

BRYONY PEARCE

HANNAH
MESSENGER
AND THE GODS OF HOCKWOLD



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INTRODUCTION

BY HANNAH MESSENGER, AGED 11

I'M GUESSING that most of you know that Zeus is King of the Gods. But what you probably don't know is that he's retired. That's right. When humans invented the nuclear bomb, he started yelling rude things about atoms and hung up his thunderbolt.

When Zeus retired as King of the Gods, he relocated to a taverna in Greece where he drank a lot of ouzo, ate a lot of baklava and chased a lot of waitresses around tables.

The eating and drinking were fine (except for his expanding waistline), but his wife, Hera, was deeply unhappy about the waitresses (see *Great Kefalonia Earthquake*, 1953).

She gave him an ultimatum: relocate to a place of *her* choosing, or face retirement alone.

And that is how Zeus, King of the Gods, and Hera, Goddess of Marriage and Family, ended up retiring to a small village in Cambridgeshire called Hockwold-cum-Wilton, which has a

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notable lack of ouzo and baklava, and absolutely no waitresses under the age of fifty.

Over time, a number of other gods joined them. Even some who I would call ‘god-adjacent’ turned up, like the descendants of Prometheus. (Prometheus stole fire from the gods, gave it to humans, and in return got nailed to a cliff for thousands of years. I never said the gods were *nice*.)

It became quite a community.

And this is where I come in. My name is Hannah Messenger. I’m eleven years old and I’m the great-granddaughter of Zeus and Hera, and granddaughter of Hermes, the messenger god, who gave up on humanity when emails were invented. He doesn’t live in Hockwold, due to the fact that, well, he’s kind of a trickster, and one of his most recent tricks got him put in time-out. OK, prison. It’s a bit embarrassing. We don’t talk about it.

The last thing to mention is that when I was little, Hera took what you might call the ultimate retirement. And because Hermes’ magic staff can open any door, including the one between life and death, and because the staff is currently hanging in our lounge, Zeus asked Dad to try and bring her back from the dead. So, Hera’s in an urn in our spare room right now and Dad has been working on resurrection spells for as long as I can remember.

Funnily enough, Zeus hasn’t even *tried* to chase a waitress since.

So that’s how most of the Greek gods, and their hangers-on, and their families, ended up in a tiny village near Cambridge. We don’t get involved in the problems of humans. There’s no

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point. Any solution we could come up with, they've either already gone one bigger (see *nuclear bombs*), or already destroyed (see *rainforests*). The local council is an absolute battleground though.

And so my story starts, on the day I come into my powers.



CHAPTER ONE

THE DAY I come into my powers, nobody notices, because my great-grandmother explodes and almost takes the roof off the house. Again.

As I hover there, a couple of centimetres above the ground, Mum rushes into the second bedroom with the fire extinguisher.

Dad is sitting in a ring of scorched carpet, without his eyebrows, glaring at the urn on top of the mantelpiece.

“She’s doing this on purpose!” he yells, pointing at the urn. As I watch, a handful of ashes whirl into it and the lid slams closed with a snap. The bowl on the table, which must have recently contained the ashes, is in pieces.

“Of course she is, dear.” Mum sprays foam around the room, starting with the glowing shards of ceramic and ending with Dad’s smouldering jumper. “She said she wanted a little rest.”

“A little rest? It’s been *eight years!* She has to come back. I can’t

tell Zeus I've failed *again*. And we need her on the council. Some of the descendants are saying we should get involved in human politics, and she was the only one able to rein any of them in." Dad jumps to his feet and notices me by the door. "Isn't it a school day?"

"Yes, but . . ." I gesture helplessly at my feet, but at that moment the little flare of power that had been lifting me up fizzles out and I drop to the floor with a thump.

"Don't jump on the landing," Mum says, without even turning around. She's stalking a glowing ember that has escaped her hose. "You'll wake your brother. Honestly, Hannah, you get more like your grandad every day. Thinking only about yourself!"

I don't say that if Henry hasn't been woken by Dad's explosion, he is unlikely to be woken by the soft thud of my slippers.

"Go on," Dad says. "Get dressed quickly, and I'll make your favourite."

"You don't *make* Coco Pops." I roll my eyes, still stinging from Mum's remark. "You just add milk."

"That's gourmet cooking as far as your father's concerned," Mum says, turning to face me. "You're still in your PJs, Hannah. You're going to be late!"

I sigh. She's right, I'm going to be late.

"And get that *tortoise* out of here!" Dad snaps, pointing at Dolio. He's sitting on the hearth gazing at me mournfully. "Honestly!" Dad breathes. "That creature. It's always around! I swear it's watching me."



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“And they didn’t even notice?” My best friend and partner in crime, aka ‘that awful boy’, aka Dylan Susan (don’t ask) Vine, walks beside me towards the bus stop.

“You know what it’s like in my house.” I sigh. “Dad was trying to bring Hera back to her body again.”

“She won’t be back until she wants to be back,” Dylan says sagely, offering me a strawberry lace. I shake my head and he shrugs, wraps it around his finger and sucks it into his mouth. “So, have you got . . . y’know?”

I pull down my left sock to reveal a five-centimetre cluster of feathers protruding from my ankle bone. Dylan crouches. “Cute.”

“They’re not even white.” I squint at the dirty grey bundle. “I look like a pigeon.”

Dylan strokes the downy fluff with one finger, and I giggle. “That tickles.” I yank my sock back up.

“Will they get bigger?”

“I’m not sure. Dad’s are the size of his hand, so . . . I guess?”

Dylan stands back up. “You’re so lucky.”

“Yeah, right! I’m meant to be a *messenger*. Even if I could fly faster than an F16 Jet, which I definitely can’t with these things,” I raise a foot, “I’d still be slower than a text message. I’m *useless*.” I gesture at Dylan. “*Your* powers are getting stronger though.” A bunch of strawberry laces protrudes from his shirt pocket.

He sniffs. “I make strawberry laces. It’s a useless power.”

“Not true,” I say, poking him. “Everyone loves strawberry laces. *And* you can speak to the dead.”

“Have you any idea how *boring* dead people are?” Dylan snaps.

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“Tell Laura I love her. Watch out for magpies. Let Martha know I’m watching her and if she doesn’t give the silver bracelet to Margery . . .” He stops and blinks. “Is that Dolio?”

Dolio’s wrinkled head is poking out of the top of my bag like he’s a tiny Extra Terrestrial.

“Dad told me to take him.” I give him a little pat and he tries to nip my finger.

“He’s *vicious*,” Dylan says, backing away from my bag. “I don’t know why you like him so much.”

I shrug. “Sometimes I think he’s the only one in my house who actually listens to me.”

“Awright, losers?”

I turn to see Zack and Zane strolling towards us. Zack is a year older than we are, and a golden boy if ever there was one. He is godlike in his good looks: well-built, charming, with white teeth that catch the light. Zane is basically his slightly smaller clone. It’s ridiculous.

I nudge Dylan, who is standing awkwardly, staring, one hand caught in the act of trying to smooth his frizzy red hair. “He’s nothing more than a toothpaste advert come to life,” I whisper, catching his wrist and pulling it to his side. “Boring, predictable and he couldn’t love himself more if he was made of chocolate.”

Dylan doesn’t answer. Instead, he glances at his own too-short trousers and trainers with holes in.

“Check this out, losers!” Zack says, and points a finger at Dylan’s feet.

Miniature storm clouds boil above us and a bolt of lightning

no bigger than my middle finger hits the ground, charring Dylan's shoes. I smell burning rubber and Dylan leaps on to the grass, stamping madly.

Zane laughs. "Nice one!" Then he looks at me. "Zack's powers turned up at the weekend. There was a huge family party. Huge!"

Dylan bristles. "Yeah? Well, Hannah's got—"

I stamp on his foot. "Congratulations, Zack, that's great."

Zack smirks and points at Dylan again.

I put my hands on my hips. "Stop it!"

"Stop what?" Zack looks innocent. "Anyway, what are you going to do about it – take a *message* to your mummy?"

Zane laughs. Neither of them are funny.

"Give us some then," Zane says to Dylan, and holds out a hand.

Dylan sighs and pulls a tangle of laces from his pocket. He hands them over and immediately his pocket is full again.

"Worst gift *ever!*" Zane says, stuffing five into his mouth at once.

"Yeah? Well, you seem to be enjoying it," I growl.

Zack points at me, and it goes grey overhead. I close my mouth. "Thought so," he says smugly. The two shoulder-barge their way past Dylan, and I catch his elbow as he stumbles. As Zack and Zane reach the end of the road, they start high fiving one another and the clouds that had gathered above our heads dissolve like bath bombs.

"I don't want to go to school today," Dylan says suddenly.

I look at him. There are tears in his eyes.

"Dylan—"

"No, listen! You need to practise your new power, right? What

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are we going to learn at school that's more important than that? Yet another lesson about the Titans? Another drama class where Zack gets to kill us with a wooden sword then gross-kiss Amy Fairchild?" He grimaces.

"Well . . ."

"He melted my trainers, Hannah! Come on, let's go to the Fens. We won't bump into anyone out there. All the grown-ups are going to be at another council meeting. You seriously want to just . . . go to school? On the day you got your powers?"

I hesitate. He's got a point. Usually on a gift day (the day you get your powers) the whole family celebrates – a day off school, a restaurant dinner, the whole nine-yards. Mine gave me a bowl of Coco Pops and a headache.

"OK," I say. "Let's do it."