

Lesser Gods Chapter 2

By

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SCENE: 1

SOUND: DOORS SLAMMING, RHEA CAN BE HEARD SHOUTING, A BREATH

HERA (NAR.)

Unthink. Even if it were for a second it was- Unthink.  
That's what I'm telling myself. Trying to be in this moment.  
Letting the relief be louder than the fear.  
Relief. Calm.

RHEA

It's fucking insane!

HERA (NAR.)

Nevermind. Rhea howls as she throws her jacket on the couch.  
She is immature and completely irresponsible.  
But she would never hurt anyone. At this moment, there is not  
a person I am more glad to see. Until she rounds on me-

RHEA

And you- you are ACCUSING ME of-

HERA

Accusing you of what? I just want to know when the last time  
you saw her was.

HERA (NAR.)

She's hopping on one foot while whipping a scuffed boot off  
the other.

RHEA

Because you think I did it?

HERA

Because I want you to be able to help them figure out what  
happened.

RHEA

Last night is blurry.

HERA (NAR.)

This never would have happened in my batch. We didn't sneeze  
without security.

But once testing indicated this gen wouldn't succeed, Black took attention off them so now every night Rhea's whereabouts are blurry.

RHEA  
I'm sorry, okay?

HERA  
Don't apologize to me. Apologize to Iris.

RHEA  
Maybe your idiot boyfriend made a mistake.

HERA  
Maybe you just can't wrap your head around the fact that after all this time trying to get yourself killed, someone's beat you there.

HERA (NAR.)  
I wish I said that to you, not her. She's heading for the stairs.

HERA  
Rhea, I'm sorry. Please, don't. I'm sorry... I'm scared. I really am.

RHEA  
And you think you need to tell me that? The age of our samples plus all the modi-fucking everyone did with us before we were born? You don't think she might've just self destructed and I might be next? Or you?

HERA (NAR.)  
I try not to wonder if that last part is just an after thought, but I hug her anyway. She lets me. The virus that eliminated half the world's population was a few hundred years ago, but the habits people picked up during it have been passed on. No one touches, let alone hugs. It makes moments like these feel a little more stolen.

HERA  
It's going to be fine. With all of the resources Black has sunk into you all, she is going to make sure you're okay. There's an explanation for everything. We're going to be fine.

HERA (NAR.)  
God, I hope I'm right.

RHEA  
Very comforting. Best sister in the world.

HERA  
Last sister in the world.

HERA (NAR.)  
I spend the next few seconds trying to cement this moment in my head. I'm going to store it for when she's pissed at me. Or me at her. It's not for if something happens to her. Nothing is going to happen to her.

SOUND: DOORBELL

HERA (NAR.)  
Andddd that's over. Great. Whoever this is, I'm sure- shit.

SOUND: A BUZZ.

HERA  
Hi Apollo.

SOUND: UNLOCKING, HEAVY DOOR OPENS.

APOLLO  
Hi. Rhea, how are you?

HERA (NAR.)  
Even under these circumstances, Rhea doesn't pretend to like him.

RHEA  
I'm just trying to wrap my head around it. Like everyone else.

APOLLO  
Can we... have a minute?

HERA (NAR.)  
Buckle up. Rhea looks to me before mounting the stairs and disappearing.

HERA  
Did you leave him alone?

APOLLO  
I only needed a few minutes. How is she?

HERA  
She's scared. I'm scared.

HERA (NAR.)  
The only thing harder than looking away, is not looking away. I don't want to hold eye contact, I feel too raw for this. As much as I hate it, the longer I look at him, the more I want him to hold me. *Please don't let him try to hold me.*

APOLLO  
Hera-

HERA (NAR.)  
My name on his lips like that is familiar. He takes a step towards me. I take one back. He waits for me to say something. I don't.

APOLLO  
Thank you for earlier.

HERA  
Of course. Yeah.

APOLLO  
I wish I could be you sometimes.

HERA (NAR.)  
Mental eyeroll.

HERA  
I'm glad one of us does.

APOLLO  
I'm falling apart.

HERA  
Someone you've known since she was born just died.  
Someone you...

HERA (NAR.)

I don't finish that. Iris and Apollo's story is... not mine to tell. I look at him, exhausted, and realize how much he's changed. We got really lucky. It's your responsibility to... give it your best shot with everyone from as early as you can. In the name of science, for the greater good. M.I.U.C. (mandatory inter unit copulation) isn't even the most invasive thing we have to put up with. It can though, feel a little humiliating. Especially the first time, not very romantic with doctors behind a one way mirror. Not that... relationship construct really has a place in our world. It's important to be able to separate the units you are assigned to from the people you love. That's how I knew my relationship with Apollo would be different. We'd been friends for so long, our gen was bigger than Rhea's but it was still small, so we weren't just friends, we really knew each other. I still resisted a real relationship in the beginning. It would only make things harder but, I trusted him. We trusted each other. Part of the reason we worked was we cared about each other but more importantly we cared about the cause. We wanted to fix things together, and we got so close to doing it. Well, closer than anyone else. I couldn't hang onto it, her. I weirdly, always think of it as a "her"... After, there was no one else on the planet who knew what losing something like that felt like except for Apollo. I needed him then... I suddenly feel how much I've changed too.

HERA

It's been a long day, Apollo.

APOLLO

Even before today. I need you. You know I need you.

HERA

I can't have this conversation right now.

APOLLO

Today I realized they are not invincible, neither are we. I've already lost so much time with you over such a stupid, selfish-

HERA

I can't just go back to the way things were. You're just shaken up. You don't need me. Rhea, though. She does, she-

APOLLO

She doesn't appreciate half of what you do for her. I want you to be happy again. Happier. I love you.

HERA (NAR.)

He throws that out like it's an atomic bomb, thinking it's my weakness. But it's his. Being loved is the most important thing to him. He was so good when we were the last batch, when the world adored us, but now we're just chaperones... He does love me. But it's because of the way I love him.

APOLLO

Please say something.

HERA

This doesn't change anything.

APOLLO

This changes everything.

SOUND: DOORBELL

HERA (NAR.)

This has been the most dramatic day of my life. If like me, you were hoping this visitor would be bringing wine; you'd be wrong.

SOUND: UNLOCKING, HEAVY DOOR OPENS.

HERA (NAR.)

Mr. Shylock Green does not look happy to see Apollo.

SHYLOCK

Why are you here?

APOLLO

I was just-

SHYLOCK

After everything that happened today, THIS is where you think you should be?

HERA (NAR.)

Apollo makes a point of looking at me.

APOLLO

Yes.

SHYLOCK

Goddammit, this is not about you. Or Hera. This is about keeping them safe. Trust me, I've never been able to picture you taking a bullet for Eros but he at least can. Get the fuck out of here.

SOUND: UNLOCKING, HEAVY DOOR OPENS.

HERA

I'm sorry about that. I should have made him leave.

SHYLOCK

I know you don't want him here. I need to talk to your sister.

HERA (NAR.)

Oh how different that word can sound in someone else's mouth. But I lead him up the stairs. I knock once, than push into Rhea's room.

RHEA

Oh cool. Just bust in or whatever.

HERA (NAR.)

Rhea is... oh so polite.

SHYLOCK

How are you?

RHEA

Getting tired of being asked that.

HERA

Rhea-

HERA (NAR.)

But I don't finish that thought because there are two glasses of whiskey on her dresser. Why would there be two if she was alone? Unless she wasn't. Without even thinking, slowly, I grab both.

HERA

-I'll give you guys some time.



HERA (NAR.)  
And I calmly close the door, but I don't get much further than that.

SHYLOCK  
(VOICE MUFFLED BY THE DOOR)  
We have a few questions for you about last night. I need to know if anything out of the ordinary happened.

RHEA  
(ALSO MUFFLED)  
We got dinner-

SHYLOCK  
Who is "we"?

RHEA  
Eros and I. Iris was there for like... twenty minutes? She was too nervous to eat before her show.

HERA (NAR.)  
She's sounding a lot less blurry now.

SHYLOCK  
And that was it?

RHEA  
Yes.

SHYLOCK  
Please, be honest with me.

RHEA  
I am!

SHYLOCK  
I know how you felt about her.

HERA (NAR.)  
I was hoping this wouldn't come up. I guess it was bound to. Iris and Rhea have not been on good terms for the last year, but you couldn't say I liked her either. I just have the sense to try and hide it.

SHYLOCK

She was your family. We couldn't help her last night, but we can now. That's what family does. We help each other. I need you to tell me if there's anything you remember that might help me figure out what happened to her-

RHEA

No one's even told me what happened to her.

SHYLOCK

There was... she was injected with something. In her neck. The syringe wasn't found at the scene.

RHEA

If there's something you want to ask me, than do it.

HERA (NAR.)

Rhea says, unmoved.

SHYLOCK

Why was Eros late this morning?

HERA (NAR.)

My grip tightens on the second glass still in my hand.

RHEA

He overslept. Like he does every other day.

SHYLOCK

How can you be so sure of that?

RHEA

Because he was here until like 6:30.

SHYLOCK

Hera saw him go back into his house.

RHEA

You don't think he's ever snuck over here?

HERA (NAR.)

He hasn't.

SHYLOCK

I seriously doubt Hera would let that happen.

HERA (NAR.)

Rhea doesn't skip a beat.

RHEA

You think we can't get around her? She's been a bit distracted by her own drama lately, no?

HERA (NAR.)

Why would she lie? Unthink. Unthink. She has nothing to do with-

SHYLOCK

Hera!

HERA (NAR.)

Without hesitation, I push through the door. Shit, that was too-

SHYLOCK

Glad to see you got far. No, no get used to it. Because if your sister's boyfriend can sneak in here WHENEVER then you're not doing your job of protecting her. The only job you've ever had.

HERA

What is that supposed to mean?

SHYLOCK

It means you should be half decent at it by now.

HERA (NAR.)

Shylock takes one of the glasses still in my hand and downs it before leaving. We wait in silence until we hear the front door slam. I stand still, stunned that she would drag me into whatever mess this is.

HERA

What did he tell you to say?

RHEA

Like you weren't listening.

HERA

I don't mean Shylock. Someone is dead, Rhea. If he's asking you to lie for him-

RHEA

He isn't.

HERA

He could barely walk last night. You're telling me he was hit with enough of a second wind to climb over here to see you?

RHEA

I don't tell you how to run your life- obviously. Otherwise I would tell you to make Apollo stop swooning over you and watch Eros so we wouldn't be in this situation in the first place!

HERA

How the fuck is this my fault?

RHEA

Oh no, are you allowed to curse? You're not afraid Black is gonna wash your mouth out with soap?

HERA

This isn't a joke, Rhea. Iris is dead and no one knows where your boyfriend-

RHEA

Don't call him that.

HERA

I know you guys aren't exactly monogamous but he wasn't sleeping with her right?

HERA (NAR.)

And then there is the worst silence.

HERA

Oh, Rhea.

RHEA

No, no it wasn't like that. She was in love with him and would threaten to hurt herself if he didn't come over. They weren't fucking.

HERA (NAR.)  
I don't know if her conviction is coming from her heart or  
the whiskey.

HERA  
Does Shylock know?

RHEA  
There's nothing to know!

HERA  
Was he with her last night. Please, please don't protect him  
right now. Let's go to Shylock. I know how you must feel, you  
know how much I understand. You-

RHEA  
I would *never* push him so far away he started fucking her.

SOUND: SILENCE

RHEA  
I'm sorry- I didn't-

HERA  
Why would you say that to me?

RHEA  
I swear I didn't mean it.

HERA (NAR.)  
She hit me where Apollo never could. How clearly, how cruelly  
she said something she knew she couldn't take back... I don't  
now how I'm supposed to forgive that.  
And that's a thought I can't unthink.

RHEA  
(SOUNDING FAR OFF)  
Hera, I'm sorry.

HERA  
You should wear black to the announcement tomorrow. You need  
to look like you care.

HERA (NAR.)

I shut the door behind me. I walk down the stairs, put the glasses in the sink.

SOUND: DOOR OPENING, SLAMMING.

HERA (NAR.)

Nod to the guards, and head immediately to Shylock's.

SOUND: SIRENS, CHATTER.

HERA (NAR.)

Or I'm trying to. The Bricks are crawling with police officers, security drones buzz just above the houses. Watching. I push past everyone, not breaking stride. I know if I stop, I'll turn around. Luckily, Shylock doesn't live far.

SOUND: CROWD.

HERA (NAR.)

The mess at The Bricks is nothing compared to the crowds gathered at the end of the block. Being held back by security are crowds and crowds of mourners. They're all in black and holding candles. A few of them call to me. One of them has a giant poster of Iris. It's from a concert a few months ago, she's wearing a long white gown, smiling. I was at that show and even I thought she was incredible. It's hard to imagine that face, cold, lifeless. I imagine what it must have been like for Apollo to find her. It doesn't matter what he did to me, she didn't deserve that. Whatever that was.

Shylock. His building is a two story concrete box. There's one light on.

## SCENE 2

THE KEENING OUTSIDE IS MUFFLED

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

It's hard to think with all this noise. And you, know, drama. I run my hand over the black dresses hanging expectantly in my closet. There was a time I could just ask for a new one but we've been on a tighter budget lately. And besides, can you imagine anything more vein than asking for something like that at a time like this? "Something with an empire waist? Iris would have wanted that..."  
"Classic Persephone" they'd say.  
*Classic Persephone.*

Do you ever think about your name so long that it begins to sound completely wrong? It's not unlike hearing your own voice. Is that what it really sounds like? How can something I've had my whole life feel so foreign? I think about my name a lot.

Probably more than whoever gave it to me. I know they weren't completely haphazard (after all, they didn't name anyone "Uranus") but still who would want to be a Persephone? She is remembered as two things (not counting "beautiful"). According to legend, Persephone was a fool and a victim. She was kidnapped by the god of the underworld and forced to become its queen. By the time her parents arranged for her return, she was tricked into eating a pomegranate and "tasting the blood of the underworld," binding herself to her asshole captor for one third of the year for the rest of her life. Have you tasted a pomegranate? Definitely not worth it.

There's a lot of words you can use to describe my life and what it's become to the people who own it. Copulation. Sex. Mating. Fucking. It doesn't matter what you call it, the words are only for us to try and make sense of what they've done. I decided a long time ago that there was no need for words when I could actively make my own rules. If sex gave them so much power, why couldn't it give me the same? And it did. But by the time I realized the differences between how people treated Iris and Hera from me, it was too late. *They* were making changes, *they* were the ones Black wanted to see succeed.

DION

I brought you some tea.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

I turn, Dion is in the doorway. A very tiny teacup in his very large hands. A weak smile stretches across his wide, flat face. Since I don't object, he enters my room.

DION

How're you doing?

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

I should be asking him. For someone who didn't know Iris very well he was... crushed. He was shaken up for hours, pulling his hair out downstairs. I had to bring *him* tea. I was upset too... Devastated, really. But once the shock wore off...

PERSEPHONE

I'm okay. Lot of memories.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

Like of the last real conversation we'd had. When we were ten. Dion crosses the room to me in a few steps.

DION

Just came from a meeting with the security team. Everyone is on high alert, obviously. But after dividing the forces up between locations, Rhea, Char, and Eros, Black-

PERSEPHONE

I bet Iris' body has more protection than me.

DION

You have a pair on the door but, I'm not supposed to let you out of my sight.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

Under any other circumstances, that at would be a come on. But neither of us are up for it. He kisses me chastely on the cheek and hands me the cup of tea. He sits on my bed.

DION

Are you deciding what to wear tomorrow? You look amazing in that one with like the v-

PERSEPHONE

I don't want to look amazing.

DION

But you're so-

PERSEPHONE

Exactly. I don't want to be just that thing anymore.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

I select a dress that gives me all the sex appeal of a coat rack.

PERSEPHONE

I want to be taken seriously. If I wanted I could be a serious bureaucratic force.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

The look on Dion's face suggests I must have just transformed into said coat rack.



DION  
Where is this coming from?

PERSEPHONE  
There's been an opening in the position.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)  
His eyebrows meet in the middle. Please don't let him start crying again.

DION  
I just think this may be the wrong time.

PERSEPHONE  
I wasn't asking what you thought.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)  
I sip from the cup and immediately hand it back to him.  
Little too sweet.

DION  
Everyone online is just losing it. Iris is everywhere virtually and physically. There are pictures of her everywhere she-

PERSEPHONE  
Can I see?

DION  
If you look outside you can-

PERSEPHONE  
No, can I see what they're saying online?

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)  
He doesn't get it, probably for his own good really.

PERSEPHONE  
Where's your device?

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)  
He shifts to grab his device from his back pocket. It's a small, sleek hand held computer. It's screen gleams in the light of my room like a tidal pool. Vibrant and alive on the other side of that glossy surface. Travel became heavily restricted after the outbreak, which was fine with most people actually.

They didn't want to risk physical contact, but they didn't mind the other kind of viral. We've never been allowed to have personal access or our own accounts. Everything we say goes through five levels of PR.

DION  
Uh, here.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)  
The screen glows as it recognizes his fingerprint. He holds it out to me. Online use is no longer a privatized industry, so all the real communication takes place on message boards. He shows me post after weepy post. Some aren't even in English.

PERSEPHONE  
I want to make a statement.

DION  
I'll contact the relations adviser.

PERSEPHONE  
No, I want to post something of my own. Right now.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)  
He freezes. Even for him, this seems like a rule he shouldn't break.

DION  
I don't think that's a good idea.

PERSEPHONE  
I want to make my own statement about her. So few people really knew Iris... And that's a shame. I want to share something candid and personal.

DION  
You can do it through the right channels.

PERSEPHONE  
Dion, everyone out there knows those statements don't really come from us. You said it yourself, everyone is losing it out. Something they know is from me will mean a lot.

DION

I'll get in trouble. You'll be in trouble too, and they'll take it down immediately.

PERSEPHONE

All I need is for it to be up for one minute. it will get shared and spread. They're not going to openly punish me for mourning my friend. And I won't let them punish you either. This is our chance to change the conversation.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

Gingerly, I take the device from his hand. *Victim, my ass.*

### SCENE 3

SOUND: BANGING

HERA

Shylock!

SOUND: UNLOCKING, HEAVY DOOR OPENS.

HERA (NAR.)

He opens the door, he's holding a glass. It smells like whiskey. Guess Rhea started a trend... He turns and walks into his house. It's cramped. Messy. I don't know if anyone's cleaned in here since his wife left him.

HERA

I'm glad you're home.

SHYLOCK

I'm not. They said I'd done enough. My closeness might compromise my judgment. Apparently Rosalind- President Black doesn't think that loving her like a daughter would make me care the most about what happened to her.

HERA (NAR.)

He drops into a patchy arm chair. There's a picture from the day Rhea and Iris were born on the mantle.

SHYLOCK

I had no idea what I was getting myself into. What we were. Remember that day? No press beyond one camera, had to keep the location a secret as long as possible. President Black held Rhea- pissed right on her.

HERA (NAR.)

He laughs with his eyes, and I try and see this day through them. I try to see her through them too.

SHYLOCK

The beginning of a beautiful friendship. Some army blockhead got Char. The doctor got Eros. A nun got Pers- can you imagine? And I ended up holding Iris.

They were all so goddamn small and suddenly the center of the fucking universe. Our crying, puking, pissing, final shot at saving mankind. Dramatic but, I mean that's literally what they were- are. Anyway, I held her and thought, this is the best we all got... And her, her I hoped... she'd rub off on the rest of them.

She just, she just wanted to help. Like you.

HERA (NAR.)

The sentiment hits me with a pang. It's hard to feel sorry for someone you hate, but Iris was always exceptional.

HERA

We need to talk about Rhea.

**END OF EPISODE**