

The Medusa Situation

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Chapter 1 extract

Unexpected Visitors in Marrickville

Applause exploded as the young woman took the stage. She looked around with wide eyes, her innocent expression undermined by her high hemline and massive coiffure of blonde ringlets. The camera cut to Dionysus, infamous wine and debauchery enthusiast and television host, who gave the woman an inauthentic smile before introducing her to the audience.

‘Hello Helen, and welcome to *Ob My God!* It’s great to have you on the show.’ His smile turned into a wolfish grin. ‘Many of our viewers will know you as the face who launched a thousand ships, the woman who sparked the greatest war of ancient Greece and, of course, the authoress of the bestselling book, *50 Shades of Troy*.’

Helen nodded fervently. ‘It’s great to be here, Dionysus.’

‘So, you’re here to confront your partner, Paris, who you believe abducted you and started an entire war, simply for the sake of his own ego?’

‘That’s right, Dionysus. I want to know: did he ever really love me?’

Or was the whole thing just a ploy to get into the history books?’

The goddess Hera, watching from her sitting room in an inner west suburb of Greater Sydney, could see how Dionysus enjoyed the anticipation of ambushing this young woman on interdimensional television.

If asked, Hera would never publicly admit to watching the *Ob My God!*

talk show. It was awful television, even by Mystic TV standards, and she had refused to appear on it several times herself, despite Dionysus' entreaties and offers of substantial amounts of existence points. Hera had her own ways of dealing with her husband's many infidelities, and none of them included her public humiliation on Mystic Television.

But there was a part of her that could not resist watching other people's embarrassment and stupidity. Something she shared with a great majority of the Deity Channel's watching public, if *Ob My God!*'s ratings were any indication.

The show cut to the usual advertisements for Hebe's cut-price facelifts and the all-you-can-eat night at Valhalla's warrior buffet, the commercials so loud the sound waves coming from the television were almost visible. The noise would deafen most people, but Hera's husband, Zeus, slumped in the armchair to the left of her in front of the TV, continued to snore loudly, undisturbed. She sighed, got up, and headed to the kitchen to make herself a cup of tea.

Hera was just settling back in her sofa, savouring the taste of her melting Tim Tam enjoying the assured public rejection and humiliation of Paris, when a hard rapping on the front door broke her concentration.

Hera muted the television and yelled across the room. 'Go away!'

Another, louder, knock came in response. Hera got up and strode to the door, annoyed enough to smite any Jehovah's Witness or door-to-door salesman with a mighty burst of divine retribution.

You never knew who was still around these days. There were more than a few who might come around for a bit of biff, now that the King and Queen of Olympus weren't quite as powerful as they once had been. Goddess knew Zeus had made his fair share of enemies – both divine and mortal. If truth be told, she had made one or two enemies herself.

Maybe she was better off ignoring this unexpected visitor.

The thought upset her in a strange way. Back in the day no one dared approach her home unannounced. Hera had been a force to be reckoned with, the undisputed Queen of the Greek Pantheon, governing over the greatest civilisation ever to emerge from that old primordial soup they called human existence.

As a goddess and a queen, people treated her with respect – not like now, when they apparently just turned up and knocked at her door in the middle of the day like she was some inconsequential, common mortal. It was unforgivable. She should smite them here and now, on principle. Trouble was, Hera hardly had the energy for even the occasional bit of divine vengeance or almighty smiting any more. She was not a young goddess, if she had ever been, and – although she was still prone to bursts of ferocious anger – actual wrath seemed like too much bloody effort these days. Fact was, she had softened with age, lack of power and, she hated to admit it, a touch of arthritis.

It was no surprise that she had let herself go a bit. So what? She and Zeus had removed themselves from the other gods decades ago and tried to settle into a somewhat mortal, immortal existence, precisely so she wouldn't have to deal with the stupidity and politics of the Divine Realm and the hundreds of other forgotten and fallen deities.

Hera scowled and glanced at Zeus, wondering if she should let him deal with it. But he was drooling in his sleep, his singlet top stained with anchovy butter, and the air around him dull with the aroma of sweat and past glory. *Greek god my arse*, she thought, irritated.

Another round of knocking. This time insistent and uninterrupted. Whoever it was, they were getting on her tits and she thought maybe she would indulge in a bit of divine smiting after all, if for no other reason than to prove she still could.

She swung the door open.

‘I said *Go Away!*’ she said angrily, before she even registered the women standing on the doorstep. Only they weren’t women. They were gorgons.

Two of them in fact. Topping seven feet tall, dressed in long green gowns, their serpent hair hidden under large floppy hats and dangerous eyes masked behind aviator shades, the sisters looked less like monsters and more like eccentric bag ladies.

The older, and shorter, of the two, Stheno, didn’t waste any time, pushing her way inside as soon as Hera opened the door, followed immediately by the youngest of the three sisters, Euryale. Medusa, the most famous of the Gorgons, did not seem to be with them.

Hera made a concerted effort to calm her anger. She wasn’t exactly afraid of the gorgons, but, all the same, she didn’t really have any desire to start a fight with them. Mystics or mortals she would happily turn into toads, but monsters had at least some of her grudging respect.

Euryale closed the door and locked it, then looked out the window before drawing the blinds quickly. Whatever their business here, she clearly didn’t want anyone else knowing about it...

‘We need to talk,’ Stheno said, and then nodded at the sleeping Zeus. ‘In private.’

‘Nothing wakes him up after a few beers.’

‘Even so,’ Euryale said, gesturing Hera towards the back of the house. Hera noticed that the snakes under the gorgon’s hat were hissing angrily, a sure sign that she was definitely upset about something despite the fact that her face behind those huge sunglasses remained as still and emotionless as a marble statue. It would probably be quicker, and less dangerous, to listen to them than toss them out...

Hera led the two sisters into the kitchen. Again Euryale closed the door while Stheno checked that the room was empty.

Satisfied that they were alone, Stheno and Euryale sat down at the cracked linoleum table, waiting for Hera to join them. Hera moved the dirty dishes over to the already teetering pile in the sink and then sat across from the sisters, conscious that behind those ridiculous glasses were gazes so powerful one glance would turn her instantly to stone. Even as a goddess she was not immune to the power of the gorgons. As far as she knew, no one except the gorgons themselves were impervious to their deadly stare.

As if reading Hera's thoughts, Stheno leant forward, her glasses slipping slightly down the bridge of her nose. Hera narrowed her eyes and tensed; she knew she should shut her eyes or turn away, but it was not in Hera's nature to back down, so she stared back. Stheno, apparently unwilling to push the goddess further, shoved the glasses back up on the top of her nose and pulled away, allowing her sister to take the lead.

'We need your help,' Euryale said.

'My help? Aren't you two of the most powerful monsters in the whole of Monsters' Realm? What on earth could I do for you?'

Euryale and Stheno exchanged a look. 'Medusa's head has been stolen,' Euryale stated frankly.

Hera sighed heavily. 'Not again.'

The sisters looked troubled and nodded.

'We have looked everywhere. Medusa is beside herself,' Euryale added. 'When that bastard stole her head the last time, she didn't get it back for years.'