

Sisyphus Imagined

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FADE IN:

INT. UNDERWORLD - NIGHT

Red hot embers glow behind jagged mountains of rock, cutting into the blackness of Tartarus, the tortuous realm of Hades.

A FACELESS MAN WAILS the sound of eternal torment.

A WOMAN lies prone, her face visible, her body hidden behind THREE MEN in black hoods, crouching beside her.

Her CRIES indicate unspeakable acts of horror perpetrated upon her.

Nearby the River STYX separates a lush green marsh from the boundary of Hades. It flows a shade of neon green... then red.

A trail of blood flows down the banks of the river, towards Hades... and leads to the now catatonic woman.

An OLD MAN, chained by his arms and legs against a cliff wall, CRIES in utter terror.

Five long knives protrude from the man's shoulder blades, chest and torso, shoving blood and entrails out with them.

The man goes limp. The knives retract into the cliff wall.

SISYPHUS, a bearded, stout specimen of a man, stands at the top of a hill, next to an enormous boulder. He surveys the hellish scenes below.

SISYPHUS

Curse you, o Zeus and Hades. You
who take great pleasure in the
suffering of mortals and demi-gods
alike.

The boulder rolls back down the hill on its own.

Sisyphus turns to pursue it. He trudges slowly down the incline.

SISYPHUS (CONT'D)

It was I who was punished because I
believe that no man should taste
death. No mortal should be
subjected to this, the ultimate
fate of nothingness. Emptiness.
Blackness. The gods do not perish -
so why must man?

Sisyphus reaches the boulder. He takes a deep breath and tucks his shoulder into it. He digs his legs into the ground and begins to work back up the incline.

SISYPHUS

And for this I am condemned to an eternity of toil at this mindless task.

His leg muscles strain. Sweat pours from his brow... as slowly he works the boulder further upwards.

ZEUS (V.O.)

No, Sisyphus, it is for your hubris and your deceit that you are condemned to your task.

Sisyphus pauses. He looks up to nowhere in particular. The boulder's weight begins to force him downward.

SISYPHUS

Are we now to speak of deceit, o father of us all? When it is you who sets all deceitful acts in motion?

ZEUS (V.O.)

Sisyphus, your words are those of a fool. You still do not know your place among men... or gods.

SISYPHUS

Speak of gods now, do we? Would a rightful god covet what belongs to another? And use all his wiles to satisfy his own lust?

ZEUS (V.O.)

If you speak of Aegina, it is for this betrayal that you are condemned.

SISYPHUS

She belonged to another.

ZEUS (V.O.)

All who belong to another belong to me!

Sisyphus resumes the arduous task.

SISYPHUS

I waste breath on you, sire. You lead a band of gods who know no boundaries. Who respect none. Who covet all in licentiousness.

HERA (V.O.)

He speaks the truth, my darling.

ZEUS (V.O.)

Lady wife, leave me! Surely you can see his evil designs. He wishes nothing but to cause strife.

HERA (V.O.)

And strife he may cause, since the seeds of strife are sown by you.

Sisyphus GRUNTS under the weight of the boulder.

SISYPHUS

Look below me, Zeus. Take aim in your vision at the carnage you allow. And yet the gods be not subject to such vile acts.

ZEUS (V.O.)

Gods are subject to whatever I deem, Sisyphus. Gods may suffer like men, should gods deserve to suffer.

SISYPHUS

Ah, but men suffer with no regard to their moral content! For who among us is so virtuous as to sit at the right of the all powerful? Those judged righteous by you can only attain the fields of Elysium. Those of us who anger you must endure Tartarus for all eternity!

ZEUS (V.O.)

Your intentions are clear, Sisyphus. As they were when you deceived Thanatos. You view yourself as a god.

Sisyphus pauses again. The weight of the boulder takes preciously gained ground from him.

SISYPHUS

Again you err, sire! You view my attempt to cheat death as vanity.

ZEUS (V.O.)

Are you not vain, Sisyphus?

SISYPHUS

As vain as the gods, yes! Yet a champion of men. An advocate for those who are condemned at the whim of capricious gods.

Sisyphus returns to the task. He WAILS as he gains upward momentum against the boulder.

His leg muscles strain against the hill's rocky bottom. Slowly, steps at a time, he moves the boulder to the top of the hill.

Sisyphus breathes deeply. The boulder settles at the top of the hill... then begins to roll back down the slope.

ZEUS (V.O.)

Then this is the price you pay for your vanity, Sisyphus.

Sisyphus throws his head back in arrogance.

SISYPHUS

What price is this you exact from me? Toil? Labor? Is it any different in life?

ZEUS (V.O.)

The difference is you are condemned to an eternity of it.

Sisyphus begins his journey down the incline.

SISYPHUS

Again you misjudge! For what follows toil is... satisfaction! When one completes a task, one is gratified! You have condemned me to an eternity of gratification! I endure no fire, no indignities upon my person. Only success!

ZEUS (V.O.)

Can this be true, Hera?

HERA (V.O.)
 Gods see only what pleases them. As
 do men.

ZEUS (V.O.)
 Your protestation is merely cover
 for your true feelings, Sisyphus.

SISYPHUS
 On the contrary, sire! I mock you
 with every success!

ZEUS (V.O.)
 No mortal dares mock me!

SISYPHUS
 O, but I do! By my actions if not
 my heart. And actions you have
 forced upon me. Who among men would
 not dearly love each task's outcome
 to be preordained to completion!

Sisyphus stands at the foot of the hill next to boulder. He
 rounds to it, inserting his shoulder in a crevice.

ZEUS (V.O.)
 Wait! Hades?

HADES (V.O.)
 Yes, sire?

ZEUS (V.O.)
 What say you?

HADES (V.O.)
 Leave him to me.

A tornado of wind cascades around Sisyphus. He is whisked
 away to...

PIT OF FIRE

Sisyphus' arms and legs are each tied to a stake. He hovers
 a few feet above a pit of hot coals, glowing orange.

HADES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Closer to what you had in mind,
 Sisyphus?

Sisyphus strains against the ropes. As he twists, his face
 contorts into an evil, death-defying grin...

SISYPHUS

You mock yourselves! You mock each other with your arrogance and your indecision!

HADES (V.O.)

No, it is you I mock now, Sisyphus. I can roast you for centuries at this height before you burst into flames.

SISYPHUS

To what end, Hades? Is this your admission that the gods can err in punishment? Oh, but I was banished to an eternity of the cruelest mental torture. The kind reserved for gods! And now you deal me mortal punishment.

HADES (V.O.)

You were never dealt other than mortal punishment.

SISYPHUS

You fool yourself, Hades. My punishment was plotted. It must be beyond heinous, befitting a betrayal of Zeus. Only Zeus erred.

ZEUS (V.O.)

Damn you to Tartarus, Sisyphus!

SISYPHUS

And you, sire! For if the other gods get wind of your addle-mindedness, surely they will broach the subject of mutiny! The great Zeus cannot decide the punishment of a mere mortal!

ZEUS (V.O.)

Hades...

HADES (V.O.)

Do not fear, sire. Sisyphus will have his share this day yet.

SISYPHUS

With mortal punishment?

HADES - bearded, malevolent - appears in the flesh.

HADES

You know not the bounds of your arrogance, Sisyphus! And you know not why your punishment was given you. Your hubris is unmatched. That is, only by your deceit.

SISYPHUS

Speak of Thanatos again, do you?

HADES

I do. With Thanatos, overseer of death, chained by your hand, no mortal man could die.

SISYPHUS

As it should be.

HADES

Praise the great Ares for delivering you back to Tartarus! If only your deceit had ended there. Convincing your lovely lady wife, Merope, not to bury your corpse. Praise Hermes for your final capture!

SISYPHUS

Merope had no part in any deceit.

HADES

Oh, but I believe you, Sisyphus! Imagine, you, indignant that your wife did not give you proper funeral offerings! When all the while it was you who instructed her in it, as a way to persuade Persephone to allow you to return to the upper world. To chide her! All part of a ruse to once again escape death.

SISYPHUS

Men learn their deceit from those who come before them. And those who instruct them in it.

HADES

Ah yes, the gods are once again at fault.

SISYPHUS

What say you of this level of capriciousness? Do you defend this level of indecision in my fate?

ZEUS (V.O.)

Hades, return him to the hill. I will not tolerate another moment of his insolence.

HADES

Trust me, sire?

ZEUS (V.O.)

As always.

EXT. UPPER WORLD - NIGHT

Sisyphus stands at the foot of a huge mountain, a large boulder next to him.

SISYPHUS

What is this?

HADES (V.O.)

Your return to the upper world. To life. And a chance at immortality. Do you wish to be a god, Sisyphus?

SISYPHUS

I wish to live. In what form is for you to decide.

HADES (V.O.)

Excellent! I shall offer you a deal. Your task is to return the boulder to the top of the mountain, and over it, down the other side. No force other than the natural will act against you. Yet this time, if you succeed... you will attain your wish to live forever.

SISYPHUS

What say you? Impossible! I have succeeded at such a challenge countless times in Tartarus! Why this reward for success?

HADES (V.O.)

Because you must agree to deal with the consequences of your actions.

SISYPHUS

Ah! There is your trick! You believe I will swallow my words once I am a god. You believe I will be unhappy once I reside on Olympus. I accept your challenge!

HADES (V.O.)

Your hubris has always made you a fool, Sisyphus.

Sisyphus tucks into the boulder. He strains almost to the breaking point... and the journey is underway...

One quarter of the way up the mountain, Sisyphus GRUNTS, the sound of an animal in heat...

Half way up the mountain, sweat stings his eyes...

Three quarters up the mountain, Sisyphus WAILS, the strength fighting to leave his body... and then...

Sisyphus reaches the top of the mountain with the boulder.

HADES (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Now... finish the task.

With a guttural SCREAM, Sisyphus heaves the boulder over the top of the mountain.

Sisyphus approaches the precipice. He sees the boulder BOUNCING, RUMBLING, cascading towards...

MEROPE, who bathes at the shore of a lake. Behind Merope, CHILDREN LAUGH... WATER SPLASHES...

MEROPE SCREAMS. As do the CHILDREN. The BOULDER CRASHES... and then... silence.

SISYPHUS

NOOOOoooo!

HADES (V.O.)

Well done, Sisyphus. You have become a god.

FADE OUT.