

I Am Zeus

#Chapter 43: Gathering Allies - Read I Am Zeus Chapter 43: Gathering Allies

Chapter 43: Gathering Allies

The sun had barely climbed halfway through the sky before Hera moved. Her sandals struck marble with sharp, measured precision as she walked through the high halls of Olympus, her crimson robes flowing behind her like silent fire. Her eyes were cold, her mind clearer than it had been in years.

She entered her private hall, flanked by tall silver columns wrapped in blooming ivy. The room was quiet, lit only by the filtered glow of sunlight through polished bronze latticework. A few handmaidens bowed low as she passed. She ignored them, her gaze fixed ahead.

At the far end of the hall, several gods stood waiting. They turned as she approached – gods of lesser domains, gods whose loyalties shifted like reeds in the wind. There was Kratos, tall and broad-shouldered with eyes like dark iron. Bia, his sister, silent and sharp-eyed. There was Icelus, the dream-bringer, his pale robe drifting around him like mist. Beside him stood Phobos, god of fear, his young face handsome and cold.

Hera stopped before them, folding her hands before her waist. Her gaze moved slowly across their faces, reading each flicker of greed, curiosity, or hidden loyalty.

"Olympus stands at the edge of change," she said softly. Her voice carried through the quiet hall, as calm as a mother's lullaby, but her eyes burned with cold fury. "Zeus would crown a Titan-born queen. He would let the blood of those who once enslaved us rule Olympus again."

Kratos shifted, his jaw tightening. Bia said nothing, but her fingers curled slightly at her side. Phobos only smiled faintly, his dark eyes gleaming with silent amusement. Icelus blinked slowly, dream-heavy and unfocused.

"And you," Hera continued, tilting her chin slightly, "are loyal to Olympus. Loyal to the gods. Loyal to me."

No one spoke. The silence itself felt like an oath.

She let it stretch before she spoke again, her voice dropping lower, edged with quiet steel.

"Metis cannot be allowed to live. If she is crowned, the throne will never be ours again. Her wisdom will coil around Zeus's mind until he sees nothing else."

Kratos inclined his head slightly, his iron-dark eyes unblinking. "What would you have us do, Lady Hera?"

She looked at him, her gaze cold and unflinching.

"Prepare your strength," she said. "When the day of coronation comes... we strike."

A faint ripple of tension passed through them. Even Icelus seemed to wake slightly, his dream-haze thinning as he watched her. Bia nodded once, silent approval. Phobos's faint smile widened.

"The others?" Kratos asked quietly. "Demeter. Hestia. Will they stand with us?"

Hera's eyes narrowed faintly. "Call them."

Kratos bowed low, his massive frame bending with surprising grace. He turned and left, his footsteps heavy against the marble. The others followed, silent shadows slipping away through the wide halls of Olympus, leaving Hera alone in the quiet room.

She stood there for a long moment, her fingers twisting together in front of her. The sunlight fell across her face, gilding her high cheekbones and shadowed eyes in cold gold. Outside, she could hear the faint song of temple doves, their calls gentle and mournful.

A few hours later, Demeter and Hestia entered the chamber. Demeter's robes were bright green and gold, her long braids draped with olive leaves. Hestia wore pale cream, simple and unadorned, her hair tied back with a thin bronze cord. They bowed before Hera, though Demeter's bow was shallow, her green eyes wary.

"Hera," Demeter said quietly. "You called us."

Hera studied them, her gaze unreadable.

"Olympus is at risk," she said calmly. "Zeus's choice threatens us all. Metis cannot be queen."

Demeter frowned, folding her arms over her chest. "Metis is wise. She has guided Olympus with patience and clarity since the Titanomachy. Her reign will bring stability."

Hera's lips tightened. "Her reign will end any chance of ours."

Hestia stepped forward slightly, her calm brown eyes meeting Hera's without fear. "And what would you do, sister?" she asked softly. "Kill her? Spill divine blood in the halls of Olympus?"

Hera said nothing, but her silence was answer enough. Demeter shook her head, her braids swaying softly over her shoulders.

"I will not side with you in this," she said. "I have seen enough blood spilled in these halls."

Hestia nodded in quiet agreement. "Nor will I," she said, her voice gentle but firm. "I will keep Olympus's hearth burning. That is my duty. Not murder."

Hera's gaze darkened, though her expression remained still as carved marble.

"You would both let our thrones slip from us forever?" she asked, her voice low.

Demeter's green eyes sharpened. "Better that than tear Olympus apart with your pride."

Hestia reached out, touching Demeter's wrist lightly before looking back at Hera.

"We love you," she said softly. "But we will not follow you down this path."

They bowed once more before turning and leaving the hall, their robes whispering softly across the stone. Hera watched them go, her eyes hard, her jaw tight.

When the door closed behind them, the quiet room felt colder. The sunlight had shifted, leaving her in pale shadow. She stood there alone, the silence pressing down on her shoulders like heavy iron.

Finally, she turned and walked back to her private chambers, her footsteps silent and smooth against the marble floors. She entered her dim antechamber and closed the doors behind her, leaning against them for a brief moment. The cool bronze pressed against her back, grounding her trembling rage.

She moved to the wide window overlooking Olympus's sprawling courtyards below. The gods moved like drifting lights beneath her, each carrying out their duties under the bright afternoon sky. She watched them for a long time, her fingers tightening against the window's stone ledge until her knuckles turned white.

"No one will stand in my way," she whispered to the empty room. "Not Demeter. Not Hestia. Not even Zeus."

She turned away from the window, her crimson robe sweeping around her ankles like blood spilled across marble. The air hummed faintly around her, a soft resonance of power stirring within her chest.

She walked to her private shrine, kneeling before the small brazier burning with faint blue flames. Her fingers moved quickly, scattering small handfuls of herbs and powdered bone into the fire. The flames shifted, darkening to a deep violet as thin coils of smoke rose into the dim air.

"Fates," she whispered, her voice low and shaking with quiet rage. "Show me the path to victory."

The flames flickered and bent, shadows twisting across her pale face. For a brief moment, Hera's eyes glowed faintly with that same violet hue. Then the vision settled in her mind – dark and heavy and final.

She bowed her head, letting her hair fall forward like a dark curtain, hiding the cold, thin smile that curled across her lips.

"Soon," she murmured. "Very soon."

Outside, the winds of Olympus picked up, rustling the olive trees and rippling the gold banners that hung from its high towers. The gods felt it without knowing why – a quiet, tightening storm gathering beneath their feet.

And far above them, in the halls of Olympus, Hera rose to her feet, her robe trailing behind her like a silent river of blood and shadows.

A/N

Kratos here is not the Kratos we all know

Chapter 44: Coronation Day

Olympus – The Day of Coronation

The sky over Olympus burned gold and white as the sun rose to its peak. Trumpets of bronze sounded from every tower, their calls echoing across the mountain, carried down into the mortal world like divine thunder. Marble courtyards overflowed with gods and spirits, all gathered to witness the crowning of their queen.

Garlands of olive leaves and laurel hung from the colonnades. Perfumed smoke curled from a thousand braziers, filling the air with the scent of cedar, sage, and crushed rose petals. Lesser gods moved through the gathered throng, scattering white and crimson blossoms across the marble floors until it looked as if Olympus itself bled beauty.

Zeus stood on the highest dais at the centre of the great courtyard. His robe was deep indigo trimmed with gold, pinned at the shoulder with a diamond lightning bolt. His hair fell in gleaming golden waves down his back, and his eyes burned with quiet stormlight.

At his side stood Metis, her lavender robes simple but elegant, her dark hair pinned up with silver combs shaped like crescent moons.

The gods watched in silent reverence. Poseidon stood near the front, trident in hand, his sea-green hair falling loose over his dark blue robe. Hades lingered in the shadows of a marble column, arms folded inside his obsidian cloak, his eyes hidden under his brow. Demeter and Hestia stood side by side, calm and solemn. Hera was there too, dressed in robes of blood-red silk embroidered with golden peacocks, her face a cold mask of regal beauty.

Zeus lifted his hand. Thunder rumbled softly through the clouds above, a quiet command for silence. The courtyard fell still.

"Gods of Olympus," he said, his voice carrying across the courtyard like rolling storm winds, "today we crown the queen of this realm. A queen of wisdom. A queen of patience. A queen who will guide Olympus beyond the reach of storms."

His gaze turned to Metis, and for a moment, the storm in his eyes softened to gentle rain.

"Metis," he said quietly, though every god heard him, "step forward."

Metis moved with quiet grace to stand before him. She bowed her head, her hands folded before her, her eyes calm and unafraid. The gathered gods leaned forward slightly, the tension thick as unfallen thunder.

Zeus raised the golden crown high. Crafted by Brontes himself, it glimmered with runes of law and wisdom, thin threads of silver and electrum twisting between polished opals that flickered with hidden light. He lowered it slowly towards Metis's brow—

A sharp whistling split the air.

Time slowed. Zeus's eyes snapped sideways, lightning flaring in his pupils. A spear, its shaft black as pitch and its blade gleaming with cruel iron light, cut through the air straight towards Metis's chest.

In a blur, Zeus's hand shot out. Lightning crackled from his palm as he caught the spear mid-flight, its iron head inches from Metis's heart. The force of the catch sent cracks spiderwebbing through the marble floor at his feet. The courtyard erupted in chaos. Gods leapt back, weapons half-drawn, voices rising in confusion and fear.

Zeus stood unmoving, his chest heaving as the spear trembled in his grip, smoke rising where his lightning scorched its dark wood. His eyes blazed with raw fury as he turned slowly, sweeping his gaze across the assembled gods.

"WHO DID THIS?" he roared, his voice shaking the columns and rattling the bronze shields hanging along the high arches. Thunder split the sky above, jagged silver bolts forking down to strike the far peaks of Olympus, sending tremors through the sacred mountain.

Silence fell. The gods stood frozen, eyes wide, robes trembling against their skin. Even Poseidon looked grim, his grip tightening on his trident. Hades narrowed his eyes, shadow flickering across his pale face. Demeter covered her mouth with her fingers. Hestia's eyes welled faintly with tears, though none fell.

Metis stood very still beside Zeus, her eyes calm despite the spear's iron head so close to her chest only moments before. She reached out and touched his forearm gently.

"Zeus," she whispered, her voice low but steady, "let them speak."

His chest heaved once, twice. Then he threw the spear down at his feet. It clattered across the marble, spinning before settling with its black shaft vibrating against the stone.

"Step forward," he commanded, his voice deep with quiet threat. "Step forward and claim your deed... before I tear this mountain apart to find you."

No one moved. The gods remained silent, fear rippling between them like a hidden tide. Hera watched with narrowed eyes, her lips pressed into a thin line. The faintest flicker of tension tightened her jaw, but her face remained smooth, carved in cold beauty.

Kratos stepped forward, his heavy sandals cracking the marble beneath his feet. His iron-dark eyes met Zeus's without fear, but he shook his head slowly.

"It was not I, Lord Zeus."

Beside him, Bia remained silent, her gaze sharp and cold. Phobos only smiled faintly, though his fingers twitched at his sides, the faint scent of blood drifting around him like perfume. Icelus blinked slowly, dream-mist coiling from his hair as he whispered, "Not I... not I..."

Zeus's gaze swept over them and then turned, his blue eyes burning into Hera's. For a long moment, the courtyard was silent but for the quiet hiss of breeze rustling the olive garlands overhead.

Hera tilted her chin slightly, meeting his gaze with a calm, regal coldness.

"You think I would act so openly?" she asked softly, her voice like frost across still water.

Zeus's jaw tightened. Lightning flickered across his shoulders, his fingers curling into fists.

"Do not test me today, Hera," he said, his voice low and shaking with the effort to remain calm. "Not today."

Hera said nothing. She merely lowered her gaze slightly, the faintest curve of a smile touching the corner of her lips before vanishing as quickly as it came.

Zeus looked away, his chest rising and falling with each slow breath as he turned back to Metis. The crown still lay in his free hand, untouched by the chaos. Carefully, he lifted it again, his fingers trembling faintly from rage. Metis raised her eyes to him, her gaze quiet and unafraid.

"Continue," she whispered, her voice soft and calm.

His throat tightened. Slowly, he placed the crown upon her brow. The moment it settled, the sky above split with silent lightning, thin silver forks branching across the heavens like tree roots in a black sea. A warm breeze washed through the courtyard, rippling the garlands and banners. The gods bowed low, their voices hushed in quiet reverence.

"Hail Metis," Poseidon said quietly, his deep voice rolling through the courtyard like a tide against stone. "Queen of Olympus."

"Hail Metis," the gods echoed softly, their voices trembling with the fading echoes of thunder.

Zeus stepped back, his gaze sweeping across them all. The storm behind his eyes burned cold and silent, a promise of reckoning yet to come.

Above them, the sun burned pale and distant in a sky crossed by silent silver scars, and Olympus held its breath, caught between dawn and ruin.

Chapter 45: Planning

Olympus

The coronation ended under uneasy skies. The gods dispersed in silence, the soft brush of sandals on marble echoing like distant rain. Metis stood quietly beside Zeus, her new crown glinting with cold silver light as she accepted whispered congratulations and solemn bows. Hera watched from afar, her crimson robes motionless in the cooling breeze.

When the crowds faded and Olympus returned to its restless quiet, Hera moved swiftly. She left the high halls through side corridors, robes whispering against polished stone as she passed columns carved with stories of old victories and older betrayals. Her

sandals clicked with steady resolve as she descended into the deeper chambers of Olympus, where shadows pooled in cold corners and the air smelled of old incense and burnt offerings.

She entered a long, narrow hall lit only by thin slits of daylight cutting down from high windows. At the far end stood a set of bronze doors carved with peacock feathers and olive branches. Two silent guards bowed deeply as she approached, pushing the doors open without a word.

Inside, the chamber was dim. Tall oil lamps burned along the walls, their flames flickering with thin yellow light. The ceiling rose high above them, lost in darkness, and ivy crawled down along the marble pillars like silent green veins. Hera walked to the centre of the room where Kratos, Bia, Phobos, and Icelus stood waiting. Poseidon was there too, leaning against a column with his trident resting across his shoulders. His sea-green hair fell loose around his dark blue robes, and his expression was unreadable.

They fell silent as Hera entered. She stopped before them, folding her hands before her waist, her golden cuffs glinting in the lamplight. For a long moment, no one spoke. The only sound was the faint hiss of burning oil and the restless breath of the hidden chamber.

"That," Hera said finally, her voice low and sharp, "just shows us one thing."

Kratos tilted his chin slightly, his heavy brow furrowing. "That Zeus is on high alert," he rumbled.

Hera nodded once, her lips curling into a thin smile. "Yes. We cannot harm Metis so long as he is present. His vigilance... it is beyond even my expectations."

Bia shifted, her dark eyes flicking to Poseidon before returning to Hera. "Then... what do we do?"

Hera's smile widened faintly, though there was no warmth in it. "We wait," she said softly. "We wait for a moment when Zeus is not here... or better yet—" She paused, her eyes glittering under the lamplight, "—when he is not in our realm entirely."

Poseidon lifted his gaze from where he watched the flickering flames, his dark eyes narrowing slightly. "And how, dear sister," he asked, his voice calm and deep as the ocean floor, "do you propose we achieve that?"

Hera turned slowly to face him, her robes shifting around her ankles like liquid blood. For a moment, she said nothing, letting the tension coil tight around them all like a strangling vine. Then she spoke, her voice low and cold with quiet satisfaction.

"Soon," she said, "Zeus will leave Olympus. He cannot remain chained to this mountain forever. The mortals are stirring again. Their kings are fighting in the east, their cities rebelling in the west. He will go to them... to remind them of his rule."

Phobos tilted his head slightly, his young face gleaming with faint amusement. "And when he does?"

Hera's smile grew sharper. "When he does... Metis will remain here. She is queen now. She will stay to rule in his stead, to show Olympus that his choice was wise. And in that time..." She paused, her gaze sweeping across each of them, reading their silent anticipation, "we strike."

Kratos grunted softly, a sound of approval. Bia folded her arms over her chest, silent and still. Icelus blinked slowly, dream-mist drifting around his hair as he murmured, "Dreams of falling... dreams of silent blood..."

Poseidon said nothing for a long moment. Then he pushed away from the column, his sandals brushing against ivy-strewn marble as he stepped forward, the heavy butt of his trident echoing against the floor.

"And how will you do it?" he asked quietly. "Even if Zeus is gone... Metis is cunning. She will not step blindly into your traps."

Hera turned to him fully, lifting her chin with regal poise. "That is why it will not be a trap," she said softly. "It will be a gift."

Poseidon frowned faintly, watching her with unreadable dark eyes. "Explain."

Hera stepped closer to him, her robes whispering across the marble. "We will use her own wisdom against her. We will create a crisis... a false threat to Olympus. One that only she, in her wisdom, would step forward to resolve. And in that moment of exposure—" She lifted her hand, her fingers curling slowly into a fist, "—we end her."

Phobos's smile widened faintly, dark excitement flickering across his handsome features. "And the gods?" he asked. "They will not question her death?"

Hera's gaze flicked to him, sharp and cold. "They will mourn her. They will call it tragedy. A queen dying to protect Olympus from a hidden threat. But Zeus will return to find his throne empty, his queen slain, and his people already grieving."

Icelus whispered faintly, dream-mist curling around his fingers. "Dreams of tears... dreams of silent mourning..."

Bia nodded once, her dark eyes flickering with approval. Kratos grunted again, a deep, quiet sound of agreement.

Poseidon remained silent, studying Hera for a long moment. Then he inclined his head slightly, though his face remained dark and unreadable.

"And if Zeus learns the truth?" he asked softly.

Hera smiled faintly, though her eyes burned with cold certainty. "Then he will learn... that Olympus belongs to its gods. Not to a Titan queen."

For a moment, silence filled the chamber. The flickering flames cast shifting shadows across their faces, each god lost in their own thoughts, their own private hungers and fears. Outside, the winds of Olympus rose, rattling the bronze doors and rustling the ivy that curled around the high windows.

Hera turned away from them, walking to the far end of the room where a small shrine to herself burned with thin blue flames. She knelt before it, her robes pooling around her like spilled blood, and pressed her fingers to the cold marble floor.

"Soon," she whispered to the flames, her voice low and steady. "Soon she will fall."

Behind her, the gods shifted. Phobos's quiet laughter rippled through the shadows like a snake moving through grass. Kratos and Bia stood silent and ready. Icelus drifted into dream-haze once more, his eyes half-closed and glowing with pale mist. Poseidon turned away, resting his trident against his shoulder as he gazed into the darkness beyond the flickering lamps.

The room felt colder suddenly, the shadows pressing closer around them all. Hera rose slowly, turning back to face her gathered allies, her crimson robes whispering softly across the marble.

"Prepare yourselves," she said quietly. "Our time comes soon."

And as they bowed their heads before her, the faint sounds of Olympus drifted down into the hidden chamber – the soft songs of temple doves, the whisper of olive branches in the breeze, the distant echo of divine laughter carried on thin mountain winds.

But beneath it all, silent and unseen, the quiet storm of betrayal gathered its strength, waiting for the day when Olympus would bleed.

Chapter 46: Birthday Invitation

Zeus stood at the edge of the balcony, his white robes drifting in the sharp morning wind. Below him, Olympus spread out in silent splendour: marble halls shining in dawn light, temple braziers smoking with fresh offerings, gardens of olive and laurel drifting with bees and small songbirds. But he saw none of it.

His fists clenched at his sides, the crackle of faint static biting the air around him.

Metis stood a few paces behind, her silver crown catching the rising sun in quiet brilliance. She watched him with calm eyes, though faint worry lined her brow.

"Zeus," she said softly, her voice clear and unhurried, "you cannot let this eat at you. Hera will not admit it. She has no reason to."

Zeus turned sharply, lightning flickering across his irises. His hair, loose this morning, whipped across his shoulders with the force of his aura.

"She orchestrated this!" he growled, his voice rumbling like distant thunder. "The fake threats. The 'hidden danger' to Olympus. She wanted you vulnerable, exposed to the council. She wanted you dead."

Metis didn't flinch. She folded her hands before her waist, her blue robes whispering softly in the breeze that cut through the high balcony arches.

"And yet," she said gently, "I am alive."

Zeus exhaled sharply, turning away again. The wind stirred around him, ruffling his robes like restless wings.

"She thinks I am blind to her schemes," he muttered, his teeth gritted. "But this—"

He paused, his hands trembling faintly before he forced them still.

"This is not the first time she has moved against you," Metis finished for him, her voice soft and calm. "And it will not be the last."

He didn't respond. The silence between them stretched, filled only by the keen whistling of mountain winds and the faint distant ringing of temple bells.

Finally, he spoke, his voice low and tired. "She was not always like this."

Metis' gaze softened. She stepped forward, placing a gentle hand against his broad back. "No one is born a schemer," she said. "Even gods."

For a moment, he closed his eyes, feeling her warmth through the thin fabric of his robe. Her scent was cool and clear, like fresh river water over stone.

"Come inside," she said quietly. "Eat. Rest. The world will still be here when you wake."

He didn't move. Didn't turn. His eyes remained locked on the glowing horizon beyond Olympus' golden spires.

"...In a moment," he said softly.

She studied him for a breath longer, then nodded once, silent and regal as she turned and left the balcony, her silver crown catching one last glint of dawn before she disappeared behind the tall carved doors.

Zeus stood alone, his breathing deep and silent as the winds whipped around him.

Then—

A faint fluttering noise.

He turned his head sharply. Perched on the window ledge just inside his chamber were two massive ravens. Their feathers shimmered with faint cosmic oil-sheen, eyes like black glass marbles reflecting the shifting dawn.

"Thought and Memory..." he rumbled softly.

The ravens cawed in unison, flaring their wings slightly. One of them—its beak faintly chipped from an old injury—leaned forward and gagged once, spitting out a small rolled scroll tied in dark leather cord.

Zeus raised a brow, stepping forward to take it from where it clattered onto the stone window sill.

He glanced at the raven, who simply cawed again, flicking its beady eyes impatiently.

"You'd think," he muttered under his breath as he unrolled the scroll, "that Odin would find a better way to send messages. Perhaps one that does not involve bird vomit."

The ravens flapped their wings irritably, clicking their beaks at him before launching themselves off the window ledge in unison. He watched them wheel away into the brightening sky, small black shapes against the deep gold and pink of dawn.

He turned his eyes back to the scroll. The leather uncurled with a faint crackle of ancient runes, revealing Odin's precise, blade-sharp handwriting across thin white bark parchment.

"Zeus, King of Olympus.

You are invited to the naming ceremony of my son, Baldur, to be held at the golden halls of Gladsheim in two moons' time.

There will be feasting, poetry, and combat exhibitions. Bring what honour you will.

— Odin Allfather."

Zeus exhaled softly through his nose, a faint smile tugging at his lips despite the storm in his chest.

"Baldur..." he murmured. "So that's what you name him."

He rolled the scroll back up and tucked it into his belt sash. The dawn breeze rustled his long hair across his shoulders again, the scent of cold olive groves drifting up from the mountain gardens below.

His eyes flicked south, towards where Asgard lay hidden beyond the mortal realms, wrapped in runic veils and rainbow bridges.

Two moons' time...

He frowned faintly, the smile fading as his thoughts drifted back to Hera. To Metis. To the endless tensions crawling beneath Olympus' golden floors.

He felt the weight of his throne like a stone on his spine. The lives under his rule, divine and mortal alike. His mother's quiet prayers from the depths of Gaia's groves. His father's silent grave in Tartarus. His brothers' and sisters' watching eyes.

The storm inside him curled tighter, quiet lightning crackling across his skin before fading back into silence.

He turned away from the balcony railing, robes drifting softly around his ankles. His sandals brushed against the marble floor with each heavy step as he walked back into his chambers, the carved golden doors closing silently behind him.

In the faint dawn shadows, Metis sat by the low table, pouring steaming tea into thin bronze cups. She looked up at him as he entered, her eyes tired but calm, her silver crown set lightly against her dark hair.

"Was it Odin?" she asked softly.

Zeus grunted in confirmation, sinking down onto the floor cushions opposite her. She passed him a cup, the pale steam curling between them like a silent offering.

"Baldur's naming ceremony," he said after a sip, the hot tea cutting through the chill in his bones.

Metis smiled faintly. "Then you will go?"

He said nothing for a long moment. The tea's warmth seeped into his chest, softening the ache there. He watched her across the rim of the cup, her calm eyes, her quiet hands folding the tea cloth in neat silent motions.

Finally, he set the cup down.

"Yes," he said quietly, his voice almost a whisper. "I will go."

Metis nodded once, her gaze lowering back to the tea she poured for herself.

"Then I will remain," she said, her voice firm and serene. "Olympus must not be left without rule."

Zeus closed his eyes briefly, a flicker of pain passing through his chest. He reached out across the low table, his hand covering hers, his thumb brushing lightly against her wrist.

"Be careful," he whispered.

She smiled faintly without lifting her gaze. "Always."

And as the pale dawn light filtered through the high windows of Olympus, the two sat together in quiet silence, the smell of hot tea and distant olive groves curling around them like a fleeting, gentle peace.

But in the quiet corners of Zeus' mind, lightning still whispered, carrying with it the distant echoes of war drums beating beyond the rainbow bridge, and the colder, closer winds of betrayal waiting to break Olympus apart.

Chapter 47: Asgard

The skies above Asgard were a pale blue dome streaked with thin clouds drifting like silk threads. The golden towers of Gladsheim rose high, their rune-carved walls gleaming under the mid-morning sun. Banners of deep red and black fluttered from their battlements, each one marked with Odin's triple-horned symbol in silver thread. The bridge of Bifröst shimmered faintly at the realm's edge, its fractured rainbow light curving down into distant mortal skies far below.

Inside the courtyards, laughter echoed.

"Thor, wait up!"

Small sandals slapped against polished flagstones as a boy with wild dark hair raced after a taller child. Thor, sturdy and golden-haired, swung a short wooden hammer in wide arcs as he ran, his deep laughter booming through the gardens.

"Too slow, Loki!" he shouted, spinning to face his friend with a grin, his young arms flexing with the easy strength he was born with. "You can't catch me even if you tried all day!"

Loki skidded to a stop, his thin frame heaving with short breaths. His long black hair drifted in the breeze, framing sharp green eyes that glimmered with playful irritation. He wore dark green tunic robes tied with thin gold cord, and a fox-fur collar that shifted each time he moved.

"Don't be so sure," he panted, wiping sweat from his brow with the back of his hand. "Speed beats strength... watch."

He raised his hands, fingers weaving through a quick set of runic gestures he'd practised in secret behind the apprentice halls. A thin flicker of green-gold mana pulsed through his veins, crackling lightly around his knuckles.

Thor tilted his head, grin widening as he planted his small wooden hammer against the stone floor.

"Magic again?" he said, his young voice deep despite his age. "Don't tell Father. He'll say you're cheating."

"Only if you tell him," Loki shot back, eyes flicking up sharply. "Which you won't—"

He vanished in a flicker of green mist, reappearing behind Thor in a silent blink. Before Thor could turn, Loki jabbed his fingers into his friend's ribs, making the bigger boy jump with a loud yelp that rang through the marble gardens.

"Got you!" Loki crowed, his grin stretching wide across his pale, sharp face. He flicked his long black hair over his shoulder with arrogant flair.

Thor rubbed his ribs, scowling half-heartedly. "That's not fair, Loki. You used your vanish again."

"And you use your fists for everything," Loki said, shrugging. "We're both good at something."

Thor grunted, his frown melting into another big grin as he hefted his wooden hammer over his shoulder. "Still gonna beat you in the next spar."

"I'm counting on it," Loki replied smoothly, his green eyes glittering with cunning mirth.

From the high balcony above the training courtyards, Frigg stood watching them. Her white-gold hair fell in braided loops around her shoulders, and her robes of midnight blue silk drifted softly in the courtyard breezes. She rested her palms lightly against the stone balustrade, her gaze soft and watchful.

"Always playing tricks on Thor," she murmured under her breath, though a faint smile curved her lips.

Beside her, a broad-shouldered figure stepped forward, clad in heavy rune-etched black steel. Odin's single eye gleamed under his low battle crown, the other covered by a smooth iron patch carved with shifting protection runes. His beard, streaked with silver, stirred faintly in the breeze.

"He learns fast," Odin said quietly, his gravel-deep voice echoing across the balcony stone. "Faster than Thor."

Frigg glanced sideways at him, her pale blue eyes tired but warm. "But Thor's heart is kinder," she said.

Odin said nothing for a moment, simply watching his sons below. Thor had grabbed Loki around the neck in a playful headlock, grinding his knuckles into Loki's scalp as the smaller boy flailed and shouted curses in ancient Vanir dialect that Frigg pretended not to understand.

"Kindness has its place," Odin said at last, folding his massive arms across his chest. "But cunning wins wars."

Frigg exhaled softly, though her eyes never left her sons. "And who will win peace?"

Odin didn't reply. His gaze remained locked on the courtyard below, his single eye reflecting the shifting green-gold mist that flickered around Loki's fingers as he slipped from Thor's grip and vanished again, reappearing high atop a marble lion statue to stick out his tongue at his brother.

Thor roared with playful rage, running forward to jump onto the statue's base, shaking it so violently that Loki lost his balance with a yelp, tumbling forward. Thor caught him easily, slinging him over his broad shoulder with a grin wide enough to split the sky.

"I win again!" Thor shouted, spinning in place as Loki flailed in the air, his green robes twisting around his thin legs.

"Put me down, you oaf!" Loki screamed, though his laughter rang clear beneath his curses.

Frigg's smile widened faintly, her hands curling tighter around the stone railing.

"Let them be boys a little longer," she whispered, almost to herself.

Odin's gaze flicked sideways, studying her for a moment before returning to his sons.

"They will be gods soon enough," he said.

Below, Thor set Loki down roughly, making the smaller boy stumble forward. Loki immediately spun, his green eyes blazing with annoyed pride.

"I'll remember that," he hissed, brushing dirt off his knees.

"Good," Thor replied, still laughing. "Then you won't do it again."

"Oh, I'll do it again," Loki said, grinning wickedly. "But better."

Thor just chuckled, ruffling Loki's black hair with one big hand before walking away, humming a crude tavern tune he'd learned from one of Odin's Einherjar guards.

Loki watched him go, his grin fading into a thoughtful line. He reached up, fixing his dishevelled hair before flicking his fingers lightly, summoning a small illusory serpent that curled around his wrist with faint hissing sounds.

He watched it slither across his knuckles, his green eyes narrowing slightly.

One day... he thought quietly. One day you'll see what else I can do.

He closed his fist, making the illusion vanish into a ripple of green mist.

High above them, the ravens Huginn and Muninn wheeled across the Asgard sky, their cries ringing across the golden towers. Odin turned his gaze upward, watching them for a long silent moment before lowering his eyes back to his sons.

Thor had sat down under a laurel tree, chewing on a thick piece of honeyed barley bread, while Loki perched beside him, muttering something under his breath as he flicked pebbles into the fountain with precise rune-enhanced flicks. Each pebble skipped six, seven, eight times before sinking under the silver surface.

The quiet courtyard breeze carried faint echoes of their childish bickering and laughter up to the balcony where their parents stood, wrapped in the restless peace of a realm that stood always on the edge of storms.

Odin exhaled softly, his massive frame unmoving as his voice rumbled low under his breath.

"Let the world sleep while it can."

Frigg said nothing, only placed her hand over his, her fingers cold against his battle-worn knuckles.

And far beyond Asgard's gleaming walls, the mortal realms stirred under waking dawns, unaware that two boys – one with thunder in his veins, and one with serpents in his shadow – would shape their fate for centuries to come.

Chapter 48: Extending The Invitation

Olympus – Hera's Private Chambers

The halls of Olympus glowed with pale afternoon light as Zeus walked through them, his robes brushing softly against polished marble. The golden clasps at his shoulders glinted with every step, catching the sunbeams that streamed through the high arched windows. Servants bowed as he passed, their eyes lowered, their breath held until he was gone. His sandals struck the floors with quiet certainty, each step echoing through the silent colonnades like distant thunder.

He stopped before the tall bronze doors of Hera's private chambers. Two handmaidens stood guard, each bowing low as he approached. Without a word, they pushed open the doors, letting him enter the cool dimness beyond.

Hera's chambers were quiet. Thin veils of gauze drifted from the high ceiling, pale as moonlight, shifting softly in the breeze from the open balcony. The scent of sandalwood and crushed jasmine lingered in the air. Hera sat before a polished silver mirror, her long dark hair unbound, falling like a shadow down her back. She wore a robe of deep crimson silk embroidered with golden feathers, its sleeves pooling around her as she brushed her hair with slow, silent strokes.

She saw him in the mirror before she turned, her eyes flicking up to meet his golden gaze.

"Zeus," she said quietly, her voice calm and low. "To what do I owe this visit?"

Zeus watched her for a moment, saying nothing as he studied her reflection. The tired lines around her eyes. The cold stillness in her gaze. The quiet beauty that refused to fade despite the burdens she carried. Slowly, he stepped forward until he stood behind her, his massive frame towering over her slender shoulders. He rested his hands lightly on the carved back of her silver chair.

"I am going to Asgard," he said, his deep voice rumbling softly through the quiet chamber. "Odin has requested my presence for the naming ceremony of his son."

Hera's fingers paused in their brushing. She set the silver comb down on her lap and turned slightly to look up at him, her dark brows arching faintly.

"And you want me to come with you?" she asked. Her voice was calm, but there was a faint edge to it, hidden beneath her quiet poise.

Zeus nodded once. "Yes. I want you to stand beside me."

Hera tilted her head slightly, her gaze sharp and unblinking. "Why not take Metis?" she asked softly, each word careful and cold. "She is your queen now. It would be fitting for her to stand with you before Odin and Frigg."

Zeus exhaled slowly, his golden eyes narrowing faintly as he studied her. For a moment, silence stretched between them, broken only by the soft hiss of burning sandalwood in the small bronze brazier near the balcony doors.

"I want to spend time with you," he said finally, his voice quiet but steady. "Metis is queen of Olympus. But you... you are still Hera."

Her gaze flickered at that, though her face remained still as carved marble. She turned back to the mirror, picking up her comb again, running it through her hair with silent, measured strokes.

"You say that as though it means something," she murmured.

Zeus stepped closer, resting one massive hand lightly on her bare shoulder. The warmth of his skin seeped into hers, but she did not lean into it. Her eyes met his in the mirror, cold and unflinching.

"It does," he said quietly. "Isn't it your dream to stand beside me? To be seen with me, not as a queen alone, but as my equal before other gods?"

Her fingers tightened around the comb. "My dream," she echoed softly, her voice tinged with quiet bitterness. "Dreams are for girls, Zeus. I am long past them."

He leaned down slightly, his golden hair falling around his face like drifting sunlit threads. For a brief moment, his eyes softened, the stormlight behind them flickering into quiet sadness.

"Then stand beside me not as a dream," he said softly, "but as yourself."

Hera said nothing. She simply set the comb down once more and rose from her chair, her crimson robes falling around her like dark fire. She moved past him without looking at his face, walking to the wide balcony where the golden afternoon light spilled across the pale marble floor. She stood there for a long moment, her gaze fixed on the distant horizon where the sky burned with thin streaks of orange and pale gold.

Zeus watched her silently, his hands curling lightly at his sides. The breeze carried the faint scent of her jasmine oil back to him, warm and cold all at once.

Finally, she turned, her eyes dark and calm. "When do we leave?" she asked.

"Tomorrow at dawn," he replied, his voice steady.

She nodded once, her gaze flicking away from him to the quiet gardens far below her balcony. "Then I will be ready."

Zeus stepped forward, placing his hand lightly on her back. She did not flinch, but she did not lean into his touch either. For a moment, he closed his eyes, feeling the quiet tension between them thrum like a silent chord pulled too tight.

"I will see you at dawn," he murmured.

Without another word, he turned and left her chambers, his footsteps echoing softly against the polished marble floors. Hera watched him go, her eyes dark and unreadable.

When the bronze doors closed behind him, she let out a slow breath, her fingers curling around the stone balustrade of the balcony until her knuckles whitened.

Outside, the winds of Olympus rose, carrying the thin scent of olive leaves and distant thunder. She stood there a long time, her crimson robes shifting around her ankles like dying embers as the sun sank low beyond the western peaks.

And far above her, hidden beyond mortal skies, the ravens of Asgard wheeled in silent black arcs, their shadows flickering across the pale clouds as the world turned towards a dawn that promised nothing but storms.

Chapter 49: To Asgard 1

Hera stood on her balcony for a long time after Zeus left, watching the sky darken with the coming night. The fading gold bled into violet and deep blue, the first stars trembling faintly in the heavens above Olympus. A faint breeze rustled her hair against her cheeks, carrying the last warmth of the day away into the silent evening.

Slowly, a smile curved across her lips.

She turned from the balcony, her crimson robes swirling softly around her ankles as she stepped back into her dim chamber. The burning sandalwood embers pulsed softly in the brazier, casting thin shadows across the gauze curtains drifting from the ceiling.

She clapped her hands once, sharply.

A young servant girl appeared from behind a hanging veil, bowing so deeply her forehead almost touched the marble floor.

"Bring Poseidon to me," Hera said, her voice calm, almost gentle, but edged with quiet command. "Tell him I wish to speak with him in private tonight."

The girl bowed again, her voice trembling as she whispered, "At once, Lady Hera," before hurrying away, her soft sandals pattering against the polished floors as she vanished into the halls.

Hera turned and walked to the long low table near her bed, her bare feet silent against the cold stone. She picked up a small silver bell and rang it lightly. The thin chime floated through the chamber like a shard of moonlight.

Within moments, another servant appeared, this one older, with her greying hair tied back tightly and her robes plain white linen.

"Summon my cohorts," Hera said quietly, not looking at the woman. Her dark eyes were fixed on the flickering brazier flames. "All of them. Tonight."

"Yes, Lady Hera," the woman murmured before backing away into the shadows beyond the doorway.

Hera stood there, feeling the silence settle around her again. The flames of the brazier shifted, burning deeper blue for a moment as a thin coil of jasmine-scented smoke curled towards the ceiling. She reached out and trailed her fingers through it, watching the smoke break and reform around her pale hand.

Her mind was quiet, sharper than it had been in years. Thoughts flickered behind her eyes like quicksilver. Each idea, each memory of slight or betrayal, each moment Zeus had ignored her words for Metis's soft voice, built itself into her growing plan.

He wants to take me to Asgard, she thought, her lips curving faintly again. He wants to parade me before Odin and Frigg. He wants me to stand beside him... so let him see me for what I truly am.

The bronze doors opened silently behind her, the breeze of their movement stirring the gauze veils hanging across the room. Poseidon entered without bowing, his tall frame filling the doorway. His sea-green hair was tied back loosely, damp strands clinging to the heavy blue and gold robes that draped across his broad shoulders.

"You sent for me, sister," he rumbled, his deep voice quiet but edged with curiosity. His trident was absent, left outside her private chambers as custom demanded.

Hera turned to him, her smile calm and small, like the curve of a blade just before it cuts.

"Yes, brother," she said softly, motioning him forward. "We have much to discuss."

Poseidon stepped closer, his bare feet silent against the marble as he stopped before her. His dark eyes studied her face, reading the careful stillness there, the gleam hidden behind her lashes.

"What is it now?" he asked. "The coronation has passed. Metis is queen. Zeus has made his choice."

"He has," Hera said, her voice barely above a whisper. "But that does not mean she will keep her crown."

Poseidon raised an eyebrow slightly, though his face remained otherwise calm. "And what do you plan, Hera?"

She tilted her head, her dark hair falling like a curtain over one shoulder. "Zeus is taking me with him to Asgard tomorrow at dawn," she said. "He wishes me to stand beside him at the naming ceremony for Odin's son."

Poseidon's brow furrowed faintly. "Leaving Metis alone in Olympus."

Hera's smile widened, slow and sharp as moonlight on black water. "Exactly."

Poseidon exhaled quietly, a faint glimmer of interest flickering in his gaze. "You intend to strike while he is away."

"I intend," Hera said softly, stepping closer to him, her voice dropping to a thin whisper, "to strike when he is not only away... but when he is in a realm that binds his powers in hospitality oaths. Asgard's rules are ancient and sacred. He will not be able to return swiftly without disrespecting Odin. And Zeus... will never risk his pride for Metis."

Poseidon studied her for a long, silent moment. Outside, the winds of Olympus sighed against the tall bronze windows, rustling the jasmine vines climbing the balcony railings. Finally, he nodded once.

"What do you require of me?" he asked.

"Strength," Hera said. "Authority. When I am gone with Zeus, you will remain here. You will stand as Olympus's second power. My cohorts will act on my orders, but your presence will ensure order does not collapse into chaos before the deed is done."

Poseidon tilted his head slightly, dark sea-green hair slipping over his broad shoulder. "And what of the other gods? Hestia, Demeter... will they stand aside again?"

"They will," Hera said calmly, her gaze unblinking. "They will weep and pray to Gaia's silent roots, but they will not move against us. Not if it is swift."

Poseidon grunted softly, a low sound of approval. "Then plan it well, sister."

"I already have," Hera whispered.

The bronze doors opened again, and her cohorts entered silently, shadows drifting across the veiled chamber. Kratos, broad and iron-eyed. Bia, cold and silent. Phobos, his dark lips curling faintly with hidden cruelty. Icelus, his thin robes drifting like dream-mist around him as his pale eyes blinked with heavy slowness.

Hera turned to face them, her crimson robes rippling softly around her ankles.

"When I am gone tomorrow," she said, her voice quiet but edged with unbreakable steel, "you will do what must be done. No mistakes. No hesitation."

Kratos inclined his head deeply. Bia's eyes flickered with silent obedience. Phobos smiled wider, his teeth white and cold in the dim brazier light. Icelus said nothing, but his pale hands twisted softly in the folds of his robe, dream-mist coiling between his long fingers.

Poseidon stood silently behind Hera, his dark eyes locked on the burning brazier flames. Outside, the last light of day faded into deep indigo. The torches along Olympus's high halls flickered into life one by one, casting long restless shadows across the silent marble floors.

Hera closed her eyes for a moment, breathing in the heavy scent of sandalwood and jasmine around her. When she opened them, her gaze burned dark and cold.

"Tomorrow," she whispered, "we begin."

And far above Olympus, the first stars flickered against the violet sky, silent and watchful as the gods moved beneath them, weaving shadows across a world that would soon bleed with storms no mortal could ever name.

Chapter 50: To Asgard 2

The dawn sky over Olympus was pale gold, the first light breaking over marble towers and quiet olive groves. Cool breezes drifted through the high colonnades, carrying the scent of morning rain far below in the mortal world.

In Zeus's private halls, servants moved quickly, folding deep indigo robes and fastening golden clasps across his broad shoulders. His golden hair fell down his back like rippling sunlight. Lightning flickered softly beneath his skin with each quiet exhale.

Hera stood beside him, her dark hair pinned into a braided crown, streaks of gold wire woven between the strands. Her crimson robes shimmered faintly with embroidered feathers that caught the dawn light with each shift of her body. She adjusted her golden sash with slow precision, her dark eyes unblinking as she watched her reflection in the polished bronze mirror before her.

"You look radiant," Zeus said quietly, his voice deep and rough with sleep still lingering at its edges.

Hera didn't respond at first. She pinned the last golden comb into her hair before turning to him, her face calm, expressionless.

"I always do," she said softly.

Zeus studied her for a moment before nodding once. He reached for his scepter resting against the table, its lightning-shaped crest glowing softly in the dim morning light.

The doors to their chambers opened quietly, and Metis entered. Her lavender robes pooled softly around her feet, her dark hair falling loose over her shoulders. She bowed her head to them both, her quiet eyes steady.

"You leave now for Asgard?" she asked.

Zeus nodded, stepping forward. "We do. The naming ceremony begins at high noon. Odin will be waiting."

Metis looked to Hera then, her gaze warm but distant. "Safe travels, Hera. May your return be swift."

Hera's lips curved faintly, though the smile did not reach her eyes. "Thank you, Metis."

Zeus reached out and touched Metis's shoulder lightly. "Guard Olympus in my absence," he said, his voice carrying quiet authority.

Metis inclined her head slightly. "Always."

Zeus turned away without another word, his golden robes swirling softly as he walked towards the outer halls. Hera followed him, her sandals silent against the marble floors. Behind them, Metis watched, her pale fingers curling slightly in the folds of her robe.

Outside, two golden chariots waited, each pulled by white steeds with wings of bronze feathers. Servants bowed low as Zeus and Hera stepped into the first chariot. The horses snorted softly, their bridles ringing with thin silver chains. Zeus took the reins with one massive hand, his golden eyes narrowing as he looked towards the horizon.

"Ready?" he asked.

Hera said nothing, simply folding her hands in her lap, her dark eyes fixed on the rising sun.

With a flick of his wrist, the chariot surged forward, the winged horses leaping into the pale sky. Wind tore past them as Olympus fell away beneath, golden towers shrinking into small silent pillars atop the vast mountain. The world blurred below them – silver rivers curling through green forests, distant mortal cities waking to their quiet dawns.

The ride was silent. Hera watched the sky ahead, her face calm as carved stone, her dark hair whipping around her shoulders in the cold wind.

Finally, the rainbow arc of Bifröst came into view ahead of them, its fractured lights glowing softly against the morning sky. The chariot soared down towards it, landing lightly on the shimmering bridge before slowing to a halt at the gates of Asgard.

Golden towers rose around them, carved with runes that pulsed faintly in the dawn light. Banners of red and black drifted from high battlements. Servants in dark tunics bowed low as Zeus and Hera stepped from the chariot onto the smooth stone floors of Gladsheim's entry hall.

They were led through tall iron-banded doors into the main gathering chamber. The hall was vast, lit with flickering braziers of blue flame. Spear racks lined the walls, and carved wolf-head columns rose to meet the dark timber beams above.

As they entered, a faint shuffling sounded to their right. Zeus paused, glancing sideways just in time to see a small boy dart behind a pillar. A thin string was stretched across the walkway before them, tied to a bronze jug balanced on its edge.

Hera frowned faintly, but Zeus chuckled softly under his breath.

"Children," he murmured.

Before they could step forward, Odin's deep voice rang through the hall.

"Loki."

The small boy stepped out slowly from behind the pillar, his thin frame wrapped in a dark green tunic tied with gold cord. Long black hair framed sharp green eyes that flickered with mischievous defiance.

"Yes, Father?" he asked, his voice careful, chin tilted slightly upward.

"Do you think it wise," Odin said, his single eye narrowing beneath his iron brow, "to prank the King of Olympus on the day of your brother's naming?"

Loki's mouth curved faintly into a thin smile. "It was only a test, All-Father. To see if he noticed."

Zeus laughed then, a deep, rumbling sound that filled the echoing hall. The thin tension in the air faded at once.

"Let him be, Odin," Zeus said, waving a massive hand dismissively. "They are boys. Tricks and pranks are their language."

Loki's eyes flickered to Zeus, a spark of admiration hidden beneath his arrogant grin. Thor, taller and broader despite being only slightly older, came stomping forward from

across the hall, his blond hair tied roughly back, thick arms bare beneath his leather sparring harness.

"Loki!" he shouted, grabbing the smaller boy by the back of his collar. "You're going to get whipped one day for all these tricks."

Loki twisted out of his grip, straightening his tunic with quick, graceful fingers. "Only if they catch me."

Thor scowled, but Zeus only chuckled again, shaking his head as he stepped forward, Hera silent at his side. Odin rose from his seat atop the wide iron and gold throne, his massive frame draped in a heavy black wolf-fur cloak.

"Welcome, Zeus. Welcome, Hera," he said, his deep voice carrying the quiet force of old storms. "You honour Asgard with your presence."

Zeus bowed his head slightly, the golden strands of his hair falling around his stern, handsome face.

"And you honour Olympus with your invitation," he said. His golden eyes flicked sideways to Loki and Thor still bickering quietly beside a spear rack. "Your sons are strong."

Odin's single eye softened faintly as he turned to watch them. "They will need to be."

Hera watched Loki quietly, her dark eyes unreadable as she studied the thin boy with mischief in his gaze and quiet fury hidden beneath his mocking smile.

They were led forward then, deeper into the gathering hall. Servants in dark linen moved around them, lighting fresh braziers and scattering thin petals of dried rowan and mistletoe across the stone floors. The naming ceremony would begin soon, and with it, the weaving of fate's next threads.

Zeus walked tall and silent at Hera's side, his robe trailing across the runed stone like dusk falling across a quiet sea, as the gods of Asgard gathered in solemn witness to the birth of a new power.