

## THE MUSE OF HISTORY

Picture the scene, if you will.

Mount Olympus – lofty, cloud-capped, impossibly beautiful, home of the gods.

Picture also, great Zeus, massive, majestic, King of the Gods, sitting with furrowed brow, contemplating, no doubt, life, the universe and everything. At the moment we join him, great Zeus is staring, with fierce concentration, at a giant bronze mirror. The Mirror of Seeing. In its reflection, he sees not his mighty self, but the earth, far below, crawling with mortals and in slightly more trouble than it usually is. Zeus frowns in awful majesty. A small earthquake devastates Ruritania.

Raising his head, he bellows, ‘Hera.’

His voice reverberates around the home of the gods. Walls shake. A peacock screams with fear. Somewhere a pot falls to the floor. Down in the Amazon, a butterfly takes flight and the unfortunate village of Minchinhampton experiences two years’ worth of rain in half an hour.

White-armed Hera appears. Tall, dark haired, beautiful and sadly married to a god unable to keep it in his tunic. Slightly surprised to find her godly husband actually on his throne and putting in a day’s work rather than descending upon unfortunate young women in the form of a swan or a shower of gold, she nevertheless responds pleasantly. ‘Good morning, my godly husband.’

He looks up. ‘Where’s that daughter of ours.’

Hera replies that due to his inability to keep it in his tunic, enquiring as to the location of that daughter of his is the equivalent to asking where was that grain of sand he left on the beach earlier?

Zeus shrugs impatiently. ‘The stropky one.’

‘Still not narrowing the field, mighty Zeus.’

He snaps his fingers impatiently. ‘They go around together in a gang. Big group of them. Call themselves The .... Something or other.’

Hera sighs. Being queen of the gods is a vastly overrated occupation. With one or two exceptions, most gods have all the thinking capacity of a teaspoon, the morals of an alley cat on a warm summer’s night, and are as personally likeable as genital warts. Take that airhead Aphrodite, for example ...

At this point, it would be fair to say that Hera has never quite recovered from coming equal second in the Great Golden Apple Scandal back in the days when gods really did walk the earth. Paris had really made the wrong choice as far as she was concerned and by the time gods and men had sorted themselves out, whole cities lay in ruins, kings had been murdered in their baths, heroes slaughtered wholesale and that too clever by half Odysseus had taken an inexplicable ten years to cover a few hundred miles. And they say women have no sense of direction. In fact, the only one who came out of things unscathed had been the bubblehead Helen who had set the whole thing in motion in the first place.

Hera’s wandering attention is recalled by another bull-like bellow from mighty Zeus. Incidentally, bulls are another of his favourite disguises. No one knows why. Hera has, on several occasions, pointed out that very few young girls would construe a randy two and a half ton bull descending on them from on high as a romantic gesture. Her words fall on deaf ears. Deaf bull ears. Hera sometimes dreams of a quiet house somewhere, a good library, a pleasant garden and absolutely no testosterone. Anywhere. Even the cat will be a girl.

She sighs. ‘Which daughter, my godly husband?’

‘The one with the nasty look in her eye. You remember. Does the history thing.’

‘Kleio.’

‘That’s the one. Bring her here.’

Hera pauses, just on the off chance the word please might be tacked on to the end of that sentence, but not today. And probably not tomorrow, either.

A small fanfare at the door heralds the approach of Kleio, Muse of History, who has been talking with Athena and is not pleased at being interrupted. Not even by – as he would be the first to describe himself – mighty Zeus, King of the Gods.

Approaching, she stands before Zeus and inclines her head in what Zeus chooses to interpret as a mark of respect. Bloody daughters ...

He waves her forwards and points to the Mirror. ‘What do you make of this, hey? Hey? Hey?’

Other gods, scenting trouble, are unobtrusively edging their way towards the door. The collective effect of a huge number of supernatural deities all evacuating at the same moment could be best described by the word stampede.

Zeus looks up. Everyone immediately pretends they are just shifting position for a better view. Except for Athena who leans against the wall with her arms folded and that look that tells her father she’s thinking how much better she could handle things given half a chance. Deep down, Zeus is a little afraid of his daughter. Sometimes he has to remind himself he is the King of the Gods.

Kleio is peering into the Mirror of Seeing. ‘Oh dear. Well, it had to happen I suppose.’

‘Had to happen?’ roars Zeus. ‘Had to happen? What happened to the days when muscle bound young men were grateful simply for the gift of a good sword? Or a flying horse? Or a pair of winged sandals? Gifts from the gods. They’re not supposed to go out and do things for themselves.’

He flings himself back in his throne. A mighty thunderstorm crashes down upon a very surprised Sahara Desert. He turns to his daughter. ‘What have you got to say about this? Eh?’

Kleio remains irritatingly calm. ‘They appear to have invented ...’ she pauses and then says with distaste, ‘time travel.’

‘Appears?’ roars Zeus. ‘They bloody well *have* invented time travel. These bloody mortals are getting above their station. What are you going to do about it? They’ll be up here, next, telling us where we went wrong and they don’t need us any more.’

Paranoia is a deity occupational hazard.

‘What am I going to do about it?’ says Kleio, surprised. ‘I think you’ll find, mighty Zeus, if you cast your mind back, that we all took early retirement when the monotheists turned up. We told them they were welcome and pushed off to enjoy a quiet life of gardening, jam making and bowls tournaments with that bunch from Asgard.’

‘Don’t talk to me about bloody monotheists,’ roars Zeus again. ‘Bunch of humourless, hairy fanatics with daddy issues.’

No god catches any other god’s eye.

‘Surely,’ continues Kleio, bending over the Mirror again, ‘it’s too late, anyway. They’ve already done it.’

Zeus scowls. ‘I’ve put them in a time loop. That should hold them while you sort things out.’

‘A time loop?’ says Hera, more interested in manipulating her godly husband back into a good mood rather than any actual desire for information. ‘How clever.’

Zeus shrugs impatiently. ‘That chappie there – yes him – the one with the limp. He’ll take one of these time engines and jump back to an earlier time. Once there he will pretend to discover how to travel in time. The years pass and then he arrives at the date he originally jumped back so he goes and does it all again. A time loop.’

‘The Bootstrap Paradox,’ says Kleio, demonstrating yet again why so few religions have any time for intelligent women.

Zeus glares at her unlovingly. ‘Why are you still here?’

‘In lieu of any instructions to the contrary I am here, ready to serve the King of the Gods.’

‘Ha,’ says Zeus, who, like all gods, could listen to that sort of remark all day. Flattery works for everyone. A tetchy god can cover the entire world with water if his breakfast egg isn’t quite right. ‘Well don’t just stand there, girl. Get down there and sort it out.’

She raises her eyebrows.

‘Is there a problem?’ enquires Zeus, frowning massively. A small parrot falls off its branch in Bolivia.

‘It is a matter of protocol, surely. I am, obviously, honoured to be chosen to fulfil the will of mighty Zeus ...’

Zeus, never top dog at detecting sarcasm in women, beams benignly. The small parrot is reinstated.

‘But I do not wish to incur the wrath of the present incumbents,’ she continues. ‘A difficult situation might arise. None of the current crop of deities will be particularly joyful at my appearance. If you remember, mighty Zeus, some of them are a little sensitive in the matter of power sharing.’

‘Good point. Good point,’ says Zeus, quickly. ‘I wondered when that would occur to you. Quick and quiet then. Less Muse and more ...’

He paused.

‘Undercover,’ suggests Kleio, who, suddenly, has perceived a perfectly acceptable method of escaping continual attendance on the King of the Gods. Long days of endless pleasure begin to pall after a while. Yes – a millennia or two back in the real world will be pleasant. However, there are terms to negotiate.

‘Staff?’ she suggests.

Already losing interest, Zeus waves a benevolent hand. ‘Take what you need.’

Kleio sends out a thought and a number of Sibyls, passing the time making a daisy chain long enough to encircle the world, raise their heads and grin.

‘My lord Zeus is generous,’ she says.

‘Don’t go mad,’ says Zeus, who, again, like all gods, isn’t actually that generous. Not unless there’s something in it for him, anyway.

The Muse inclines her head and treads respectfully from the giant chamber, already assembling her To Do List.

A partridge, displaying the survival skills that will one day lead to extinction, ascends from under her feet, flies headlong into a Doric pillar and lies, stunned.

Well, that’s number one taken care of. Number two – learn to type ...