

Lesser Gods Chapter 6

By

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SCENE 1

CLARK (NAR.)

Religion isn't much of a concept to us, none of our handlers are allowed to push us towards or away from one, and none of them are really into it anyway. I would though, be lying if I said I wasn't praying in a technical sense when we were in the air. It was a fast thought- "Please let me be okay." That's it. But... it worked. I took an air bag to the face but that's pretty much it. After we finally stopped rolling I frantically felt my face, the fragile bones there all intact. After a few beats, I looked over at Rhea and she was... it's hard to-

RHEA

CLARK!

CLARK (NAR.)

Well clearly her vocal chords have been spared. She's got a nasty bruise forming under her eye but her body seems okay besides being trapped in her seat. Her right arm is pinned between the center console and the wheel, it's bleeding but it's hard to tell how superficial the wound is. Her left arm was fully functional as it was swatting at me as I fell out of the car, gripping the solid ground as if it intended to slip away. Currently, I'm surveying the damage. Her door is stuck, dented so badly it won't open. We rolled a good way. Hitting a few more trees and rocks as we went. The windshield is a spiderweb of cracked glass. I wave a hand in front of the door's sensor trying to see if by some miracle the auto function might-

RHEA

Great idea.

CLARK (NAR.)

I've never heard someone panicking AND being sarcastic. She continues to impress me.

CLARK

It was worth a shot. Do you want to try and open it?

CLARK (NAR.)

She sighs- no huffs.

Didn't think so...

But I don't have time to enjoy my tiny victory over her, because peeking into the twisted car I can see her eyes are pressed tightly together, and a tear is running down her cheek.

CLARK

You look almost fine.

CLARK (NAR.)
I spit out in the awkward silence.

RHEA
Thank you.

CLARK
You've got a black eye forming.

RHEA
Great.

CLARK
And your lip is bleeding.

RHEA
I get it.

CLARK (NAR.)
She looks away to hide the fear I know must be growing. We've been driving for close to six hours, and it's been even longer since anyone has seen us. They must be looking. But they aren't looking here. Even if they decide to branch out here (which they undoubtedly will at some point) they're going to search every inch of the city first. I think of the tunnel we took and wonder how many more miles of crevices weave between the paths more traveled. How long will it be until they find us out here? Days? A week? We have no water, no food, no time.

CLARK
What should we do?

CLARK (NAR.)
She is silent, still looking away.

CLARK
Rhea.

RHEA
I heard you.

CLARK
Well?
We need to figure it out. And soon.

CLARK (NAR.)
She says nothing.

CLARK
Fine, I'll say it. We need to go back.

RHEA
No!

CLARK (NAR.)
Now she's responding.

CLARK
Why not?

RHEA
It won't be safe.

CLARK
Do you feel safe now?

CLARK (NAR.)
She pauses, her eyes scan the woods. The mountains in the distance, the dark rock of the black hills just a few shades off from the sky. Wordlessly, I walk to the back of the car. I wave my hand in front of the sensor. Right. Why would that work?

RHEA
Clark?

CLARK (NAR.)
Circling back to my side of the car I open the door.

RHEA
What're you-

CLARK (NAR.)
But before she can finish her question I climb into the back seat and reach into the trunk. I dig through my bag.

RHEA
Hope you aren't just showing off how much you can move around.

CLARK (NAR.)

Instead of dignifying that with a response I continue to feel, blindly until I grasp the small, sleek panic button. I clamber back to the front seat and the second Rhea sees what I'm holding her eyes go wide.

RHEA

You brought it.

CLARK

I'm going to press it.

RHEA

Clark-

CLARK (NAR.)

She pleads, her eyes wide.

CLARK

There's nothing else we can do.

RHEA

I just need a minute to think.

CLARK

It could take them days to find us.

RHEA

I know but-

CLARK

What is it you're not telling me?

No, no more of... this. I need to know everything you do so I can be a part of the plan. This isn't just about you.

RHEA

If I go back there, he's not going to let me out.

CLARK

Who?

RHEA
Blue.

CLARK
The detective? Why?

CLARK (NAR.)
And then my blood runs cold. I think of her speedy exit, the gun she grabbed.

CLARK
What did you do?

RHEA
All I did was lie.

CLARK
About your part in the death of your friend? Is that all?

RHEA
I had no part in it! I didn't hurt her, Clark.

CLARK
Then why lie?

RHEA
Because Eros was the last person to see her alive and I... He told me he'd been over there he just hadn't told me everything.

CLARK (NAR.)
A heat rises in my cheeks and I look away, uncomfortable and unsure in the silence.

RHEA
I think he wanted me to accuse him of sleeping with her. It would have been a relief. Instead I just... believed him.

CLARK
But you don't trust anyone.

RHEA

We've more than grown up together, he was the first person besides Hera to make me feel like I was more than just a piece of someone else's whole. And he was a lot more fun. When I was with him I...

CLARK (NAR.)

I can tell from her eyes she's seeing something I can't. There's a shift in her voice.

RHEA

Look we weren't bound to each other in some ultra serious way. We just didn't lie to each other. When I got taken in I told the truth. There was nothing I could do to help him in the mess he made. Besides I was- and am- pissed at him. But I am sorry he's left with Blue. For that guy... it wasn't about Iris. It was about me.

CLARK (NAR.)

And there it is. Every time I forget who she is, she reminds me. Everything she does and says is through this twisted narcissistic gaze.

RHEA

Something has changed. Look at how they treated me, are probably treating Eros. We aren't worth what we used to be. Why else bring you out now? Things are never going to be what they were and they want it that way.

CLARK (NAR.)

But I'm not really listening. I hold her gaze, unflinching, as I press the button.

SCENE 2

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

Open spaces make me uncomfortable. I basically hold my breath as we pass through the square in front of the capitol building. Even though I'm surrounded by five guards- a benefit to Rhea's disappearing act- I still feel exposed. When we were ten we were doing a photo op on this artificially created field. Some kind of enhanced farming thing. There was something vaguely cannibalistic as we (ourselves genetically modified organisms) bit into the huge, yellow pieces of corn as the cameras flashed. It was further out than we'd ever been from the city, none of the people there had ever even seen us in person. Everyone was so happy.

They adorned our tiny heads with crowns made of weeds. They held signs with our names on them. Someone handed me a bouquet of wild flowers... It was beautiful... Until some man came walking out from the crowd, his eyes manic. He was holding a small revolver. Security cautiously approached him, their own weapons raised. The man looked me in the eye and slowly raised the gun, there was a shout from a cop but not before the man put the gun to his own head, and pulled the trigger. I looked around for something to hide under, but there was nothing.

DION
Pers?

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)
Dion stands holding the door open for me. I step inside. The whole ordeal was maybe seven seconds. It wasn't the first time someone had done something crazy in front of us, but it was something about his eyes as he did it... He didn't look angry, he looked thrilled. There's a lot of things on my list of things to try not to think about, a stranger's brains splattered on the petals of my flowers is at the top. But when I feel exposed, he's the first thing to come to mind. Like he might step out from somewhere.

DION
What're you thinking about?

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)
Dion says lowly to me while the rest of the security detail gets patted down and searched- really going for this safety thing.

PERSEPHONE
How dumb you would have looked with a black eye.

DION
I don't know why you're making such a big deal out of this.

PERSEPHONE
Because Hera doesn't need to deal with you on top of everything else.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)
He stops at this.

DION

Since when have you cared about her?

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

As much as Dion hates to hear it, Hera is a rather hard person to hate. Black is not a people person so she's always deployed Hera to banquets and hand out awards... make the odd jokey toast. Pop champagne at celebrations. Anything Black demands too fun for her own time. Hera's like... the fucking American flag. The worst anyone feels about her is used to her.

PERSEPHONE

Since I realized she can help me. Is there a better person to endorse me?

DION

Endorse or be chaperoned by?

PERSEPHONE

That's the best idea you've had all day.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

I smile up at him, but he doesn't look happy. The rest of our guards pass through security but they don't follow us into the elevator.

PERSEPHONE

Oh, come on. If anything, I hope she retires. Easier to replace someone if they let you.

SOUND: FOURTH FLOOR.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

We step out of the elevator and there's another security checkpoint, I tap my ID bracelet and the metal arms of a turnstile make way for me. Dion taps his-

SOUND: REJECT.

DION

What?

PERSEPHONE

It's probably nothing personal. Just Black being a freak. None of them can get through either.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

I nod to a few security guards standing by the elevator.

DION
You're not supposed to be alone.

PERSEPHONE
I lay a hand on his chest.

PERSEPHONE
Are we playing by the rules now? It's 300 feet to her office.
I can handle it.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)
I walk backwards down the hallway, wave to him as I push into
the door labeled "Office of the President".

The Oval Office this is not... The place was probably a shoe
store when this was still a mall. It'd explain the foot
smell. Weird. The secretary desk is empty but there are
voices coming from her office. I can hear Black speaking in a
tone I don't recognize.

ROSALIND
I did everything I could.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)
And then the cold voice of Detective Blue.

ORSINO
I'm going to stop you right there. Because I needed you when
your agents were knocking on my door asking what-

ROSALIND
You always knew it'd be a risk.

ORSINO
That's exactly why I'm doing it right this time.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)
I knew he and Black knew each other from before but-

ORSINO
I'm sorry if what happened isn't what you want to have
happened, but I'm not fucking up again this close to you and
a body.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

And before I have time to back up, he's through the door and staring at me.

ORSINO

You have a guest.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

He says loudly. Black comes to the door to see for herself. She hasn't bothered to put in her contacts, her hair is greasy. I've never seen her like this.

ROSALIND

Persephone.

PERSEPHONE

Hi.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

Blue disappears down the hallway.

ROSALIND

Shut the door please.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

And I follow her. She says nothing, just sits behind her desk- one egg away from being a nest. She's not going to say anything? Fine.

PERSEPHONE

What was that about?

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

She looks at me like she's considering lying for a moment, but it passes.

ROSALIND

Old friend, old secrets.

PERSEPHONE

Anything I should know about?

ROSALIND

Power strains friendships.

After helping turn the public against him, I'm sure Eros will have a very difficult time forgiving you.

PERSEPHONE

I don't care if he forgives me.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

I speak before I think. It comes out harsher than I intended, all I meant was that I haven't thought about him forgiving me.

PERSEPHONE

I've only worried how he's doing.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

Black seems pleased anyway

ROSALIND

Well that's good to know.

PERSEPHONE

If he really did what Detective Blue thinks, we need to deal with that before we worry about my personal relationship with him.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

She just watches me. I take a breath.

PERSEPHONE

Iris is dead. She was my friend too. Even if I didn't always treat her like it. But it isn't like she made it easy for me.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

Black nods.

ROSALIND

I like when the other you slips out like that. The one I've known for 22 years. The uhm... the honest version. That's always been a word I used to describe you. For better or worse.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

She runs a hand through her greasy hair.

ROSALIND

People think of you as honest too, mostly for worse. But still. That's why they believe you now... Orsino and I no longer agree on who did this.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

I freeze. Resist the urge to look over my shoulder.

PERSEPHONE

You don't think it's Eros.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

She rummages in her desk, emerges with two small white pills.

ROSALIND

I know they don't do much for me at this point. I know they're actually bad for me. And I know people know I take them. But I don't particularly care.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

She pops them in her mouth. She reaches in another drawer, extracts a cigarette. She registers what must be the look on my face.

ROSALIND

They raided Rhea's Brick.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

She lights up, sits back for a second. But doesn't take more than a drag before she leans forward. Her chin on her fist. Cut to the chase. I think.

ROSALIND

Eros had a psych eval the day before. He had elected to keep going with the trials.

PERSEPHONE

Maybe he thought she was going to tell Rhea.

ROSALIND

He wanted to tell Rhea himself. This wasn't something planned out, the weapon was only convenient. The odds of actually being killed by an air bubble in a syringe... This was a crime of passion. And bad luck. Besides, Eros has never had violent tendencies.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

She's right. Even in boxing classes, I've never seen him react. I always chalked it up to him being high though.

PERSEPHONE

Well who does he think did it?

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

And she places the second pill in her mouth before swallowing it dry.

ROSALIND

Hera.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

I nearly laugh.

PERSEPHONE

That's ridiculous.

ROSALIND

You don't have to tell me.

PERSEPHONE

Why would he think that?

ROSALIND

You can't ignore that her demeanor has been strange since it happened.

PERSEPHONE

Sure. But everyone has been freaked out. Especially with Rhea leaving.

ROSALIND

Her finger prints are all-

PERSEPHONE

All our finger prints are all over each other.

ROSALIND

It just puts her in the house. Plus there are these... audio diaries. Notes. That Iris kept. She spoke a lot about Hera.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

Nothing too surprising there. I think.

ROSALIND

"You're going to make things right with her." Over and over again. Then the night of her death she recorded a final message. She was elated, it must have been just after the concert. Saying "We're finally about to talk... things are going to be right after tonight" and the kicker- "That she was relieved Eros had fallen asleep."

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

I spend a second stuck on how strange the idea of them being together still feels. Then the weight of what she's saying hits me- Someone was there after he was.

ROSALIND

Orsino thinks Rhea left because of Hera. It seems too convenient. Hera is the one who screwed over Eros. He thinks when Rhea realized Hera was throwing her and Eros under the bus, she ran.

PERSEPHONE

What possible motive could Hera have had?

ROSALIND

Well there's the idea she was jealous we were sinking reproductive resources into Iris, that could have triggered something. Also, Orsino's created a neat little narrative there. Something about Iris and Eros mirroring Iris and Apollo.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

She pauses to look at me. Gauging my response to see if I'm surprised. I'm not. A few years ago, I walked into a bathroom and found Iris crying on the bathroom floor. She just referred to him as "some man" as if we don't interact with the same seven people everyday. Plus... Apollo acts differently when someone pays him extra attention. Gluttonous. Instead of being satiated, he gets hungrier... Of course though, Apollo and Hera's relationship was something that was never discussed out of respect for the two of them. What I do in my free time is public knowledge, but them? Please respect their privacy... I kept it quiet anyway. Knowing everything Hera went through... It wasn't worth it.

ROSALIND

There is one more thing. They found the syringe they think was used to kill Iris.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)
She pauses like she expects me to jump in.

ROSALIND
It appeared in the trash from Hera and Rhea's Brick.

PERSEPHONE
Fuck me.

ROSALIND
My thoughts exactly.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)
My head starts to spin. Hera? This couldn't have really been Hera. Who is good in a way the rest of us can't be. Not in the way Iris tried to be but in an infuriating selfless way. Trust me if I could hate Hera I would. It'd be easier than this unwilling admiration. And definitely easier than what I say next.

PERSEPHONE
I can't... I can't write about that.

ROSALIND
You and I know Hera. I need her. They all need her. I'm an old lady. I'm going to need someone to take my place... Which of course would open hers for you.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)
I look away quickly, uncomfortable with how she seems to have read my mind.

ROSALIND
I'm not going to be able to keep Orsino from taking his case against her public. It... it isn't safe for me to protect her. But you can.

PERSEPHONE
I don't... I don't even know what I'm supposed to write.

ROSALIND
Hera isn't the only person who lives in that house.

SCENE 3

RHEA (NAR.)

I watch the sun sink below the line of trees closest to us. I'm already running through what I'll say to Hera when I get home. Assuming I get home and they don't just throw me in some dungeon opposite Eros. At least then I'll get to tell him about this. He would get a kick out of it. I think back to the last time I saw him, the red and blue light painting his pale face like a canvas. I can't let myself start to miss him. Or Hera. I hope she's okay. Sleeping. When Hera is upset she can't sleep. She's gone for days on end, just spinning out of control. It's been a long time. I mean, the last time I saw her like that was after Iris and Apollo- well after I told her. And before that, when she lost it. Before they took her to the hospital.

CLARK

Are you cold?

RHEA (NAR.)

I turn to Clark, forgetting my arm, and wince when something sharp digs into my skin.

CLARK

Careful.

RHEA (NAR.)

Duh. I haven't said a word to him in the hour since he pushed the button and the silence is clearly getting to him.

CLARK

Can I take a look at that?

RHEA (NAR.)

I say nothing, just turn back to the trees. He climbs into the passenger seat and leans over me. The pinned arm is between the wheel and the center console of the car. He's small enough to sit up on his legs without knocking his head on the roof.

CLARK

Okay uhm, it looks like it isn't metal or anything that's hurting you. But there's all this glass. I think when you struggle it gets into the nooks around your arm so- damn. This piece is really-

RHEA (NAR.)
He looks into my face apologetically.

CLARK
I had to call, Rhea. You need help.

RHEA (NAR.)
He's only a few inches from my face. The smell of his nervous sweat mingles with something sweet, like cookie batter. He stares intensely into my eyes and for a terrifying moment, I think he's going to kiss me. I wonder then if he's ever been kissed. That's discouraged during our MIUCs. And him, it's not like he had an Eros lying around. Just a breath away from his idle lips, I wonder what it must be like to never be touched by someone who cares about you. I turn away and that's when I see it-

RHEA
Clark.

CLARK
What?

RHEA
Who are those people?

RHEA (NAR.)
Because just at the tree line, a hooded group of people in dark clothing approach. But their faces- their faces- and then in the last hazy seconds of dusk, I recognize a familiar clown mask.

SCENE 4

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)
My head spins as I leave Black's office. I feel confused, a little torn, and incredibly powerful. Dion leans against a pillar. His bulky frame looking almost comically casual. Like a bull on it's hind legs, arms folded.

DION
What took so long?

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)
I speak loud enough for the nearby security to overhear.

PERSEPHONE

She's worried about me. All of us really. She's a sweet woman. Little trouble expressing it.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

We step into the elevator.

SOUND: ELEVATOR DOORS OPENING.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

They think Hera did it.

DION

No.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

But his response isn't what I expected. His face is twisted again like he's going to cry.

PERSEPHONE

Twenty minutes ago she was your fucking nemesis.

DION

She couldn't have. She wouldn't. Not Hera, I know-

PERSEPHONE

Oh my god Dion, calm down. Black and I don't think she did.

DION

Who then?

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

But when I try to respond, something sticks in my throat. Saying it. Saying Rhea. Rhea with her big mouth and her stupid theories and books and cigarettes and comments and her jokes and her infectious laugh. It isn't that I think she did it so much as I don't think anyone else could have done it. I mean Eros? Black is right. There are a million ways it could have played out, maybe he was there. Maybe it was an accident. Something stupid, Rhea getting fired up. Why else would she run?

DION

Pers.

SOUND: FIRST FLOOR.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

I look down, and his fingers are wrapped around mine.
The doors pop open and I untangle my hand.

PERSEPHONE

I have to write a post about Rhea.

DION

You don't have to.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

No shit. I think. I don't look at him, but I feel him beside
me as my security detail scuttles to their feet.

DION

Persephone.

PERSEPHONE

Somebody did this. It's going to be someone we know, or
someone we trust, or whatever. There's no easy answer to
this.

DION

But you don't have to get involved. We could easily just hold
up in the Bricks for the next few days. Order any food or
wine we want. Stay in bed until two everyday.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

He looks up. Suddenly aware of the guards on us.

DION

Think of how... safe you would feel.

CHAR

Jeez, Dion. Are you going to invite all of us?

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)

Char throws and arm around me. Artemis is a few feet behind
him. Not sure why she's getting dragged around. Unless she's
going to be used as a human shield I can't image her small
frame being much help to anyone.

CHAR

You heading to lunch?

PERSEPHONE

No, I'm just going home.

CHAR
I'll walk with you.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)
Great. We step out through the doors and are back in the square. It's quiet for noon. The wind catches on the still hanging portrait of Iris. Her face ripples with wrinkles it will never have.

PERSEPHONE
Dion, can I see your device?

DION
Now?

PERSEPHONE
Who's going to yell at you?

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)
He stops, fishes in his pockets. Puzzled, he pats his jacket-

SOUND: GUN SHOTS.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)
He hits the ground before I even register the shots. I rush to him, take in the blood coming from his neck. My hands are stained red but I don't- when did I-? And then the sun is gone.

CHAR
Pers.

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)
Char hovers a few inches above me. The guards have formed a turtle like shell around us.

PERSEPHONE
We need to get him help.

CHAR
We can't-

PERSEPHONE
Get him OUT of here.

CHAR
He's-

PERSEPHONE (NAR.)
But Char could be on fucking Mars. I take Dion's head in my
hands and look in his open eyes. But he's not there anymore.

END OF EPISODE