

# Avarice - Chapter II

By Avarice

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Athena gazed towards the late twilight with a mix of anxiety and excitement. The dark sun's light played on the autumn stained leaves of far away trees, to create the illusion of a fiery circle, silently burning around the field she alone stood upon. Behind this smouldering view, heavy and dark clouds dominated the distant sky with the looming promise of certain storms. This gloomy forecast was however, not the cause of her anxiety. Athena could feel it in the air, the building wrath of the Gods that would put the coming tempest to shame. It was like a blocked up volcano; suppressed and ready to burst forth with disastrous consequences.

Athena knew this like she knew when a draught was coming, or some other sort of impending misfortune. This knowing was built inside her nature as much as the colour of her flowing hair was, and the wise light that lay beneath the surface of her grey gaze. She stood and stared at the horizon, with the two emotions boiling inside her chest, as the cool wind blew her hair which was the fiery colour of the autumn leaves surrounding her. The second emotion of excitement was from the knowledge that the next time the golden sun rose, she would be a fully fledged woman of eighteen.

Husbandless and childless, with no interest in either, at the ripe age of eighteen may seem a little more than slightly daunting for your average Greek family, but Athena's family was not your average one. They were small time farmers with no fortune about themselves other than a herd of goats and a few fields of crops. They worked hard and long, finding fulfilment in their work as much as the finest craftsman of Greece could muster. It was a simple existence, but a blessedly peaceful one. Athena herself did the majority of the work, being stronger and fitter than her father could have ever hoped for. Her work was ever increasing too, as her parents were getting older and she only had one brother, born two years prior to her to help.

Athena was content, despite her mother's wishes for her to find herself a life in the city the closest to their secluded home. Her mother saw potential in her indisputable beauty, and wished for Athena herself to see it, but she did not. The satisfaction of work and hardship was a reward that lazing about and wearing pretty dresses could not dream to equal, in her mind. And who was to rescue the goats that went astray, if she was not there? Harvest, tend and prepare the crops? Her brother was sickly and weak, so unable to help a good majority of the time. Athena could not leave; would not.

She took one last glance at the chaos of colours that was the sunset, feeling the warm light on her face, before turning away and slowly walking through the long grasses of her family's field, her pale fingers fondly trailing above the tops of the hardy mountain vegetation. Before long her ever familiar cottage came into view at the base of the mountain, nestled in the white rock like a birds nest, hidden

from distant sight by trees and boulders. It was beautiful, like a painting in its perfection, and like a fairy tail in its ethereality. It was only a couple of years old, as at the young age of fifteen Athena had built it out of the surrounding resources, along with her father. Every time she caught sight of it, pride and peace filled her, along with a wash of pleasant memories.

~~~~~ Athena's mood grew even better when she spotted her mother collecting their linen where they had been left to dry in the sun, and walked towards her with a subtly radiant smile. Her mother was getting older, with wrinkly hands and a weary face, but was more than healthy enough to do the housework untroubled on most days. Today was different though, the old wife's back was giving her unreasonable troubles and the wind seemed to chill her very bones.

~~~~~ Catching her daughters approach out of the corner of her eye, she straightened her back and smiled at Athena with unrivalled warmth. "My dear child, I thought you were inside helping your brother fix the hole in your father's shirt."

Athena wondered at the unease behind her mother's gaze, but dismissed it and said lightly, "We finished that an hour ago, and as there was no work to do I decided to go on a stroll." Athena then busied herself helping to retrieve the cloth from the cliff face, glancing at the confusing scene of dusk behind her as the colours grew steadily more oppressing.

She paused, her dexterous fingers working as she thought. "Mother, I know this may sound sudden, but do you know of a reason for the Gods to be so displeased? I can feel it in the air, their growing amnesty towards us surface walkers is so deep." Athena said, the skin between her eyes creasing to show her displeasure. Her mother froze suddenly, causing Athena to glance at her in worry. "It will be alright, I'm sure of it. We are so secluded that a war would barely be cause for worry, let alone the Gods who have no business with farmers such as us." Athena added quickly, wishing to ease the reason for her mother's shock. Her mother was silent, the cloth in her hands long forgotten as she gazed towards the setting sun, feeling not what her daughter claimed to.

"The King is the cause of such feelings. No one else is to blame but him and his greed. Not the civilians, nor his advisors." Her mother's voice was so grave that Athena's light mood was dampened by worry, but the old woman soon collected herself and got about with the work that needed to be done.

"I gather you wish to know the tale?" Her mother ventured once the cloth was collected and they made their way towards the cottage. Athena confirmed she did, and her mother stopped outside the doorway and turned to her only daughter, smiling fondly. "Listen carefully, because it is a story seldom told." Athena did not ask why, only nodded. "The present King is the younger brother of King Perisius, the previous ruler of Avarice. King Perisius was as arrogant as his younger brother is now, he had an immeasurable greed for wealth that had been born from the growing prosperity of Avarice. Perisius gloated that his daughter was the fairer than the goddess Aphrodite herself, and proclaimed that the gods

had no hand in the growth of the grand city. And one day he went too far with his claims. As punishment, it is said that the gods took his daughter into the underworld, to never be seen again. Perisius was thus enraged at the gods, and ventured to Mount Olympus to retrieve his daughter. He was never seen again, despite taking fifty men along with him.â€•

Athenaâ€™s eye widened at the number of men and their fate, but her mother had yet to finish the tale. â€œHer wife was then left to rule, and for a good decade she did so peacefully, not consumed by greed or want for more, like her ill fated husband had been. Avarice was ruled fairly and the taxes were low, but it was not to last. The queen died, and a young boy claiming to be the half brother of the deceased Perisius was throned. No one knows how he proved it, but he managed to convince them all and has ruled for the past few years.â€• Athena looked through the semi-darkness to see her mother's eyes glazed, as she looked through the eyes of her past self.

â€œNow King Athar, Perisiusâ€™s younger brother, is ruling like a power hungry God. High taxes, strict rule and a court run by fear. This alone is not enough to earn more than the bland ill-will of the gods, but he has stopped all worship towards them, and the Gods are starting to have enough of humanityâ€™s arrogance.â€•

Athena was silent as she watched awareness grow in her motherâ€™s eyes, feeling none of her earlier cheer. â€œThe oracles of Apollo have stopped seeing, snakes have been found in our wells, and cattle are dieing for no reason. It is only matter of time before one side gives way.â€•

Silence enveloped the two as the last words of Athenaâ€™s motherâ€™s speech hung in the air. Athena could feel it, the threat to her peace and future, as clearly as if she had known it since her birth.

Suddenly, her mother smiled warmly and broke the silence, â€œCome, let us not dwell on misfortunes such as these, for tomorrow is your birthday, and youâ€™re eighteenth at that.â€•

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