

The Story of Charon, the Ferryman

written by Leanne Guenther based on the Greek Mythology texts by Berens and Baldwin

I was not afraid on the shore. That actually surprised me more than anything.

The river was called the Styx. It was black and very still, and a low mist lay over the water so that the far side was only a rumor. Other souls stood around me, quiet and gray, all of us just waiting. Silently.

A boat slid out of the mist. It was long and narrow, and it made no sound at all. It didn't even seem to make a ripple in the water. At the back stood an old man with a stubbly gray beard and a cloak the color of wet stone if you can call that a color. This was Charon, the ferryman of the dead. Everyone knew his name, even the ones who had never seen him. He did not smile and he did not frown. He'd done this job longer than anyone could count and he looked it.

I felt the coin under my tongue. My family had placed it there before they laid me to rest... small and cold, with a faint taste of metal. That was the toll. Charon carries only the dead who have been buried properly, and only the ones who can pay.

I stepped to the edge of the water. He held out his hand, and I put the coin in it. He looked at it, nodded once, and pointed to a seat. No conversation or explanation.

A few souls at the back of the crowd didn't step forward. No one had given them a coin or maybe no one had buried them. So Charon didn't take them. Those sad souls would wander up and down the bank of the river Styx for a hundred years. I looked back once, and they just watched us go.

The boat pushed off. His oar dipped and rose... still as silent as ever, and the black water barely rippled. On the far bank I could just make out a tall seat where a judge waited and beside it a huge dog with three heads, lying across the path.

Charon's work ended at the shore. I stepped out onto the far bank and behind me the silent oar dipped once more. The boat slid back into the mist, already on its way to gather the next soul.





