

**DAUGHTER OF SPARTA:
CHAPTER ONE**

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CHAPTER ONE

In a dark, cool lair somewhere on the island of Sarpendon, an inhospitable rock that jutted angrily out of the river Okeanos, a gorgon slept. Coiled like a giant serpent, she drifted between vivid dreams and shallow wakefulness until a chorus of sharp screams echoed through her chamber startling her awake. A horde of screeching small-winged creatures from deep within her cavern lair shot over her head and out of the cave, creating a giant gust of wind in their wake.

The gorgon arose wondering what caused the winged stampede as gold and green snakes unfurled from her head writhing themselves awake. A few more bat-like stragglers flew by, racing after the lead mob. These were not bats, however, but keres - fearsome flying monsters with black, oily wings, pointed talons and gnashing fangs. Only one scent roused the keres from their slumber into such a mass of fury – human blood.

The gorgon's snakes flicked their tongues and thrashed with frenzied anticipation of a possible kill. It had been so long since some sad soul had visited the island and like the keres, they had a taste for human blood. The serpents jerked the gorgon forward urging her to follow the keres. Attached but with a mind of their own, the gorgon's serpent hair was a dark detail of her insidious curse – and constant unwelcome companions. Their pleas hissed in her mind although they spoke no audible words, *let's go, Medusa. Move forward, Medusa. It has been too long.*

Medusa let the snakes guide her outside into the crisp night air. She marveled at the pack of screaming keres frantic against the full, shimmering moon that illuminated the

craggy beach below the gorgon's den. Bending low, Medusa surveyed the beach from her perch. All appeared as it should.

Below waves crashed relentlessly against the rugged boulders that formed the island's shoreline. Every so often, a brave soul ventured to her island in order to make a name for himself. If he survived, he would return a hero having slayed the infamous Medusa. Instead, many boulders littered the beach like discarded statues from an ancient ruin, the petrified bodies of would-be heroes whose eyes had met the gorgon's stare. Medusa exiled herself to lonely Sarpendon so that no one would be harmed by her vile curse - but they kept coming anyway.

Taking a deep breath, inhaling the typical scents of salt and seaweed, she scanned the water, seeking the cause for the keres alarm, for they continued to shriek, chasing each other around the island's perimeter. *Perhaps it was just another ketos washed up on the shore.* It happened occasionally – a gargantuan pebble-gray, scaleless fish dragged in with the tide only to be pulled back out again after the keres feast on its blubber. But the snakes hissed their disagreement, *we can smell human blood.*

As her dark green eyes with their diamond shaped pupils adjusted to the moonlight, some subtle movement caught her attention, and she ducked behind a nearby boulder. *Quiet! You'll give us away,* she scolded the restless serpents that stretched to get a look for themselves.

Two figures stood about sixty paces down a nearby pathway deep in conversation. Neither looked ruffled by the keres racing by. Even when a couple swooped down aiming for their heads, they didn't flinch. The older man held up one hand and the keres returned immediately to their flock. *I know that visage. He is no man.* Medusa

recognized the relaxed and ageless messenger god Hermes despite being disguised as an eccentric but harmless traveler. Golden wings extended from his hat and he held his signature Caduceus. She felt an old rage ignite deep inside her.

The other man looked foreign. On his lanky body, he wore a long tunic over baggy trousers that ballooned around his calves: Persian pants. However, the rounded, heavily polished shield looked Greek. The gangly young man held it firm, straining his biceps against the weight. His wavy sand-colored hair whipped about in the windy sea air.

The foreigner glanced back over his shoulder toward the gorgon's lair, and Medusa leaned back into the shadows. His crystal blue eyes were narrow, determined and cold. Hermes handed him a golden sickle, which he eagerly accepted, slicing at the air, testing the balance of the blade.

Medusa despised these pointless confrontations, but if Hermes brought this fool to attack, then she would defend herself. Whether she liked or not, she was a gorgon – something ancient and primal raged inside her when danger loomed near.

The serpents on her head thrashed with blood-lust, *bring us your ripe warm flesh*, they willed. *Don't look into her eyes --*

Silence! Medusa admonished.

From the shadows, Medusa watched Hermes reach into his cloak pulling out the most unusual, shiny object – an iridescent helmet that caught the light of the moon, sparkling brilliantly as if completely covered in diamonds. Medusa gasped at its beauty. *The Helm of Hades - Hermes must have gone to great lengths to secure this*

talisman, she thought with a growing uneasiness. Hermes ceremoniously placed the helmet on the man's head, and the young warrior instantly disappeared.

Medusa blinked once and then twice to confirm what she just witnessed. The man, his shield and sickle had all vanished in a flash. Then, with a puff of smoke, so did Hermes.

Temporarily stunned, the sound of sandals slapping the path sprinting at full force towards her brought Medusa back into focus. Relying on instinct, she whipped her giant serpent tail in the direction of the sound to swoop her invisible attacker off his feet. She felt the tip of the man's sandal brush against the scales of her outstretched tail while he leaped over her to evade the attack.

Without warning, she felt her snakes recoil hard and then lunge at the unseen assailant, guided by the scent of his blood. *Not now you murderous fiends*, she thought, fighting to recover her balance. Her invisible foe swung his sickle wildly in defense, cleanly chopping the heads off the most fervent of the bunch. Pain ripped through Medusa's skull, but she steeled herself while the serpents screamed in despair over their fallen sisters. *Pity they'll grow back*, she thought, clearly annoyed at her unruly hair.

With blood dripping down her face, Medusa snapped forward blindly grasping and found lucky purchase on his sickle wielding arm. She squeezed hard, then quickly twisted back and up forcing him to drop his weapon. With her other hand, she clawed for his head, trying to tear off his enchanted helmet. He ducked and pulled away from her pawing hands, but Medusa would not relent. Just as he tore from her grip, she ripped the mystical helmet away.

Instantly visible, the man scrambled out of range, bowing his head and gluing his eyes to the floor.

“Who are you? Why has the messenger god sent you here to face me?” She asked, her booming voice echoing off the surrounding rocks.

He ignored her and in a single fluid movement dove for the sickle, snatched it from the ground and in a continuous forward roll swept the blade down and across Medusa’s chest. She instinctively raised her guard in defense, and the blade bit into her arm, spraying blood across her face. Her attacker then jumped to the shield, scooped it up onto his forearm, and spun around so that his back faced Medusa.

Filled with rage, Medusa stomped the ground with her tail causing the earth to shake. She let out a blood-curdling scream, and the young man’s arms shook from fear as he positioned the mirrored interior of the shield at face level looking into the reflective surface at his angry opponent.

Medusa circled to get closer, looking into the bronzed surface of the shield, her eyes meeting his silvery blue gaze.

“Forgive me Medusa, but I have no choice,” he spoke with a soft, solemn tone. “I’m here because of my mother. She said it was the only way. We need your head to stop a war!”

“War? What war? Who you are?” Medusa challenged.

“My name is Perseus and I am on a mission to bring forth peace to my village.”

“Hermes sent you here to die, Perseus.”

“You are our last hope.” he continued. “Our realm is threatened and it is only the power you possess that can stop this war.”

“Save your lies.” Medusa charged forward.

Perseus pulled back, spun around with his eyes tightly closed, holding his shield like a giant discus, he propelled it at the gorgon’s neck. Medusa ducked without hesitation, and the shield sailed harmlessly by. Perseus then heaved his sickle hard at her in a final desperate blow. She caught his arm with her monstrous strength and held it firmly in mid-swing; then she yanked him forward and spun him like a rag doll face-to-face. She held him close, and the serpents darted forward and buried their venomous fangs into his head and shoulders. While their paralyzing venom began to take effect, Perseus, resigned to his fate, slowly opened his eyes and deliberately met Medusa’s gaze. She was astonished for a moment when instead of terror, she saw compassion.

“Peace? How could I ever bring peace?” Medusa spat.

Perseus didn’t respond. Like a bolt of lightning, a mystical beam passed from her eyes to his, petrifying his skin, muscles, bones and organs. By the time Medusa was finished speaking, Perseus was transformed. She heaved his stone figure backward over a nearby cliff; it shattered when it hit the ground with a thundering crash.

Gorgo woke with a start. She bolted upright. Her heart raced and her breath came in jagged gasps. She ran her fingers through her thick, tangled hair, reassured by the texture of her own rough and kinky locks damp with sweat. *Not snakes. Just a dream...it was just a dream*, she repeated anxiously.

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