

Daphne

By Harley Gallagher

"There! An entrance to the Underworld! Stop here Clio." I unmounted the dragon and felt the ground.

*I knew it. This is the first step.*

Hate filled my heart as I flashed back to the memory of running for my life, trying to escape Apollo. I still remember Apollo calling my name—"Daphne! I will shower you with Hyacinths! I will make you my queen!" I will—No. I don't even want to remember praying to my father for help—help was his idea of turning me into a tree. I force a new memory into my mind. Artemis. Artemis walking up to me. Her words. "No woman should ever live out her life as a tree." Artemis transforming me back, then asking—"Would you like to join my Hunters, where no brother of mine will ever try to woo you again?" I wanted to say yes, but... I couldn't. I would get my revenge, *then* join the Hunters.

"Daphne. Daphne? Daphne!" Clio snapped me back. I nodded, snapping back from my memories. I leaned forward, looking into the crack. I stuck out my tongue in disgust. *There's no freshwater in there.* Only the Styx, the River of Hate. And there was no sunlight in the Underworld. No sun. N-no sun. *NO SUN!*

I turned around to face Clio, and the look on her scaly face was *please go in there.* I sigh and turn back, ready to jump in, and then someone pushes me. "CLIOOOOOOOOO!" *Oh gods.*

I land on the bank of the Styx with a *thump. Ouch.* The Underworld is dark. And disgusting. I already hate it here. Chills ran up my spine, and not just from the Styx. I feel bad for my fellow naiads there. Imagine being the river spirit of the River of Hate, or Woe, Wailing, Fire, or even Forgetfulness. I bet the naiads there forget their hair combs *all* the time.

But the Styx was freezing. I couldn't even get close to it without backing away.

I steadied myself, ready to dip in it. I crept closer to the River of Hate. I think it's rubbing off of me, because I really hate this river. I take a deep breath, and dip my toes in.

In my mind I thought, *OH GODS!*

What I actually said was, "...O-Oh g-gods."

Cold! Very cold!

S-so c-cold.

"You should see the punishments I've given. I won't list them all now, but catch up on history when you can. Maybe the Styx won't seem so bad then."

I turned around rapidly to find a woman in white hunting robes and a crown embroidered with an onyx moon.

Artemis.

“M-my lady! Please forgive me for not seeing you!” I got down on my knees and begged. “Oh please.” Artemis scoffed. “You’re giving a bad image of females.” I stood up, trying to look as strong as I could.

Artemis points to a far image of a boat with passengers, her other hand on a beautiful hunting dog. “Over there is where the ferryman Charon transports his passengers. That’s where you can get across. Here’s some drachmas. No money, no business.” Artemis stuck her hand out, and shimmering drachmas appeared in her pale hand.

“Thank you, my lady.” I replied. “Ha! I just wanna see Apollo stunned when *that one girl* comes back.” Artemis giggles, then puts on a more serious face. “I will try my best to protect you, Daphne. But don’t make stupid choices! That is always a hero’s downfall.” Artemis concludes her message and disappears in a beam of moonlight. When I look again, she’s gone besides the drachmas lying where she stood.

I pick them up and head for Charon.

I’m pretty sure immortals can choose what they look like, yet Charon decides to be an old man. “Well, a *not* dead soul! Going across—” Charon’s old, tired eyes drifted to my drachmas. He grinned, showing crooked teeth so yellow they might as well be gold.

Oh wait. I think that one *is* gold.

“Well... what are we waiting for?!” Charon exclaimed, a greedy hint in his eyes. I nodded and boarded the ferry boat, ready to meet Hades, King of the Underworld.

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Hades’ throne room is a gloomy but beautiful place. I thought of Clio. *Don’t worry Daphne, my inner self tells me. Once we get out of the Underworld, we’ll be able to see Clio. She’s probably fine.* I gulped as I took a step closer. I finally mustered up the courage to look up at the duel thrones.

What I saw surprised me.

Hades isn’t there.

Instead, his wife and queen, Persephone, is on her beautiful throne, looking annoyed. She scoffs when she sees my startled expression. She has long blonde hair with flowers braided in and a gray dress—not gloomy gray, but misty, dewy gray—with warm brown eyes. “Did you expect to see Hades? Too bad. He’s out feeding Cerberus. *BOREing*, am I right?” Persephone

announced. “Ahem. Sorry. What are you here for, nymph?” I replied, “Queen of the Underworld, Goddess of Spring, I need your help... getting revenge on Apollo.”

Persephone raised an eyebrow again, so I told her my story. She then sighs.

“Oh...mortals these days. So clueless. Well—what is your name?” “Daphne, my queen.”

“Daphne. Apollo wouldn’t chase after you if he had a choice. A while ago, he bragged to Eros about how much better his bow was. Eros, being the sensitive guy he is, shot Apollo with a love arrow and you with a lead one—so he loved you and you hated him.”

I’m stunned. *What?!* Persephone sighed once again. “I hope you use this information well, Daphne. Now, I’m going to plant some flowers in my garden. I’ll just transport you to the surface...” I couldn’t say anything, because I’m instantly teleported to a daffodil field.

Well... revenge is postponed. I have to go find Apollo now—for other reasons. My job isn’t unfinished—but I need more.