2370 A Cruel Fate  
The mountains had collapsed, creating a vast valley. The green slopes had turned into a brown desert of crushed rock… and now, the desert turned into a red river.  
  
The blood - red cloaks of the imperial soldiers were like a crimson tide as they marched forward, sunlight glistening on the tips of their spears.  
  
Far above the sea of marching warriors, a hawk was gliding on the gentle winds. It opened its beak and let out a cry, then moved its wings to fly away. It was just in time - a moment latеr, a golden arrow flashed past it, tearing the sky apart.  
  
The hawk folded its wings and plummeted down, then spread them again to glide and escape the cold gaze of the unseen archer.  
  
It flew away, across the rolling hills of olive trees and beautiful cities. Across the wine - colored sea with islands where vibrant flowers bloomed among white rocks. Across deep forests teeming with wildlife, where holy beasts rested in the shade of emerald canopies, deep quarries where precious marble was being mined, and tranquil shrines.  
Across a peaceful realm that was about to be devoured by the jaws of War.  
  
Eventually, the hawk reached a vast city that sprawled around a tall hill and landed in the courtyard of a humble manor, turning into a woman who wore a deer hide around her shoulders. Her olive skin was covered in sweat, and her breathing was labored, her face showing fatigue from having crossed such a great distance in such a short time.  
"My lady!"  
Handmaidens rushed to offer her water and fresh fruit, their eyes gleaming with awe and veneration.  
The woman drank deeply from a beautifully painted amphora, then waved the young girls away. When she looked at them, her own eyes became full of sorrow for a brief moment.  
Then, she hid her sorrow away.  
"No time for that. Where is the prince? I must see him."  
The handmaidens looked at each other, prompting her to frown.  
"What is it?"  
They looked in the direction of the hill, where an ancient temple stood, its white pillars weathered from the passage of time.  
"It is the Oracle… you have been summoned. The prince, as well."  
The woman sighed bitterly, then wiped the water off her lips.  
"Now they are speaking, huh?"  
She closed her eyes for a few seconds, then straightened and looked at the young handmaidens one more time.  
The girls giggled in embarrassment under her gaze, which made the woman's face harden. Turning away, she left without looking back.  
  
The atmosphere in the temple was peculiar when she arrived. It stood empty most of the time, but now, there were people.  
She recognized most of them.  
There was a noble young man with calm and wise eyes. A boy with red hair - an unusual color in this land. A scholarly woman with a long black braid, her graceful beauty both subtle and bewitching.  
There was also a tall warrior with broad shoulders, his towering height making the others seem puny. A slender man in elegant clothes who looked like a sculptor. A ship captain whose rough skin had turned bronze in the sun, his eyes the same color as the sea. A blind poet whose songs were renowned across the realm. A woman who was either a priestess or a courtesan, or possibly both…  
Each and every one of them, except the boy, was famous for one reason or another. Some of them were immensely powerful, while some were only slightly so, but all were outstanding.  
  
All in all, it was a peculiar crowd of people.  
  
As the woman wearing a deerskin around her shoulders arrived, there were now nine of them.  
She looked at the gathering with a frown, but chose to say nothing.  
The warrior spoke, instead, his booming voice echoing under the roof of the ancient temple:  
"What news?"  
The woman responded curtly.  
"It is as we expected. The imperials are already on the match."  
The warrior clicked his tongue.  
"Curses! I should be gathering citizens into an army, not wasting my time here."  
The noble young man looked at him calmly.  
"We were summoned."  
Despite the difference in their height, the tall man seemed taken aback. He lowered his head.  
"I am sorry, my prince. I spoke out of turn."  
  
Soon, they were ushered into the inner sanctum of the temple. There, three figures sat behind a veil.  
A young girl, a mature woman, and an old hag…  
All three of them were blind, but saw much more than anyone with sight could.  
They were the Oracle.  
The young man kneeled before them.  
"I, Eurys, greet you. We have arrived to answer your call."  
The three women smiled and responded, their three voices becoming one:  
"Greetings, brother!"  
"Greetings, my son."  
"Greetings, child."  
The young man - Prince Eurys - took a deep breath.  
"Our homeland is in grave peril, oh Oracle. And so, we beseech you… please, show us how to save our realm."  
The young girl seеmed sad. The woman stayed motionless. The old hag laughed.  
"Have you finally learned manners, naughty child?"  
The young man stayed silent for a few seconds, then repeated his words:  
"We beseech you."  
The young girl moved, as if wanting to cross the veil and touch him, but the woman held her back. She turned her head to face the kneeling prince, and then said calmly:  
"I am sorry, my son. But that is not why we called you."  
The eight people staying behind the prince paled, while the prince himself pursed his lips.  
  
The three women continued, their voices fusing with each other.  
"This land of ours…"  
"Cannot be saved."  
"The tapestry of fate is vast, but it is also cruel."  
"The empire won't be stopped."  
"Our cities…"  
"Will burn."  
"Our people will be enslaved."  
"Our kingdom will fall, its very name forgotten."  
"We cannot stop it."  
"But…"  
There was a second of silence befоre the Oracle spoke again.  
"We can avenge ourselves."  
"The nine of you can."  
"The nine of you will."  
"The Empire of War…"  
"Must be destroyed."  
The prince looked up at the Oracle, his eyes full of darkness.  
  
Eventually, he looked down.  
"My, oh my. How can nine people destroy an empire? It is protected by a god."  
There were a few moments of silence, and then the little girl leaned forward.  
Her childish voice rеsounded in the silence of the ancient temple, echoing under its roof:  
"Then you must kill the gods."