



PROMPT #1: Write about a god desperately trying to get their chosen hero to follow the path they set out for them.

[untitled]

by **Carrie Cheng**

What would be the easiest way to strangle someone? Large hands would help. To completely wrap around the throat that produces such vulgar language would put this torment to an end, but when I first looked at him, he looked back. I'm certain he did because then he closed his eyes and tilted his head to hum his tune towards the left part of the tavern. And when his fingers picked up the pace and showcased their proficiency on the lyre, he let out his voice and sang the words of a forgotten sailor cursing the god for the violent seas. What else did this mean other than a direct acknowledgment of my presence?

But that first meeting only established how fit he was for the role of a hero. Cheers had erupted and while intoxicated people shared their drinks with the floor, the man merely slouched down more on the stool and shielded his instrument from the bustling environment. It was the great finishing climax that made everyone rise up and celebrate another hard-earned day. There was no space that went empty, as people embraced fellow drinkers, so when a woman flung herself towards her partner, right through my body, I didn't mind. I felt nothing and she most definitely didn't notice, but the musician peered at the spot where I stood and a smile wiggled on my face.

He was observant and knew how to hold his composure during the chaos. All that was left was to guide him to a sword and a teacher. So I followed him up that night to his room and the man gave a surprising response of looking over his shoulder and giving a smile. I was overjoyed at how much easier this was this time around because all I had to do was explain the situation. He should've already deduced who I am and connected himself to the prophecy I had already sent out to the church.

But when I opened my mouth, he spoke first with his honey voice and said, "Leave me alone." And then slammed the door in my face.

Confounded is a word I am not allowing myself be related to, but maybe discomposd might suffice to detail my next few attempts. I just couldn't believe someone would be so *rude* to, well, *me* because that made no sense. How could he refuse my calls to be the next hero? He would receive more money through the church and patrons than his shows for taverns. He would gain fame and recognition for something meaningful. And at the end of the adventure? He would be able to settle down and marry whoever he makes friends with along the way. But he avoided every single crack in the road that would lead to those fateful encounters and willed himself awake from the dreams I sent him. He then decided to retaliate and began openly mocking the existence of god.

Maybe I *should* strangle him. Or at least cause a small accident that would create a black eye on the face he treasures and flaunts. But now he had his lyre in front of children, singing a popular folk song and swaying with the tempo. It was a tranquil scene, but the children wore ragged clothes and hopped around the man barefoot. Though they wore wide grins, their parents were nowhere to be seen, and the chord progression he had picked matched the falling red and yellow leaves perfectly. It all le a sour a ertaste in my mouth and annoyance crawled up my body. I had already promised a hero for this time and though he wouldn't be fighting physical battles, he needs to lead the people out of the a ermath of war.

So I li ed my arm and gave a small gesture to the wind, which complied eagerly and dashed along the branches of trees and the man's upper body. His hat fell off his head and while a boy tried to catch it for him, I pointed to the right and the wind carried it a few feet further to the shop of magical items. I looked back at the man and somehow, I had a feeling his smile was even bigger than before as he laughed at the loss of his headwear and got the kids to do the same. With a quick ushering to the center of the town square, he pulled himself away from them and walked towards his hat.

He was slow when bending down to pick it up and even slower when patting off the dirt from each possible side. But I kept quiet, even as he held out the hat to examine the feather at all angles for its ideal shape.

He suddenly spoke, "When I have admirers, I take that as a signal to leave the town."

I felt my mouth slightly open as the rest of my face scrunched up. *What?*

He continued on, "While I live by being watched, this is taking it a bit too far, don'chu think?"

All my frustration came out first in a heavy sigh, and even more was shown through my voice as the corner of his mouth twitched up. "Why refuse? You will get everything—"

“Why *should* I?” He turns to face me and crosses his arms, careful not to ruin his hat. “Hm?”

Now it was obvious that he was taunting me. For weeks he had ignored all my signals and decided to finally show his impertinence. I give my best winning smile and begin, “*Because* you will get everything. Do you think living as you are now is fulfilling? Is—”

“Yes.”

The urge to use the wind to impel him somewhere was tempting, but I continued on. “How is that? Compared to being the symbol of the kingdom, you won’t get as much fame or money. You can still do music as a pastime and with a much bigger audience at that. Everyone will know your name and it will be written down in history. Is that not what you want?” Now he was smiling and I felt the words come out faster. “Performers such as yourself live for the praise and admiration, do you not? And you are a person of this country. You live and interact with its people. You *care* for them, do you not? So you should lead them as a strong figure in these weak times. War has ruined people and the land. They need a leader to look up to.”

But as I gave him the reasonings, the resolve dwindled. I have waited to have a conversation and convince him of this journey, but oddly, now I’m wondering if this was the right call.

He hums and nods, as if satisfied with the outcome. “You think humans too simple.”

“*What?*” That was ridiculous. They are more incredible than anything in this world. Their community is proof of that.

“*Do you not?*” He imitates the tone I showed earlier and I grimace at the tone. “I, in fact, don’t. While I do enjoy the praise, what I enjoy most about performing,” he uncrosses his arms and brings up his pointer fingers together in front of his mouth before separating them into a curve upwards, “is how it brings the smiles to people’s faces.”

“That noble quality—”

“Uh uh.” He tuts with a finger waving back and right before letting his arms fall to his side. “Not done yet.” He takes another breath and says, “Being a ‘figure’ wouldn’t do anything. This isn’t the time of war. There’s no need for conflict or strength.”

Now I was lost. I agree that there’s no need for fighting, as that was done by the previous hero, but strength was always needed, whether physically or in the form of hope.

He spoke with long pauses in between the sentences. “It’s fine to be strong. But us people won’t fade away because we’re not strong. We need time to be weak. To be vulnerable. I’m not going to be whatever you want me to be because who I am now is what these people need. This isn’t just the time after the war. It’s now the time of peace.

And if the people I care about know my name, isn’t that enough?”

He then pulls up the cheeky grin he always had when sidestepping all the obstacles I’ve set up for him. With a quick nod of his head as a poor excuse for a bow, he puts his hat on securely and then unstraps his lyre from his belt.

“I’ve got to go now. The kids are waiting for me.” The man didn’t look back, but I still watched him. As he became smaller in the distance, he blended right in with a new scenery. Of people going around in their daily lives, war-stricken, but the chatters of eggs and trade, bangs of construction, and children’s laughter were a harmonious sound. I couldn’t help the smile that made its way onto my face nor the sting in my eyes.

In the end, everyone was happy and will be happy for as many years that will come. Because isn’t that what everybody wants?