

Prologue

Arrows rained down on the deep, followed by a steady stream of sinking men. Fallen men flung their arms wide against the current's fleeting cushion. The war muffled their voices, forming a barrier through which only the visible elements of war could be perceived. The wall grew thicker, drowning out the noise above. A boy drifted near the ocean floor and saw as all these remnants of war preceded the unwelcome sight of sinking ships. He thought that the deafening silence was due to the compression of all ocean sounds. But it was a wall that kept all the cries of war at bay.

The boy was Triton, child of the deep. He saw the shadows of the ocean floor lengthen, but then he felt the touch of a hand. It was a hand not unlike his own, but more delicate. It was the hand of a girl around his age. He looked up and saw her as she maneuvered herself closer to him. The girl's hand tightened around his, but he was more alarmed than pleased by her presence. It was an Oceanid, one of the many water nymphs who belonged to the kingdom of Oceanus. "What are you doing here, Oceanid? Oceanus will not be pleased."

The girl smiled and replied, "You can hear my voice, can you?"

Triton wondered at her words and realized his own voice remained unheard to him. He spoke again, but the words instantly drifted into silence.

The girl spoke but did not hear her own voice as well. Then she said, "I can hear your voice even if you can't. And you can hear mine even if I can't," she said.

Triton had a puzzled look. The girl nodded to him and pointed toward the surface. "There is a wall that is preventing sound from traveling as before. But I think you know that already."

The two swam side by side. Triton looked around him and realized that all the sinking men and ships were gone now. The light coming from the surface dimmed. Triton looked alarmingly at the girl, who smiled at him reassuringly. She still held his hand as she said, "Don't worry. The wall will not always be there. We can still..." Her words trailed off into silence. The wall was shifting again. Both of them knew it.

The Serenity War

There was silent war, but then boisterous peace. Tridents had clashed in a sea of abysmal sound. But then peace had come at a wordless and even soundless cost. It had all been a mystery...until now.

The kingdoms had waged a series of trident wars, but it was only when they had achieved peace that the ocean became noise. The trident wars had brought the voiceless toil and labors of armies. But the absence of war was unbearably loud.

Something had been erected, but something had also made it through. Everything became clear to Triton. He understood now. The silence in his mind was silence no longer.

But was it too late?

On the day Oceanus was wedded to Tethys, all the sea kingdoms had gathered to honor the event. He was, after all, the god of fresh water, and it was said that the wellsprings that arose from him bound all the rivers of the

earth together. The kingdoms had sent the most illustrious and decorated members of their societies. However, there was one problem: Tethys had almost failed to exchange vows with Oceanus. Gripped by a sudden silence, the goddess had seen war forming in the eyes of her future husband.

The honored guests had seen Tethys march ceremoniously down the sea flower-encrusted aisle. Every pair of eyes was directed at her, and she managed to purse her smile to contain her timidity. The wedding was the most lavish and crowded she had ever seen. Men in armor and women in flowing gowns watched with muted appreciation. Oceanus stood at the center, where he stood patiently as the bride drifted in silence. Words of praise and wonder arose from the crowd. But each guest kept their voice low as a means to honor Oceanus. When Tethys stood before him, he smiled and nodded to her. Everyone was hushed into total silence. A man stood between the two and glanced at both of them.

“Do you, Oceanus, take Tethys as your beloved wife, now and forever?”

“I do,” he said, his voice echoing through the deep.

Then the man regarded Tethys warmly before saying, “And do you, Tethys, take Oceanus as your beloved husband?”

It was then that Tethys fell in a strange silence, as though the words of love and devotion died in her throat. And then she knew why. She looked into the eyes of Oceanus and saw armies marching. War flowed in his eyes. The sight of it caused her voice to gain the likeness of waves dispersing. Everyone observed her, waiting for her voice to be heard, but the words she spoke seemed to scatter aimlessly like bubbles. Oceanus thought he saw her lips

move, but no sound arose from them.

Tethys struggled to speak. Her voice drowned in silence. She spoke, but Oceanus heard nothing. “Speak, my love,” Oceanus said. The man who stood between them was confused. Then he asked again, “Will you take Oceanus as your beloved husband?”

Then Tethys looked into Oceanus' eyes and saw the calm blue she had always known and loved. “I will,” she said finally.

Oceanus smiled broadly and held her hands more firmly. Tethys turned with him to face the joyful crowds, who cheered at their shared nuptials. But the armies she had seen in his eyes lingered in her thoughts. Deep inside, she had felt the images silence her voice. She wondered whether she should have joined hands with him in matrimony. The words of praise that arose from the crowded guests somehow allowed her own voice to be heard. But she knew: war was coming.

A hand reached and grasped a trident with such forcefulness that it seemed to tame the sea's infinities. It held the trident upward as a barrier rippled overhead. The wall above almost appeared as a whirlpool were it not for the lack of gravitational pull.

A boy and girl stood on the opposite sides of the wall. When the boy spoke, he saw his words become bubbles of air that moved through the

rippling wall. "Take my hand!" the boy said as he reached out. The words reached through the wall, but the girl heard the words "Don't come near me!"

The two children shared confusing looks as the wall shifted. The wall rippled again as though a rock had fallen into a pond. Then the trident-wielding hand below them reached higher. The liquid wall became denser now, and all sounds the boy and girl made were inaudible. Sound became silence, and then silence became sound again. But it was not a dream anymore. It was the precious stone-like solidity of a world without war, a world in which walls no longer kept people prisoner but protected them. Walls had dissolved between the kingdoms, but now another one seemed to have emerged. The liquid wall in his dream kept his mind prisoner, and he wanted to know why.

Triton squinted through the depths, as though to dispel the lingering trace of his dream. The dream was vivid and seemed to penetrate his conscious mind regardless of his attempt to repress it. He saw himself as a boy, and there was a girl he barely recognized. But he brushed all thoughts of the dream away. He had business to attend to. He was, after all, a messenger, who would put aside all duty to ensure that the coming ceremony would proceed smoothly.

Triton arrived at Poseidon's kingdom, where mermen were preparing for a collective wedding with the water nymphs of Oceanus' kingdom. Triton knew this was the outcome of aquatic peace. Poseidon had sent Triton to warn all the underwater kingdoms of imminent doom. Some kingdoms had heeded the warnings instantly while others did so belatedly. But in the end,

the kingdoms joined together their tridents. Triton had sensed the shifts of the ocean, and he felt song-like rhythms alter the depths from time to time. Change was coming again. It reached him soundlessly, like the distant sound of ocean currents dispersing. But for now the seas reveled in unforeseen prosperity. Triton had helped to forge alliances, and the seas once again teemed with possibilities.

The kingdoms had achieved unity in the face of a common threat. They had agreed to form closer relations in one form or another. Weeks ago, Tethys, the wife of Oceanus, had arranged for thousands of her water nymph daughters to be wedded to the young mermen of Poseidon's kingdom. Oceanus sat on the seashell throne of his large palace. He had rejoiced at the prospect of long-term peace. The queen had also envisioned a long-lasting unity between all the kingdoms. The brides had all gathered and made a lasting impression on Poseidon, who nodded approvingly at the display of beauty.

One by one the water nymphs appeared, their hair emitting a glow under the shining walls of the palace. Each of them smiled timidly as they approached. "Ah, my beautiful daughters," Tethys had said warmly as she saw all the brides. "Today is the beginning of a long marriage even as our two kingdoms are wedded to one another."

Oceanus also appeared pleased beyond words. He motioned for one of the nymphs to approach. "Come, daughter, approach. I wish for the mermen all to marvel at your beauty. The mermen will be arriving shortly."

Poseidon heard the small clamor of the doors being opened and then shut. The mermen of Poseidon's kingdom entered in a slow, ceremonial fashion. Their boisterous voices echoed through the great halls of the palace. They glanced at the women arrayed on the other side. They heard the giggling noises of the nymphs as they saw the men dart curious glances in their direction. The eager voices of the mermen and excited laughter of the Oceanids intermingled, forming a cacophony inside the watery confines of the palace. Oceanus smiled at the nymph and said, "Myriella, my sweet daughter. I will choose a mate for you. He is the bravest of all Poseidon's children. There he stands. He is Gyron."

Oceanus motioned toward the young man. Myriella observed him curiously while her father asked, "Will you not join him and prepare to be wedded to him?"

Myriella stood still for a moment. She heard the cacophony, and she strained to hear clearly. She remained silent, so silent in fact that Oceanus grew alarmed and even outraged. "Daughter, speak!"

She leaned forward and lowered her head. "I will marry him, father. I will do as you please," she said. But Oceanus seemed to have heard something else. The intermingling sounds the mermen and nymphs made seemed to have altered her spoken words. "What? You refuse to marry him?"

Myriella shook her head and looked at him with confused eyes. "No, I said I will marry him, father."

Oceanus narrowed his eyes painfully. He once again responded as though she said the contrary. "Ah, I see, your refusal is noted. I am most displeased with

you.” Myriella failed to grasp how different words had reached her father than the ones she had spoken. The mermen and nymphs were close to each other, speaking as if in a loud, cacophonious voice.

Myriella saw Gyron turn away in disappointment. Then Triton appeared. The son of Poseidon walked along the mermen, who seemed eager to know which of the water nymphs they would be wedded to. The Mermen could barely tear their lustful eyes away from the nymphs. Triton's sudden arrival assuaged Myriella, who looked at him as though in recognition. Triton had just entered the seashell-encrusted corridor of Oceanus' palace, which glowed with deep blue and green hues. The two stared at each other for a moment, but Triton proceeded to speak with Oceanus. Their eyes seemed to be speaking through the distorting euphoria around them.

Oceanus smiled. “Triton, son of Poseidon, I am most glad you have arrived. But my daughter here refuses to marry the man I have chosen for her.” “Oh?” Triton looked at her inquisitively. “Who, then, does she want to marry?”

Myriella maintained her curious eyes on the son of Poseidon. She felt a connection to Triton. Oceanus asked her to whom she wished to be wedded. Triton recognized how critical this moment was as it helped to cement peace between the two kingdoms. Oceanus and Poseidon were eager for this to be underway and done with.

“Daughter, I will allow you to choose a mate.”

Myriella spoke, but her voice remained unheard to her. The noise around her seemed to refashion her words. “Triton? Ah, yes. It seems you arrived here at precisely the right moment, son of Poseidon.”

Triton slowly approached Myriella. He remembered the girl he saw in his dream, but he wondered whether what he had experienced was a vision.

Tethys had overheard, and she approached Triton and Myriella. Oceanus looked at him intently and asked, “Will you take her as your bride, Triton?”

For a moment, he was silent. But then he said, “I will.”

Oceanus failed to hear these words as the mermen spoke collectively, and they all seemed to be saying, “He said he will not, therefore she must choose a mate from amongst us.” The nymphs giggled uncontrollably, and the mermen spoke loudly.

Triton shook his head. “No, I said I will take her as my bride.”

Myriella somehow heard the words through the invisible wall between them, but the mermen instantly converged upon Triton. Now the mermen seemed to have heard his words correctly. “You cannot change your mind, Triton. She must choose one of us now.” Triton looked at them in disbelief. Myriella gasped and covered her mouth with her hand.

The mermen drew sharp weapons and lunged at Triton, who was shocked by the sight. Oceanus looked on in dismay. Myriella failed to grasp the meaning of these events. Triton had said one thing, but the mermen seemed to have heard something else entirely. The voices of the mermen and Oceanids now dissolved in a wave of panic and dismay.

Oceanus grew alarmed again. He smote the armrests of his throne and

rose impetuously. He waved his arms in dismay and shouted, "There can be no peace between our two kingdoms if my daughter is the object of such intense rivalry and jealousy. We must end our peaceful relations with Poseidon's kingdom!" Tethys covered her mouth with her hand. "We cannot go to war again, my love," she said.

Oceanus gave her a cold stare. "It seems that we must."

Myriella turned to look at Triton. They both looked at each other curiously, as though feeling responsible for everything that had just happened. They both spoke but heard only the other's words. "We must preserve the peace!" Triton said.

"Yes, we cannot afford another trident war!" she replied.

Each heard the other's words but failed to hear their own words. Oceanus looked on in dismay. The words Triton and Myriella had spoken faded into a loud noise. Then Poseidon appeared and Oceanus raised his trident. The god of the seas had a mystified look, but Oceanus seemed intent on fighting him. Everyone was hushed into silence as the tridents clashed. The mermen and nymphs were utterly voiceless now as the two kingdoms stood on the threshold of war.

Triton rushed to take Myriella and they both departed. Poseidon and Oceanus stood still and watched as both faded into the distance. The nymphs and mermen now drifted away from each other. The peace between the two kingdoms had ended.