away Persephone.”

Demeter brought a single hand to her mouth, staring hard at the ground in front of him, streams of tears escaping her leafy green eyes. Thanatos only gazed at her pale skin drifting into a hue of red; he was not afraid, would never be afraid. He was older, calmer, wiser. This is fact, and it is fact that Persephone was fine and Demeter was an overdramatic, worrying, fretting mother that only cared for her child who was growing up too fast, far too fast, and Demeter just wanted her to be safe and most importantly to be right next to her-

Thanatos then realized, in that moment, that his parents, divine Nyx and Erebus, in all of their godly glory, were not prone to caring for Thanatos’s™ safety. All he remembered was being thrust into the homes of dying men, women, and children, handing their souls off to Hermes to escort to the Underworld. And, as he thought of it, Persephone was down there among those souls now, consorting with the Lord of the Dead, as her mother wept in his own presence.

Yes, Thanatos felt something. Something other than a lingering, cold chill. He was not sure what, but he was one of swift action, and it would be tended to immediately.

After he instructed Hermes to bring back Persephone...

After Persephone herself had eaten a total of six pomegranate seeds...

After a deal was arranged, where she could live on the surface for six months of the year, and return to her husband during the other half...

After her mother came into view beside a withered tree, stroking its bark as she gazed upon Death...

A silence passed between the two, and Demeter uttered a hushed "thank you" to Thanatos. His eyes widened, the depth of their blackness surpassing that of the void.

He did not know how it happened, how he could not feel the soles of his feet glide across the yellowing grass. The chapped lips of Death pressed against Demeter's. She leaned in, her arms slowly wrapping around his waist, his hands cupping her soft cheeks. A surge of life passes through Thanatos' veins, and he smiled into the kiss, a giggle vibrated in Demeter's chest. They stayed like this for a few seconds, the pale gray clouds rolling along the heavens.

Demeter broke away first. A gorgeous laugh bubbled out of her mouth. She took the hands of Thanatos, hard and calloused, just like her own, and she blinked up at his dark complexion, now decorated with joy and love like no other.

Around them, rings of tiny plant-like stalks erupted out of the rich soil. They swirled about the hill on which they stood, reaching up onto the trunk of the rotting tree. Their round tops were gentle and soft, the face of Demeter, and their color was a rich brown, the color of Thanatos' face as she gazed at him.

The goddess of spring may have fallen in love with the Lord of the Underworld, but Life held Death's hands as they stood on the little hill.

And wherever Life visits Death, is where the mushrooms grow.