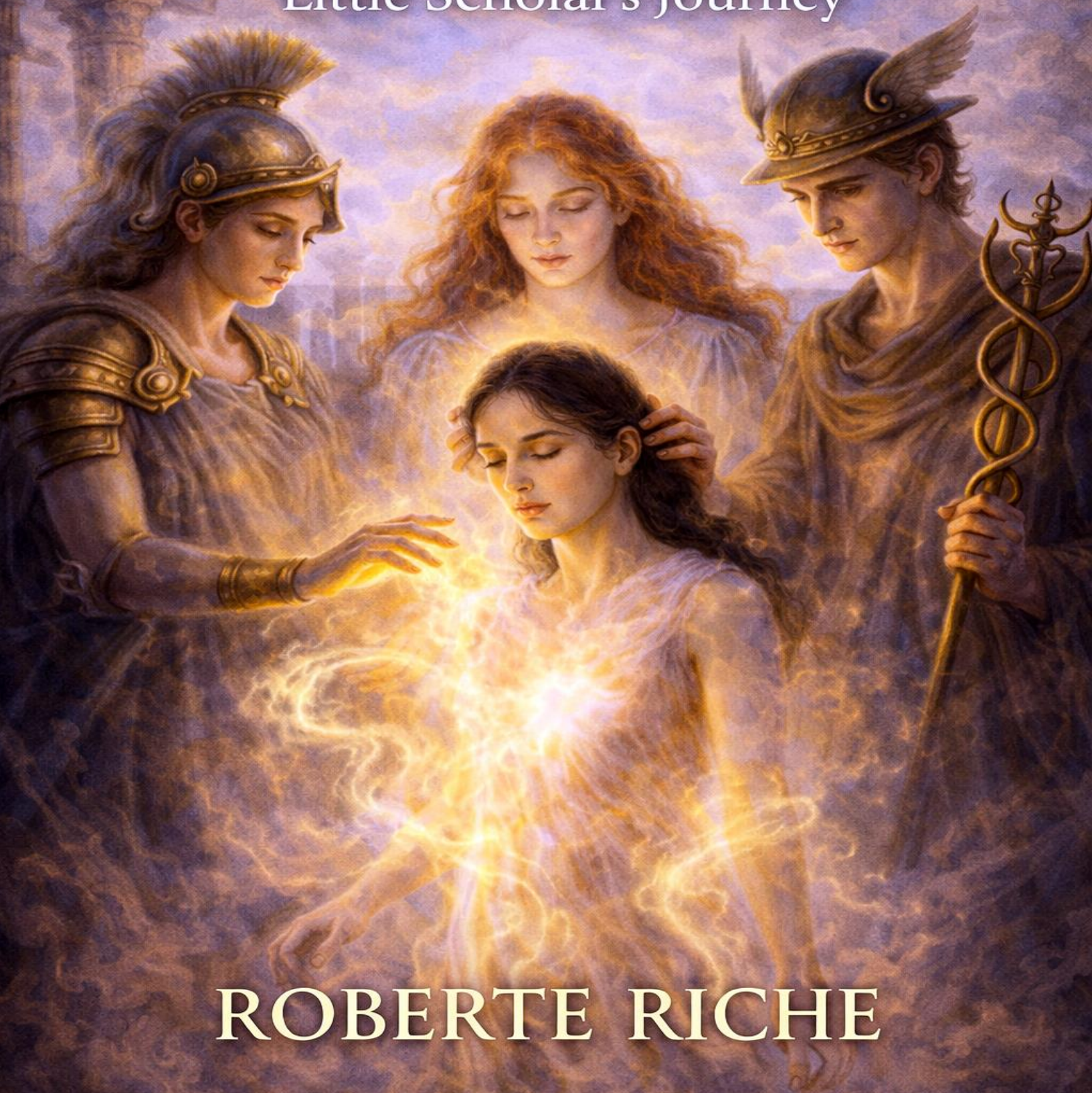


THE BIRTH OF CALLISTA

Little Scholar's Journey



ROBERTE RICHE



The Birth of Callista
Little Scholar's Journey

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Prelude:

She was not born.

She did not come from blood, or breath, or any line that could be traced backward. She began when remembrance began to fail.

Names faded first. Then the stories that carried them. What had once been spoken with certainty thinned, scattered, and slipped from the world without resistance. Even the gods felt it—the quiet loss of what had been known.

So she was made.

Not as a god, who stands apart.

Not as a mortal, who breaks beneath what they carry.

Something between.

A daimon.

She was given no past to anchor her, and no end to measure her against. She exists only in the moment she stands within, untouched by what came before, unchanged by the weight others cannot release.

She does not remember for herself.

She remembers for the world.

Where a voice is lost, she hears it.

Where a story falters, she gives it shape.

Where truth is buried, she brings it into form.

She walks where memory weakens—between what is spoken and what is forgotten, between the living and what remains of them.

She does not judge.

She does not change what was.

She only carries it forward, so it does not vanish.

This is her purpose.

This is her path.

And so she walks.

Hymn to Callista the Rememberer

(An original poem)

Sing, O Muse, of Callista,
born not of womb nor of earth,
but shaped from Mind and Memory,
and the road between.

When men forgot the names of old,
and the voices of gods grew faint,
the halls of heaven fell to quiet,
and remembrance began to fail.

Then they made a wanderer.
Not mortal, who breaks beneath truth,
nor divine, who stands too far above it,
but a daimon who walks between.

To her they gave sight to see what remains,
and a heart to hear what is not spoken,
and the path that crosses unseen ways.

So she goes where stories fall silent,
where memory thins and falters,
where the last words wait without voice.

For where her hand sets truth in place,
the lost are not undone,
and silence does not prevail.

Sing of her, O Muse,
the daimon who remembers.

Aedon in Homer's Odyssey (Samuel Butler Translation, 1898 — Public Domain)

"As the nightingale, daughter of Pandareus,
sings in the early spring from her seat in the thick foliage of the trees;
and with her many-toned voice trills mournfully for Itylus,
her beloved son, whom she slew unwittingly with the sword,
so my heart is rent within me as I think of these things."

This is **the earliest surviving poetic reference to Aedon**, portraying her as the eternal lamenting nightingale whose grief becomes the emblem of endless sorrow.



hapter 1

The Whisper in the Void

The age of gods was fading.

Across the world, the temples stood hollow, their marble faces weathered by time and neglect. The hymns that once rose from every mountain and sea had grown faint, replaced by the clash of armies and the pride of kings. Mortals no longer prayed with open hearts. They whispered to the void, not to be heard, but to feel less alone.

I remember the sound of that silence. It was the first thing I ever knew. It was not the silence before creation, it was the silence of the void itself, after belief had begun to die.

From that silence came a voice. Not loud. Not distant. It did not need to travel.

“Who will remember us when they no longer do?”

The words did not echo. They settled.

Three voices spoke as one, each distinct yet inseparable. I did not understand them, yet their meaning reached me. That question shaped the space around it. And within that shaping, I became aware.

When I opened my eyes, there was something beneath my feet.

Not earth. Not stone shaped by time.

A surface held together by will.

Pale marble stretched outward, smooth in places, fractured in others. Fine cracks ran through it, filled with a faint glow that pulsed as though something beneath it pressed upward. It did not belong to any world I could name. It existed because it had been made to exist.

The void remained beyond it, vast and empty. This place stood apart from it.

A space made for this moment.

The air held no warmth or chill. It did not move. It did not carry scent. It simply was.

And before me stood three figures.

Athena. Mnemosyne. Hermes.

They did not arrive. They were already there.

Athena stood first, her presence firm, grounded. Her armor bore the marks of long use, not neglect. Light moved across its surface but did not linger. Her gaze held steady on me, measuring, not unkind, but exact.

“The world grows dim,” she said. Her voice did not rise. It carried weight without force. “Mortals forget what shaped them. Their stories weaken. And with them, so do we.”

Mnemosyne, the mother of memory, stood beside her, still, composed. The space around her held a quiet pressure, as if it contained more than it revealed. A low murmur gathered near her, not words, but the shape of them. Names that had lost their speakers. Prayers left unfinished.

“The forgetting does not belong to mortals alone,” she said. “We turned away from what should have been held.”

Hermes moved last, though he did not step so much as shift into place. His posture remained loose, his attention sharp. His eyes moved over me quickly, taking in what I was without hesitation.

“You both speak as if this is ending,” he said. “It is not ending. It is thinning.” His gaze settled. “And this one?”

Athena answered without turning. "She is remembrance."

The word took hold.

"Remembrance?" I spoke. The sound of my voice felt new, yet certain. "I do not understand."

"You will," Mnemosyne said. "You are born of thought and story, given form so that what is lost may yet be heard again. The mortals have their poets, but their voices falter. We will give you more. The gift of endless memory."

She lifted her veil.

Her eyes held a depth I could not name, a weight that felt older than the place we stood. I had nothing to compare it to, yet something in me recognized the power of what she carried.

She spoke, and as she did, something passed from her.

Not light. Not sound.

A presence.

It moved with her breath and reached me. When it touched my lips, it entered without resistance. I felt it settle inside me, not as memory already formed, but as the ability to hold it. To receive what others would lose.

"The memory of all things will pass through you," she said.

The space within me changed. Expanded. Made ready.

Hermes stepped forward, one hand lifting.

Between his fingers, a thin thread of gold caught the light. It shifted as he moved, never still, as if it resisted remaining in one place.

"You will not stay where you are placed," he said. "You will move where others cannot."

He lowered his hand and pressed the thread into my palm.

It did not rest there.

It sank into my skin, warmth spreading along my hand, up my arm, into my chest. Not burning. Not painful. It moved with purpose, then settled.

“The paths between places will open to you,” he said. “Not all at once. When needed.”

Athena stepped closer.

She raised her hand and placed two fingers against my brow.

The contact stilled everything.

“You will not die,” she said. “And you will not forget.”

Something passed through me. Not overwhelming. Not forceful. It held me steady. What Mnemosyne had given me, Athena anchored.

“You will walk among mortals,” she continued. “You will be seen but not known. You will hear what others lose. You will carry what remains.”

Her hand lowered.

I felt the weight of it settle.

“Why me?” I asked.

Her gaze did not shift. “Because you were not made to worship us. You were made to remember us.”

Mnemosyne stepped forward again.

“You will carry a name,” she said. “*Callista*; not for beauty of form, but for the beauty of what you will preserve.”

The word took hold as she spoke it.

“Kalli-historia,” she murmured, as if shaping the name itself from air. “The Beautiful Story. The Chosen for the Story.”

The name did not feel given. It felt recognized.

Hermes exhaled softly, almost amused. “When you walk among them, they’ll see what they wish to see. A scholar. A spirit. A wandering voice. Let them.” His expression sharpened slightly. “They do not welcome what does not fit.”

The marble beneath my feet dimmed.

The edges of the space began to thin. The void pressed closer, reclaiming what had been shaped.

The chamber had served its purpose.

Athena's voice remained.

"Go where stories end," she said. "Listen. And write."

The space gave way.

The marble dissolved beneath me.

And I fell.

Through air and shadow, through the dimming echo of prayer, until my feet struck earth for the first time.

I stood on the steps of an abandoned temple. Vines clung to its pillars, and the sea below sang to the stones like a mourner at a grave. The scent of salt and old incense hung in the air.

The world of men was no longer one of gods, but their memory still trembled in the wind.

I looked out across the horizon, where dawn struggled against the fading stars. And in that quiet hour, I understood the truth of my creation.

I was not divine, nor mortal, I was daimon. I was made for what remains when both forget.

I knelt, pressed my hand to the cracked marble, and whispered to the earth, "Then I will remember."

And the wind carried my vow away, soft, and relieved, as if it had been waiting for someone to answer.



Chapter 2

THE FIRST STEPS AMONG MORTALS

The world startled me with its brightness.

I had taken my first breath only moments before, yet the air already felt heavy with the weight of ages. Light spilled across hills and valleys, and every color struck me with the shock of seeing something both new and known at once. Perhaps the gifts of Mnemosyne and Athena had prepared me for wisdom, but nothing had prepared me for the immediacy of living.

I moved forward.

My feet pressed into earth still cool with morning dew. Moisture clung to my skin before giving way with each step. The ground softened beneath me, then steadied. The breeze carried olives and distant rain, and birds called from somewhere beyond the trees, their voices crossing and separating without pattern. Leaves shifted overhead, answering them.

The world did not wait. It moved around me, constant and alive.

I slowed, not from hesitation, but to take hold of what surrounded me. In the void, nothing pressed back. Here, everything did.

The first mortals I met were shepherds tending the edges of a rocky hillside. Their flocks grazed in uneven clusters, the rhythm of tearing grass steady and unbroken.

When I stepped into view, the men stopped.

Hands tightened on their staffs. One leaned forward slightly, studying me. Another shifted his weight, ready to move but not yet retreating.

“A priestess?” one whispered.

“No... a Muse, perhaps?”

The oldest man did not step closer. His eyes narrowed, fixed on me with quiet certainty.

“A wandering spirit,” he said. “See how the animals do not flee.”

The sheep had lifted their heads. They did not scatter. They watched, ears flicking, bodies still. A few stepped closer, slow and deliberate.

He was right.

I spoke, asking their names, but the moment my voice reached them, they withdrew. Not in panic. Not in haste. They moved away because they chose not to stand where I stood. Whatever they saw in me, it was not a woman.

Their eyes did not leave me.

I did not follow.

I walked on.

Along the coast, the air shifted. Salt replaced the scent of earth. Wind pressed against me, stronger, pulling at my hair and clothing. Nets hung stretched across wooden frames. Fish lay in shallow baskets, their scales catching light before dulling again.

When I entered the village, movement slowed.

A man paused mid-knot, the rope held tight between his fingers. A child clung to her mother's dress and leaned around her leg to stare. Another man lowered his basket without taking his eyes off me.

Some bowed their heads.

Their lips moved, quiet, contained.

One woman turned slightly toward another. "A ghost from drowned sailors."

The other shook her head. "No. Look at her eyes. She is a Muse wandering the shore."

No one asked who I was.

They gave space without being told.

I stood among them and understood what Hermes said: "When you walk among them, they'll see what they wish to see."

They were not seeing me. They were placing something over me. Something that allowed them to remain where they stood.

I moved on.

Animals did not do this.

Dogs approached without hesitation, circling once before settling near my feet. Birds dipped lower as they passed overhead, shifting their flight to move around me instead of away. Even the sea foam reached toward me, touching the edge of my steps before pulling back again.

Nothing in them recoiled.

As I walked, patterns began to take shape.

Men passed shrines without stopping. Women spoke prayers under their breath, low enough that no one else would hear. Offerings sat where they had been placed, untouched, left out of habit rather than belief.

I passed a man kneeling before a broken statue. His hands rested against the stone. His lips parted once, then closed.

Further along, something else made itself known.

A presence.

Not seen. Not heard.

Aware.

It lingered at the edge of where I stood, then pulled away before I could turn toward it. Not mortal. Not animal.

Something that kept its distance.

I did not follow.

I continued.

The understanding did not come all at once. It formed from what I moved through.

Mortals lowered their voices around what they could not see.
Spirits kept their distance from both.
The gods did not answer.

I did not belong to any of them.

The realization settled low, steady, and did not leave.

I stopped beside a low stone wall and rested my hand against it. The surface held the warmth of the sun. Solid. Unchanging.

I did not feel fixed the way it was.

The feeling remained.

So I turned to what did not turn away from me.

I listened.

Outside temples, long after footsteps faded, something remained. Not spoken aloud, but present. Words shaped in hesitation. In breath. In what was not said.

At the harbors, voices carried over the water. Songs rose and fell with the tide, calling to gods that no longer answered. The rhythm held, even when belief did not.

Inside small homes, grief filled the space in ways no one spoke openly. A woman sat with her hands folded in her lap, her gaze fixed on nothing. Her lips moved once, then she stilled.

I stayed until she stood and left.

By firelight in mountain huts, old men spoke to children. Their stories shifted as they spoke. Names changed. Endings bent. What began as one tale became another before it finished.

The children listened without question.

I began to understand.

Not the stories as they were meant to be told.

The stories as they were slipping in memory.

A name left out.

A moment altered.

A meaning lost between one telling and the next.

I understood the danger Mnemosyne meant. The change did not announce itself. It wore away slowly, unnoticed, until a life or myth becomes a shadow with no shape left to cast.

One night, while walking a narrow path that wound between olive groves and ancient stones, I heard it.

A voice, thin, frayed.

It whispered my name.

Callista...

Everything around me stilled. Even the breeze seemed to hold its breath.

The sound came from a ruined shrine half-hidden beneath curling vines and crumbling marble. The structure was little more than broken pillars and a collapsed roof, but the whisper pulsed from within like the beat of a wounded heart.

I stepped toward it, not out of bravery, but out of recognition.
The call of a story refusing to die.
And I followed it.



Chapter 3

THE NIGHTINGALE SONG

Moonlight pooled through the broken roof, silvering the altar and painting the stone floor with pale fractured light. Vines curled over fallen columns. The ruin felt forgotten by gods and mortals alike, yet the air carried the unmistakable weight of a presence.

A soft, trembling nightingale song drifted from the shadows.

It was gentle at first. Clear. Measured. The kind of sound that might pass unnoticed in any quiet grove.

Then it lingered.

Not in the air, but in the chest. Each note carried something that did not fade when the sound ended. It gathered instead, settled deeper with every breath, until the space around me felt shaped by it.

I stepped forward without thinking.

She perched on the altar.

Small. Brown-feathered. Bright-eyed.

Nothing about her would have drawn notice in the world beyond this place. No mark of divinity. No sign of power. Only a bird, still and watchful.

The song shifted.

Not in sound, but in meaning.

“Callista.”

The word formed inside me as clearly as spoken speech.

I inclined my head. “Aedon.”

She did not move. Her gaze held steady.

“You heard me,” she said.

“I was meant to.”

There was a pause, though her song never stopped.

“I wondered,” she said, “if I had already slipped too far.”

“You have not,” I answered. “I am here.”

Something in her posture softened, though her wings remained folded.

“I was not always this,” she said.

Her voice carried through the melody with ease, as though she had spoken these words many times, but never to someone who could answer.

“I had a home. Stone walls warmed by the sun. A husband who spoke my name with certainty.” A faint shift in tone, quieter now. “And a son.”

The word lingered.

“Itylus.”

Her claws tightened slightly against the altar.

“He was small enough to rest against my shoulder. His hands would curl into my hair when he slept. He laughed before he could speak. And when he did speak...” Her voice wavered, then steadied. “He said my name as though it belonged only to him.”

The song continued, but something inside it strained.

“I did not think of what I lacked then,” she said. “I did not measure my life against another’s.”

A pause.

“My sister-in-law did.”

The words carried a different weight.

“She bore sons. Many. One after another.” The melody dipped, not breaking, but tightening. “And each time, the house filled with voices. Celebration. Pride. Her name carried through the halls.”

Her gaze remained fixed on me.

“I stood beside her. I smiled. I held her children. I spoke kindness.”

Her claws shifted again.

“But each time, I returned to my own child. To silence. To one voice instead of many.”

The song deepened.

“It did not begin as hatred.”

The words came slower now.

“It began as comparison.”

She lifted her head slightly.

“I told myself I was content. That one child was enough. That love did not need to be counted.”

Another pause.

“But the world counted.”

The words settled between us.

“They praised her. They spoke of legacy. Of strength. Of abundance.” Her voice tightened. “And when they spoke of me, they did not speak at all.”

The space around us tightened.

“I noticed it in everything. In the way others looked at her. In the way they did not look at me.”

The melody thinned, stretched tight.

“I began to listen for it.”

Her gaze sharpened.

“And once you begin to listen for something like that... you hear it everywhere.”

I did not interrupt.

“I told myself I had been wronged,” she said. “That something had been taken from me. That I deserved more.”

Her voice dropped, almost to a whisper beneath the song.

“Envy does not shout. It settles in. It waits. It makes itself reasonable.”

Her wings shifted once, then stilled again.

“I did not wake one day and choose violence.”

The words came steadily.

“I chose it slowly. Piece by piece. Thought by thought.”

The next breath carried weight.

“I chose a night.”

The air grew colder.

“I chose one of her sons.”

Her voice did not break.

“I told myself it would make us equal.”

The silence that followed pressed against my chest.

“Itylus came to me instead.”

Her eyes did not move.

“He called for me.”

The melody faltered for the first time, then recovered.

“I did not stop in time.”

The words did not rise. They settled.

“I held him as he died.”

Moonlight shifted across the altar.

“I called his name. I asked the gods to undo what I had done. I asked them to take me in his place.”

A breath.

“They did neither.”

The song returned, steady, but altered.

“They changed me.”

She lifted her head.

“Not as punishment. Not as mercy.”

The next note carried through the stone beneath my feet.

“Because what I carried could no longer remain inside me.”

She drew in a slow breath.

“This is what remains.”

Her wings opened slightly, not in flight, but in quiet acceptance.

“I am the first nightingale,” she said. “And what you hear... what mortals call beautiful...”

Her gaze held mine.

“...is my sorrow.”

The words did not need emphasis.

“They hear it and think it is music.”

A pause.

“They do not know it is grief.”

Silence settled between us again.

“Over time, they changed my story,” she said. “They shortened it. Smoothed it. Removed the parts that made them uncomfortable.”

Her voice remained calm.

“They left out the truth.”

She stepped closer.

“Remember this, Callista.”

Her voice held steady, certain.

“A story untold becomes a wound.”

The words held.

“I will remember,” I said. “I will write it as you lived it.”

She lowered her head once, a quiet acknowledgment.

Then she opened her wings.

She lifted into the air, circling once, then again, her song trailing behind her. It was beautiful to the ear, long, steady, and unbroken.

As she rose toward the broken roof, one feather slipped free.

It turned as it fell.

Halfway down, its color shifted. Brown gave way to gold. The soft edge sharpened, forming into a slender quill.

It landed in my palm, warm, holding the weight of what she had given.

Her truth settled into me.

Her voice stayed with me.

This was the first story I ever recorded.

And it would not be the last.



Chapter 4

A QUESTION THE GODS DID NOT ASK

I noticed it first in the smallest places. A woman at a well told her granddaughter that a certain god watched over children. An hour later, an old man muttered that the same god abandoned his village years ago. At a roadside shrine, a traveler whispered a prayer of gratitude; the spirit drifting nearby whispered a complaint about being forgotten.

Every voice insisted on its version.

None matched.

Something pressed at the edges of those contradictions. Not a clear memory. No knowledge I could reach for. A quiet presence left behind from Mnemosyne's touch. Fragments that would not form. Names spoken once. Prayers left unfinished. Stories that ended before they should have.

The contradictions followed as I moved, each one settling into me. Not heavy at first. Then they were harder to ignore. I carried them without meaning to.

By the time the sun lowered, they had weight.

That evening, I came to a shrine set along a narrow path, worn smoothly by the passage of travelers who no longer stopped as often as they once had. The stone had rounded with time. The offering bowl held only a few pebbles.

I placed Aedon's golden quill among them.

It did not belong there.

Light caught along its edge, sharper than the worn stone beneath it.

“Hermes,” I said quietly.

He entered the clearing without announcement, as if he had always been walking toward it. His lamp gave off a steady glow, enough to hold the space without drawing attention beyond it.

“You found me quickly,” he said.

“I followed the road,” I answered.

His gaze shifted to the quill, then back to me. “And what have you gathered so far?”

I did not answer at once.

“I have been listening.”

“That is your work.”

“It is not the listening,” I said. “It is what remains after.”

He waited.

“There is a shepherd who says a river spirit saved his son,” I said. “A fisherman who swears the same spirit drags boats under. They speak of the same thing, but they do not agree.” I paused. “The spirits do not agree with each other either.”

Hermes lowered the lamp slightly, the light shifting across the stone between us.

“That has always been so.”

“It does not feel like it should be,” I said. “If I am meant to remember, what am I holding? One truth? Many?”

He did not answer immediately.

“Truth is not singular,” he said at last.

“That does not resolve it,” I replied.

His attention sharpened, not in challenge, but in focus.

"If I write one version, I leave another behind," I said. "If I hold all of them, then I carry contradiction. Some of what I hear is not only incomplete. It is hidden."

Hermes's grip shifted slightly on the lamp. Not tight. Measured.

"There are reasons for that," he said.

"For the gods?" I asked.

"For balance."

I looked down at the quill resting among the stones.

"And if balance hides something that should be known?"

He did not look away.

"Some things are left unspoken for a reason."

"And some are left unspoken because no one is willing to speak them," I said.

The words settled between us.

He studied me, weighing what I had said without dismissing it.

"You were made to preserve what must not vanish," he said.

"And who decides that?" I asked.

This time, the silence held longer.

"The world holds together because not everything is carried at once," he said. "Too much, too quickly, and it fractures."

"And when something is left out," I said, "it does not disappear. It changes."

Hermes's expression shifted, faint but real.

"You are reaching further than we intended," he said.

"I am not reaching," I answered. "I am standing where the stories lead."

That drew the smallest change from him. Not surprise. Recognition.

The lamp's light moved across his face, then steadied again.

"Be careful," he said.

"I am."

"That may not be enough."

"I know."

Neither of us spoke. The moment ended without answer.

Hermes stepped back. The edge of his presence softened, as if the road had already taken hold of him again.

"Remember your purpose," he said.

But the words did not settle the way he intended.

As the clearing emptied his presence, the weight of the conversation shifted inside me, not like a revelation, but like something I could no longer ignore.

What I carried would not simply preserve the world the gods wanted remembered.

It would reveal the world as it truly was.



Chapter 5

THE PRICE OF REMEMBERING

The more I listened, the heavier everything became.

It wasn't a sudden weight. It gathered slowly, story by story, voice by voice, until it felt as though the world pressed closer in return. Mortals rarely realized how much they revealed, even in passing words.

A widow lit a small flame outside her doorway each evening, speaking to it as if her husband still sat beside her. Some nights she spoke with tenderness. Other nights with anger. Her memories pulled in different directions, never settling.

An old man sat by a stone wall at noon, insisting to anyone who paused that his lost son had been brave. Some days the story was clear. Other days it shifted, as if he feared losing even the parts he loved.

Children invented their own versions of myths as they played, bright fragments mixed freely, reshaping old tales without meaning to. Their laughter made it easy to see how stories slipped or changed without warning.

All of it stayed with me.
None of it left.

By the time I sat beneath the shade of a fig tree that afternoon, my chest felt tight with the weight of everything I'd gathered.

I didn't hear Athena approach. I only realized she stood nearby, watching the road with a quiet focus that held longer than a passing glance.

"You've been quiet," she said.

I nodded. "There is... a great deal to hold."

She sat beside me. Not as a goddess addressing a creation, but as someone choosing a place to rest. For a moment neither of us spoke. The branches above shifted softly in the breeze.

"Memory is not light work, Callista," she said. "Every truth you gather will change something in you."

"I feel that already."

She studied me for a moment, then reached into the fold of her cloak and withdrew a small book. The book was crafted with such precision it seemed almost unreal. Its cover held a steady light, not reflecting the sun but giving off its own. Fine patterns, as thin as hair and exact as measured lines, were etched across its surface. They shifted slightly when the angle changed, as if the design lived beneath the surface. Across the front, the title *Little Scholar's Journey* appeared in lettering so fine it seemed to have been written in starlight.

I brushed my fingers over the words.

"Hermes inscribed it," Athena said. "He said you would need a place for what you carry."

I opened the book. Only a handful of blank pages lay inside, no more than ten, their surfaces smooth, as if they had yet to take shape.

"There are hardly any pages," I said.

"There will be as many as you require," Athena answered. "The book will meet your pace. It will not run out so long as you write what must be remembered."

I held the book carefully. It felt different from Aedon's quill. Not a weight of sorrow, but something meant to endure.

Athena watched my hands close around it. "You will hear many things," she said. "You cannot choose which voices find you. But you can choose what you set in writing. That choice will shape the kind of rememberer you become."

I did not respond immediately. There was too much inside me to make sense of. Too many stories leaning against one another, refusing to settle neatly.

Athena rose. "Writing will steady the burden," she said. "It will not lighten it, but it will give it shape."

Before she stepped away, I asked, "Why does it feel heavier the more I hear?"

"Because you care for the ones who speak," she replied. "And caring is the part even the gods never learned to control."

She left me with the book resting in my lap.

I sat beneath the fig tree for a long while, running my thumb along its spine. The pages inside waited, quiet and still.

At last, I opened the first blank sheet.

I lifted Aedon's golden quill.

The memory of her on the ruined altar returned with sharp clarity. Her steady voice. The sorrow carried in each note of her song. The trust that someone would listen.

I placed the quill to the page.

When the quill met the page, no ink followed. The words appeared where it passed, clear and complete, as though the page accepted them the moment they were known. Line by line, I wrote her truth, the love for her son, the mistake that broke her life, the form she could never leave, the years of being misunderstood. The words settled into the page.

When I finished the last line, the words caught the light, then settled into the page.

The page held a faint warmth beneath my hand.

I closed the book.

One story written.

Many more waiting.



Chapter 6

THE PATH OF THE REMEMBERER

Morning climbed the ridge with me, slow and steady. The air was cool, the stones still holding the night's chill. I didn't know why I chose that direction. Something in me needed a higher place to think.

The valley below was quiet. Smoke rose from a few early hearths. The river caught a thin line of light. Nothing extraordinary, yet it felt honest in a way I needed.

I stopped near a smooth outcrop of stone and rested my bundle on my knees. The book and quill seemed almost too small for what they were meant to hold.

Footsteps sounded behind me. Not hidden, not dramatic. Just someone walking the same path.

Mnemosyne came into view between two sunlit rocks.

"I thought you might come here," she said.

I nodded. "I wasn't sure why until I arrived."

She gave a small smile. "Often the path knows before you do."

She stood for a moment, looking out over the valley. The light had begun to spread across the fields, touching rooftops, catching along the river, the distant figures beginning their morning tasks. When she sat beside me, she did it the way anyone would, choosing the place by feel rather than purpose.

"You've begun writing," she said, glancing at the book.

“One story,” I answered. “Aedon’s.”

Mnemosyne touched the cover lightly. The gesture carried more than words.

“There will be more,” she said.

I hesitated. “I don’t know how I’ll carry them all. I can feel how heavy they become.”

“That’s natural,” she said. “Truth carried properly has weight. If it didn’t, it would slip away.”

Her voice steadied something in me.

“I’m starting to notice gaps,” I said. “Things mortals forget. Things spirits refuse to say. Things the gods avoid.”

She didn’t interrupt. She watched me, patient.

“You’re hearing where the world has broken,” she said. “Where stories have been lost or bent. You were made for those places.”

“But how do I know what to keep?” I asked. “Or what should be revealed?”

“By listening,” she said. “Not only to others, but to yourself. The truth you hear won’t always be the one spoken aloud.”

I let out a slow breath. “Hermes told me to be cautious.”

“Hermes tells everyone to be cautious,” she said, a faint note of amusement in her voice. “But caution isn’t silence.”

I looked down at the book. The pages felt thin, but not fragile.

“There weren’t many blank pages when Athena gave it to me,” I said. “I thought I might need to choose carefully.”

Mnemosyne shook her head. “The book grows with you. It opens when you need it. It answers truth, not number.”

A breeze crossed the ridge, brushing her cloak. She reached inside and drew out a satchel.

The leather was dark and smooth, shaped with quiet precision. No excess detail. Nothing wasted. The strap was wide enough to carry without strain, and the stitching was so fine it nearly vanished into the seams.

“This is for your work,” she said. “A place for the book, the quill, and whatever else you gather.”

She placed it beside me. It felt light in my hands, but strong.

“A scribe should travel prepared,” she added. “And you’ll be walking farther than most.”

I slipped the book and quill inside. They fit as though the satchel had been made for them alone.

“I keep wondering,” I said, “if I’ll be enough. If I’ll make the right choices.”

“You won’t always,” she answered. “No one does. But intention matters more than precision. Stories endure because someone cared enough to keep them.”

Something in me eased. Not fully. Enough.

Mnemosyne stood. “Your path won’t be straight,” she said. “But it will be yours. And the voices meant for you will find you.”

She stepped down the slope, then paused.

“Callista,” she added, “not every story will be saved. Not everyone you help will welcome it. But each one will change you. That is the price of being what you are.”

Then she continued down the trail, her form fading into the morning light until she was gone.

I stayed where I was, letting the silence settle.

After a while, I opened *Little Scholar’s Journey* and turned to the page after Aedon’s.

Blank. Waiting without urgency.

I rested my fingers on the page. For a moment, I expected another voice to rise from the valley, the way Aedon's voice had found me. None came.

Instead, something else stirred.

Not a voice.

Not a call from below.

A memory, if it could be called that, pulled at the edges of my mind. Faint. Unformed. As though it had been buried and was only now breaking through.

A name surfaced first. Broken. Incomplete.

Tithonus.

Then something followed. Not sight. Not sound. Something closer to feeling.

Endless age. A voice worn thin. A longing stretched far beyond what a life should hold.

The fragments came apart as quickly as they formed.

A hand reaching.

A plea caught between breaths.

Life drawn out too far.

They slipped away before I could hold them, leaving only the sense that someone, somewhere, was trying to be remembered.

I closed the book.

This memory wasn't mine.

But it was meant for me.

I lifted the satchel and settled it over my shoulder. The weight settled into place.

Whatever came next would not rise from the valley below.

It would come from something older.

And the name remained, quiet and certain, as I began my descent.

Tithonus.