



14. Myths and Legends

It was the fourth time that day that Elliot had travelled by immortal transport and flying by horse quickly became his favourite. As Pegasus climbed high into the sky, Elliot was treated to the most beautiful view of the English countryside below.

'There's my farm!' said Elliot after a few minutes, seeing his beloved home like a little model in the fields near Stonehenge.

'I couldn't trouble you for a place to lay my hat, could I, old boy?' Zeus yelled into Elliot's ear. 'Need to lie low for a few days.'

Elliot was caught off guard. On the one hand,

the last thing he needed was another stranger on the farm drawing attention to him and Mum. On the other, Zeus had the Earth Stone – perhaps if he gave him somewhere to stay, he might let Elliot borrow it. Or perhaps Elliot might borrow it anyway. It was worth the risk.

'Of course, Your . . . erm . . . Majesty,' he said.

Pegasus touched down in the disused paddock of Home Farm and Elliot immediately jumped off and ran to the farmhouse. It was OK. He could see his mum sitting in the kitchen chatting away to herself. Now he just needed to find somewhere to conceal a handful of immortals.

Zeus removed the invisibility helmet as Virgo dismounted, pinging them back into view. Elliot tried to look away as Zeus struggled to get his considerable girth off his horse. Zeus eventually managed to get both legs pointing in the same direction and plopped inelegantly to the ground. He pulled himself up, ripped off his tux and revealed bright orange Bermuda shorts and a red Hawaiian shirt underneath.

'That's better,' he said. 'Been dying to get rid of that wretched thing.'

'The tux or the bride?' asked Hermes, screeching to a halt on his motorbike.

Virgo dropped into another dutiful low curtsy.

'Oh, enough of that nonsense,' boomed Zeus, his bright-blue eyes sparkling like sapphires. 'Come here and give your old King a hug.'

Virgo ran to Zeus with a relieved smile and was soon enveloped in a vast Bermuda bear hug.

'That's more like it,' laughed Zeus, his twinkling gaze lighting on Elliot. 'Wonderful to meet you too, Elliot. Some call me Jupiter, others call me Brontios. To at least five of my ex-wives, I'm a plumber called Bob. But you can call me Zeus.'

Elliot accepted a giant handshake, trying not to wince as the God crushed his fingers with his surprising strength.

'And this fine fellow,' said Zeus, gesturing towards the winged white stallion, 'is my trusty steed, Pegasus.'

At the sound of his name, Pegasus trotted over. Elliot had loved the horses they'd had on the farm and this one was truly magnificent. He gently lifted his hand to stroke the horse's elegant head.

'Hey, boy,' he whispered softly.

'If you require a dog to fetch you a stick, then please continue,' said Pegasus grandly, shocking Elliot into silence. 'But if you are referring to me, my name is Pegasus. And I'm gasping for a mineral water.'

'You can talk!' exclaimed Elliot.

'I'm a flying horse,' said Pegasus pertly. 'Talking's the easy part. And I prefer sparkling with a twist of lime.'

Elliot looked blankly around him, having never catered for a talking, flying immortal horse.

'Oh, don't mind him,' said Zeus dismissively. 'Get off your high horse, Peg. There's a water trough over there, that'll do just fine.'

Pegasus looked over at the rusty trough filled with murky brown water and released a disdainful whinny.

'I suppose a few ice cubes would be too much to ask,' he huffed as he sauntered over, sticking his nose high in the air.

'Zeus – we've got a problem,' said Virgo, unable to look him in the eye. 'I've done something dreadful.'

'I'm sure we can fix it,' said Zeus. 'I've got a brilliant lawyer if we need one. She could get an Athenian out of a labyrinth and make the Minotaur pay costs. Elliot, is there a good spot to sit and chat, please?'

Instinctively feeling that a chubby God, a flying fashion model and a talking horse might be too much for Mum, Elliot ushered the immortals towards Bessie's cowshed, where they pulled up



some hay bales. Pegasus strode in behind them, earning a flirtatious moo from Bessie as he settled down for a rest on a pile of straw.

'Isn't this delightful!' boomed Zeus, looking around the dilapidated shed as if he were in the Ritz. 'So, who is going to fill me in?'

Virgo and Elliot recounted what had happened beneath Stonehenge in as much detail as they could remember, while Hermes and Zeus listened intently.

'And that's when I thought I should find you,' said Virgo at the end of their story, hanging her head. 'I'm so sorry, Zeus, this is all my fault.'

'We'll have no more of that,' said Zeus kindly. 'If anyone's to blame, it is me.'

'Charon said that Thanatos is still alive,' said Elliot. 'Is that true?'

'Oh, for goodness' sake, Elliot,' snapped Virgo. 'I'm sorry, Zeus, Charon's been filling his head with—'

'Yes,' said Zeus quietly. 'Yes, it is.'

'What?' gasped Virgo.

'You're 'aving a laugh, Dad!' yelled Hermes. 'Since when?'

'Since always,' sighed Zeus. 'You have to understand, when I made his father, Erebus, the King of the Daemons, we were like brothers. I'd hoped

that the Gods and Daemons could work together to help the mortals. But the Chaos Stones changed Erebus. Made him power-crazed, greedy, blind to anything but his own ambition.'

'But you killed him, right?' asked Elliot.

'I did,' said Zeus, hanging his head. 'It was one of the worst moments of my life. I was younger, angrier, stronger. I saw nothing but my own rage and the next thing I knew . . . Erebus was dead. His wife, Nyx, the Goddess of Night, was so grief-stricken that she was never seen again. But it got worse. As Erebus lay dying, his twin sons Thanatos and Hypnos – barely more than boys themselves – came running to their father's body. I never quite recovered from that sight.'

'What happened?' asked Virgo.

'Although Hypnos was the older twin, Erebus handed the Chaos Stones to Thanatos, naming him his heir with his final breaths. Hypnos was furious – the stones were his birthright – but Erebus said Thanatos would make the better King. Hypnos never forgave his brother for that.'

'So Thanatos wanted to finish what his father had started?' said Elliot.

'Precisely,' said Zeus. 'A few centuries later, he wanted to avenge his father – and by now the Chaos Stones had corrupted him too.'



'But you killed him in that legendary duel, bosh, job done?' said Hermes. 'How can Thanatos still be alive?'

'I went to destroy his kardia and deliver the death blow, but I ... I couldn't do it,' said Zeus. 'All I could see was that young boy holding his father's – my friend's – body. I no longer had the stomach for killing. Or for being King of the Gods. It was why I retired.'

'So you hid Thanatos under Stonehenge where no one could find him,' said Elliot, everything suddenly making sense. 'And the rest of the Daemons?'

'I held the Chaos Stones in my hands and I could feel their dark power flowing through me – I've never experienced anything like it,' explained Zeus. 'I had planned to take the Daemons' kardia and then wipe them all out with an earthquake or a tsunami – but something stopped me. I realized it wouldn't be a victory. It would be a massacre. I asked my brother Hades to build them a prison in Tartarus. They've been there ever since.'

'What happened to the Chaos Stones?' asked Elliot, trying to keep the need out of his voice.

'No worries, mate,' said Hermes. 'Dad will have them locked up tighter than jeggings in January. Won't you, Dad?'

Zeus's attention was suddenly drawn all around the shed.

'Daaaaaaaad?' asked Hermes suspiciously. 'You have got the stones, right?'

'Not ... exactly,' said Zeus sheepishly. 'In fact ... not at all.'

Elliot's heart plummeted. He'd been that close to solving his problems.

'So where are they?' he asked.

'There's the rub,' said Zeus. 'I can admit it now: Thanatos was stronger than me. I just couldn't defeat him while he had the stones. I wasn't able to win them in a fair fight, so I rather ... well ... sort of ...'

'You cheated!' shouted Hermes. 'You dirty dog!'

'In a manner of speaking. Well – yes,' admitted Zeus. 'I remembered the look on Hypnos's face when his father passed him over in favour of Thanatos – it was pure hatred. I knew I could exploit that – and that Hypnos was the only person who could get close enough to Thanatos. They lived together in the Cave of Sleep and Death. So I struck a deal with him. If Hypnos brought me the Chaos Stones, he would escape the fate of his Daemon comrades when I won. He didn't even think about it – the opportunity for

revenge was just what he'd been waiting for. He brought me the stones that very hour.'

'But . . . but that's not possible,' exclaimed Virgo in disbelief. 'That's not in our history. You can't have lied?'

'I'm afraid I did,' said Zeus, shamefaced. 'After all, history is only what the winners wrote down.'

Elliot shot a triumphant look at Virgo, which she chose to ignore.

'Once Thanatos and the Daemons were defeated, the power of the stones scared me,' said Zeus. 'I didn't want them to corrupt me like they had Erebus and Thanatos. I told Hypnos that his brother and the Daemons were dead, then made him swear on the Styx that he wouldn't use the Chaos Stones himself. I commanded him to hide them where they could never be found – not even by me. I've not seen him or the stones from that day to this.'

'Shut. Up.' said Hermes, taking a stunned selfie on his iGod. 'You've got to be joking. Seriously. I'm not even joking.'

Elliot felt winded. He had less than a week to find twenty thousand pounds and his one ray of hope – the Earth Stone – was fading. He needed that stone – and fast.

'I'm not proud, chaps,' said Zeus. 'But now that

Thanatos is free, we must get to those stones before he does. If he gets his hands on them, he can free his Daemon army from Tartarus and then we'll all be in the soup. I'm going to need the girls.'

'Which ones?' asked Hermes.

'Athene and Aphrodite,' said Zeus firmly. 'And Hephaestus, he's always handy in a crisis. It's getting late – we can fetch them tomorrow. Elliot, we can just bed down here if that's OK with you?'

'Sure, why not?' said Elliot, his mind whirring.

'Super! Now,' said Zeus, pushing himself to his feet, 'give me a tour of this fine home of yours. I could do with stretching my legs after that flight.'

They left the shed and Zeus looked out at the overgrown farmlands that had fallen into disuse. Elliot felt embarrassed as he looked at his home through someone else's eyes – the hard soil was thick with weeds, the shed was falling apart and the farmhouse was a shambles.

'I'm ever so grateful to you, Elliot. I wonder if there is anything I might do to repay your kind hospitality?' Zeus said.

'Are Gods . . . rich?' asked Elliot. 'I mean, you've lived for ages. Do you have loads of money?'

'None that's any use to you, my friend,' laughed Zeus. 'Gods can't keep mortal money. It's against the Sacred Code. We immortals have our own



currency – obols, drachma and mina. Although most of mine goes to my ex-wives anyway ... Why do you ask?

'No reason,' said Elliot, not comfortable sharing his biggest secret with this complete stranger. Besides, Mum always said it was easier to seek forgiveness than permission. What if the Gods didn't let him use the Earth Stone to save the farm? He'd just 'borrow' it the one time, find enough treasure to pay off his debts, then give it straight back. No one needed to know ...

Elliot again had the sensation that Zeus could see into his thoughts. But it passed in a heartbeat as the God smiled warmly. 'My sisters Hestia and Demeter are very good around the house,' he said. 'With your permission, perhaps they could help you out on the farm?'

'Great. Thanks,' Elliot said, and then yawned as the long and eventful day caught up with him.

'Top-hole,' smiled Zeus again. 'You're tired, Elliot – we can manage from here. Why don't you head back inside? Oh, and here,' he added, producing a hamper that Elliot was sure wasn't there before. 'A few leftovers from the wedding. Shame for it all to go to waste. Again.'

'Thank you,' said Elliot, struggling under the weight of it. 'I'll see you in the morning.'

'Toodle-pip,' said Zeus as Hermes fluttered down next to him.

The two Gods watched the young boy wander back to the farmhouse with his supper.

'Thank the Heavens you found me,' said Zeus. 'We need to stay close to Elliot – he's in terrible danger.'

'What gives?' asked Hermes.

Zeus pulled an ancient piece of parchment from his pocket and handed it to his son.

Hermes's eyes bulged out of his head. 'Shut up. It's him, isn't it?'

'It is,' said Zeus. 'We need to find those stones, and there's not a moment to lose.'

'Should we tell him?' asked Hermes.

'No,' said Zeus. 'Elliot Hooper is the only person who can save the world. And I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy.'

