

DAUGHTER OF SPARTA: CHAPTER NINE

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NINE

Phoebe's eyes grew wide at Gorgo's news. "Another gorgon dream?"

"Yes, and I am so confused. That man," Gorgo said pointing at Perseus whose form was now just a speck in the distance, "he was in my dream. He wanted to kill me, but I – Medusa – killed him first. Turned him to stone." Words tumbled out of Gorgo's mouth quickly and incoherently.

"Slow down," Phoebe said trying to follow. "That young man was trying to kill you?"

"Yes. He wanted my head. Then last night, I met him in real life. His name is Perseus."

"Like the myth?" Phoebe was flabbergasted.

"Exactly like the myth, but in my dream, I killed him. Then the next day, I see him in the flesh in King Demaratus's garden. He is traveling with his uncle. The real Perseus isn't anything like the dream, but I don't know. What do you think?"

Phoebe seemed dazed as she tried to process her best friend's dream, then quickly decided "I've got it! *Kleros Manteia*."

"Casting lots?" Gorgo hesitated.

A boisterous cheer from the cheese competition echoed off the stone temple behind them. Phoebe looked over her shoulder and then back at Gorgo, "Another *paidískoi* must have fallen. We don't have much time. Soon it will be over, and the other priestesses will return. Quick, follow me," Phoebe ran up the steps that led into the temple's interior.

Gorgo shadowed Phoebe as they entered the *cella*. Another statue of Artemis set just inside the main room. Smaller than the one outdoors, this Artemis looked straight out with her arms outstretched and welcoming. Her body was a cylindrical column with carvings of animal faces organized in trios. Gorgo bowed to Artemis.

“We don’t have time for that, Gorgo,” Phoebe called over her shoulder continuing toward the *adyton* at the far end of the *cella*. Gorgo stopped just outside the sacred room while Phoebe opened a cupboard at the far wall to retrieve a flat woven mat, a small sack and an oblong dish. On top of the cupboard, there was a basket with drying sprigs of laurel. With one hand, Phoebe selected a twig setting it into the dish, while with the other, she picked up a slender stick set against the cupboard, placed the tip of it into the singular torch that lit the small dark space, and then touched the glowing end of the burning stick to the laurel causing it to smolder. Gorgo sat in awe of her friend who moved with swift confidence.

“Why are you way over there?” Phoebe asked dipping the small stick in a copper bowl of water, setting it aside and blowing on the laurel to make it smoke.

“I’m not allowed in there, Phoebe, you know that.”

“Nor, am I,” Phoebe smiled mischievously. “My mother would not be happy to discover me here, but we will be quick, so she will never know,” she said sitting on the floor.

Gorgo reluctantly entered into the *adyton* and sat cross legged on the floor across from her friend, who placed the mat, sack, and incense between them.

“Have you cast lots before?” Gorgo asked.

“Not in an official capacity, but I’ve been studying under my mother for my entire life. Don’t worry, it’s in my blood. First, I want you to close your eyes and take in a deep, cleansing breath.”

Gorgo did. The sweet smelling smoke from the laurel tickled her nose, and she fought the urge to sneeze.

“And let it out, clearing away all thoughts except the dream,” Phoebe said calmly.

Gorgo exhaled deeply and the tickle disappeared.

“Focus all of your energy on the information you seek, and when you are ready, just ask me a question about your dream – but it needs to be a question that can be answered with a yes or no. Understand?”

“Okay,” Gorgo contemplated. “I’m not sure how to start.”

“I’ll start us off with something easy to show you.” Phoebe shook the sack rattling the lots within and asked, “Did Gorgo really dream she was a gorgon?”

“Phoebe, I already told you that I did,” Gorgo said as Phoebe reached into the bag and pulled out a handful of small stones and dropped them into the mat. All but a sparse few of the pebbles were the same size, shape and color – taupe like the color of deer fur.

“Yes,” said Phoebe, with some relief, “You did dream you were a gorgon.” Phoebe scooped the stones back up and dumped them back into the bag before posing another query. “Is this the first time Gorgo dreamt she was a gorgon?”

Gorgo rolled her eyes, “You know I have.”

Phoebe didn’t listen. She grabbed another handful of stones and threw them on the mat. Most of the stones cast were dark brown, but a few were not. “No,” Phoebe said

victoriously, "This is your third gorgon dream," she said picking up a trio of light brown pebbles cast.

"How did the stones know that?" Gorgo asked, trying to discern some pattern in the stones before Phoebe quickly scooped them up.

"Now, do you have a question for the stones?"

Gorgo decided that she did. "In the dream," Gorgo started, "Did the man – Perseus – want to kill the gorgon?"

Phoebe shook the bag again before reaching and pulling out another handful of stones that she scattered onto the mat. This time the stones were both light brown and dark brown.

"Uncertain," Phoebe said studying the rocks. "Ask something else," she said putting the rocks back into the container.

"But the answer is yes, Phoebe. In the dream, he held a sickle to my neck."

"Ask another question."

"If Medusa hadn't killed Perseus first, would he have killed her?"

"Uncertain," Phoebe said again reading a new throw of stones. "Try a different line of questioning."

"Like what?"

"Maybe something about the real Perseus."

"Is the real Perseus a friend?"

"Uncertain," Phoebe said again looking down puzzling over the mix of light and dark stones.

"What do you mean 'uncertain'?" Gorgo felt irritation. "Well, then is he a foe?"

“Hmmm,” Phoebe said contemplating the rocks scattered on the mat. “Uncertain.”

“Are you sure you know how to do this?”

“Yes. Something is emerging.”

“What is it?”

“It’s too early to say – it’s like I can see a shape in the shadows. I can’t quite make it out.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means, ask another question.”

Gorgo felt exasperated. “I want to know how the man from my dream walked into my real life. How is that possible?”

“The stones can’t answer that question. It has to be a ‘yes’ or ‘no’.”

“But that’s what I want to know,” Gorgo sighed.

“Dreams are not literal. The violence you witnessed in the dream could signify something else entirely.”

“Like what?”

“Like change. A significant change. Dream death does not mean real death, but the end of something, and the end can be so resolute that it feels like a death.”

“In the dream, Perseus said he didn’t want to kill me but it was the only way.”

“Nobody wants things to end or change.”

“He said he wanted my head to stop a war,” Gorgo said automatically. She sat up straighter, “A war! But Perseus is here with his uncle to *start* a war, not *stop* one.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, he wants to be a soldier in his uncle’s war. He wants to avenge his father’s death.”

“Let’s ask the stones.”

Gorgo nodded in agreement, and Phoebe shook the bag while Gorgo asked, “Does Perseus want to be a soldier in the Ionian Revolt?”

Phoebe grabbed a handful of stones from the bag and tossed them into the mat. Both leaned in to look. Half the stones were taupe and half were dark brown just like before.

“Uncertain,” groaned Gorgo, reading the stones herself. “Why does the answer always come up uncertain when I ask a question?”

“That’s not what it says,” Phoebe said.

“Yes, it does. Half the stones are light and half are dark.”

“The pattern the stones fall in are just as important as the stones themselves. Also, look at this one,” she said pointing to a blueish stone that landed at the corner of the mat.”

“I thought there were only light and dark brown stones in the bag.”

“No, there are a few others – they help to highlight something, and where they fall in association with the others is important.”

“What does it mean?” asked Gorgo.

Phoebe paused trying to find the right words. She looked up at Gorgo, “All is not as it seems.”

Suddenly a noise like a clap at the other side of the temple startled them breaking their concentration.

“What was that?” Gorgo raised her head up to look down the length of the temple.

“Phoebe pulled her down, “You need to go,” she whispered. In a matter of seconds, she hastily swept the stones back into the sack, extinguished the incense and set the room back in order. Then she pushed Gorgo through a door in the darkened corner of the adyton that Gorgo hadn’t seen before. It led directly into a small private garden.

Once outside, Gorgo could hear people laughing and talking loudly as they strolled past the secret garden and left the Temple grounds. The cheese contest was over.

Gorgo turned to say something to Phoebe, but her friend wasn’t behind her. She took a step toward the closed door that Phoebe pushed her out of and thought better of it. If Phoebe was caught in the adyton, she would receive a reprimand, but if she was caught doing a reading in the sacred space with someone else, the king’s daughter no less, her punishment would be significant. Gorgo’s mind raced thinking about her friend’s fate.

A few years back, a priestess was exiled. Gorgo didn’t know the details of the crime committed, but the young priestess was shunned from the Temple and Sparta.

Phoebe’s more cunning than I give her credit for, Gorgo reminded herself. *Plus, she is the daughter of the head priestess*. Gorgo didn’t feel satisfied; she ducked down into a crouch and hid behind a nearby tree listening and waiting. She heard nothing from the temple, only exuberant spectators still ebullient from the evening’s festivities as they streamed past the garden. She hoped eventually Phoebe would emerge into the garden, but she didn’t come.

The crowd had significantly thinned, and Gorgo decided she needed to find a way to join the departing stragglers to avoid suspicion. Quietly and strategically she moved her

way out of the garden, crawling from a tree to a bench and then a bush, staying hidden to avoid detection. Once out of the garden, she headed for the gates and then home reciting a short prayer to Artemis to watch over her friend and keep her safe.

On the way home, she ruminated over Phoebe's mysterious message, read from her sacred stones, *all is not as it seems*.

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