

Medusa's reflection

Narrative

Shaded by the towering majesty of Mount Olympus's mythological palace, a lone girl drifted along the meandering garden paths. Her feet met the ground in soft, unconscious steps and she directed her vision downwards, for nature's glory could do nothing to brighten her spirits. A dark cloud of uncertainty overshadowed her every thought because fate impatiently waited to open a door through which she must pass and could never return. What existence waited beyond? Even her worst imaginings failed to conjure the true horror of her destiny. This tragic figure was Medusa.

Detached from the only life she had ever known, Medusa was overwhelmed by a crushing sense of loss. She should have been at Athena's side, dutifully providing her every whim and fancy. Instead, she was utterly alone. Breathing a grief-stricken, quivering sigh, she sat on the edge of a walled pond and gazed at her reflection on the mirrored surface. The likeness was unchanged: almond-shaped eyes enclosed within long, sweeping lashes; silky-smooth, rosebud lips; a youthful, unblemished complexion; and cheeks that were naturally flushed like a ripe peach. However, the light which set Medusa's beauty ablaze was extinguished. Her soul was empty.

Storming dominantly into the watery painting – in the manner of its formidable owner – a second image drew the maiden's attention from her self-pity. Cast by the statue that stood arrogantly on an ornate plinth in the centre of the pool, his appearance made Medusa recoil and rejoice in equal measure. This was the deity whom she despised for causing the seismic rift between herself and her goddess mistress, yet whom she harboured deep-seated affection for: Poseidon.

Medusa shifted so that – perhaps for the last time – they were together. A swirling gust of emotion threatened to drown her as her memories tussled for prime position in the forefront of her mind. She recalled Poseidon's warm hand in hers, his chiselled handsomeness that had the ability to stop her in her tracks and the gentle words of adoration he whispered in snatched moments together. She was his secret. He was hers. A faint smile danced around her mouth and a sprinkling of diamonds sparkled in her eyes. Sorrow was quick to banish such self-centred indulgences; it liquified the gems, forcing them to tumble. Medusa's tears shattered the glassy surface with circular ripples through which materialised a different – more harrowing – recollection.

“Do not demean yourself further!” Athena – who stood regally at full height garbed in gold-braided robes –

barked at the quaking subject before her. “Denying your wickedness will serve you no favours!”

Medusa’s head felt as heavy as lead; she stared at the marble floor. “I’m s-sorry-”

“Look at me when you’re addressing me, insolent child!” the goddess roared, her unblinking, granite-cold glare boring into Medusa until she obeyed.

Truths spilled from Medusa’s lips like milk from a broken jug. She was powerless to halt them, so they flowed until the vessel was empty. “I desired only to honour my pledge to ignore all male advances,” she began. “You are goddess of wisdom and chose my path sagely. But... but it is true... I have given my heart to a man. It pains me to have deceived you, Athena. I earnestly seek your forgiveness.” She fell into a low, submissive curtsy.

“Forgiveness!” Athena spat, as if the word left an acrid taste on her tongue. “You dishonour my trust, fracture these imperial walls with controversy and embarrass yourself in the most shameful manner. Then, you come grovelling for forgiveness!” She laughed falsely, then – flicking the switch on the action – abruptly stopped and turned to the ring of attendants who were doing their utmost to melt into the background. “Well, what say you all? Should I forgive Medusa?” Of course, every head shook in united loyalty towards Athena.

“W-what w-will happen to me?” Medusa trembled, understanding that further reasoning was futile; nothing could persuade Athena to pardon her betrayal.

“You will give me your audience at dusk tomorrow,” Athena instructed, signalling for her guards to dismiss the wretched creature.

Dragged back to the present, Medusa released the agony-laden scream that had threatened to explode since the first moment of that cruel wait.

She aggressively slapped and beat the water until it resembled a storm-ravaged sea.

Then – energy spent – she crumpled and wept with her tendrils of glossy, honey-coloured hair trailing in the froth.

Had Medusa’s salt-stung eyes have opened... If she had focused, once more, on her reflection, she would have observed her dismal future projected: lips twisted by jagged fangs, skin tinged with the sickly pallor of a cold-blooded creature, golden locks twisted into a tangle of writhing serpents. The face of a gorgon!

