



TEMPTING TYPHON

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“One word
Frees us of all the weight and pain of life:
That word is love.”
— Sophocles

Chapter 1

Wet ash crunches beneath my feet on the concrete. Pools of black water ran off into storm drains. A HazMat truck pulls up. Firefighters shout at reporters to move out of the way to let us past the temporary barricades. News helicopters beat the air above, circling like vultures of the city skyline. Tons of emergency workers and fire department personnel were on the ground dealing with the mess. The stench of smoke and burnt plastic was heavy in the air. People huddled in blankets and sat curbside, shell-shocked but unharmed.

“Way too fucking early for this. Haven’t had my second cup of coffee.” I groan.

Reports had come in that a monstrous fire-breathing dragon had attacked the city in the early morning hours, before the crack of dawn. I held up my GBI badge as I trudged through the chaos.

My name is Tempest Geryon, Special Agent in Charge and the lead detective assigned to this investigation. Special Agent Larissa Jensen has been my partner for five of those six years. She’s taller than most men, solid as bedrock, with a stillness that makes rooms adjust around her. In the New World, she’s also my closest friend.

Genesis Bureau of Investigation, better known as GBI, is the equivalent of the FBI, only we deal with the monsters, the non-human kind called theras. Both agencies are equally bureaucratic nightmares. I should know. I've worked at GBI for the past six years.

The rising mid-summer sun shone bright and happy in clear blue skies over the Bronx as if mocking the misery below. The weather forecast had temps climbing into the nineties across New York City. In an hour, the heat and humidity would be unbearable, making a bad situation worse. Humidity and my hair did not mix.

My long, black, curly hair generally looked like a rat's nest piled on top of my head. Nothing some detangling spray, a wide-tooth comb, and an elastic hair tie couldn't fix, but today I came prepared. Right now it was all hidden under a navy baseball cap with the letters GBI embroidered in yellow.

I looked passable for human. Most people found it easier to talk to me when I looked less Gorgon-ish. Somewhat civilized. I prayed my snakes stayed that way. There were no guarantees. The girls had minds of their own and tended to respond to my emotions. I had no control over them.

My great-grandmother was Medusa. I have her sweet heart-shaped face, olive skin, hazel green eyes, petite frame, and curves. I also inherited her other not-so-pretty parts like the dark circles that hallowed out my eyes and drew attention to my elliptical pupils. I pull out a pair of silver reflective Ray-Bans from my blazer pocket and put them on to cover up my eyes.

The block had been cordoned off for hours. Men with Geiger counters swept the perimeter while anti-terrorism units idled in armored mobile command vehicles lining the

street. Cadaver dogs moved through the rubble with clinical focus, noses down, tails rigid. Larissa and I had been called in to interview residents and witnesses.

“Put this on.” Larissa hands me a fancy white respiratory mask with an exhalation valve. The type contractors used, industrial strength, not the flimsy paper type you got at the doctor’s office when you had the sniffles.

Carefully, I affix the mask over my mouth and nose, trying to get the elastic band over my ears and hat without disturbing my horned-nosed vipers. Venomous snakes with black and brown markings unfurled from my curls, stretching and yawning, awakened for the day.

It fits snugly. I can feel my girls moving underneath, unhappy at being confined. Still, I feel better giving them some protection against the asbestos and ash floating in the air. Some of my girls coil back up, camouflaging themselves inside my unruly curly brown hair and go back to sleep. I wish I could do the same. Unlike my partner, Larissa, who stood next to me bright-eyed and bushy-tailed this morning, pen and notepad out, ready to tackle the crime scene, I was so not a morning person.

Then again, I was completely the opposite of my friend and GBI partner in every way. Special Agent Larissa Jensen was an earth-born giant. She stood close to seven feet tall, had smooth mocha skin, large round black eyes, sported a short silky black flat iron chin-length bob haircut, and had an athletic build with model long legs built for kicking the shit out of bad guys. Not that she was any kind of femme fatale. Gentle, cautious, and meticulous, Larissa did everything by the book.

I, on the other hand, stood at five feet four, a Titan with a complicated gene pool. I looked perpetually thirty-five, which is the perfect age in my mind. Mature enough to be

considered worldly and wise, but young enough not to be called an old maid, if anyone used that term anymore. Close to a thousand years old, I never acted my age. One would think with that many years under my belt, I would have acquired wisdom and patience. Yeah, not me. Most would describe me as temperamental, impulsive, and prone to breaking the rules. Not that anyone would dare call me out on my behavior. One of the perks of being a descendant of the legendary gorgon, Medusa.

“GBI Sucks!”

“Protect the people, not the monsters!”

Slowly, clusters of protestors carrying signs and chanting Anti-monster slogans stood outside the perimeter.

I feel my jaw tighten. My pulse crept upward, familiar and unwelcome.

Larissa notices immediately. “A bunch of morons,” she mutters, not looking up from her tablet. “Ignore them. We do our jobs. The police have them contained.”

Contained didn’t mean quiet.

“Monsters go home!” someone screams again.

A rock sails over the barricade and strikes the pavement near us. Another followed. This one clips the back of my head. Not hard, but enough.

Larissa’s voice drops. “Temper. Check it.”

I’d thought the disguise would hold. Dark sunglasses, GBI cap, respirator pulled tight over my mouth. Anonymous. Just another agent in the mess. But the media blitz earlier had probably done me in. My face, blasted across feeds. Patriots with misdirected anger always found their targets.

Another rock hit. This one knocks my cap clean off.

My snakes stir instantly, coiling, hissing, tasting the air. The crowd recoils a half step, then surges forward again.

“Good grief,” I mutter. “Don’t they teach Classical Greek stories in school anymore? I thought it became required reading once everyone realized we weren’t myths.”

“It is,” Larissa says dryly. “That doesn’t mean they’re literate.”

“Hey, Medusa!” a man yells. “Why don’t you turn me to stone?”

I sigh.

More rocks flew. This time hitting both of us.

That is it.

I step forward, crossing the police line before Larissa could stop me. Officers immediately raise their weapons.

“Taser!” one of them shouts.

I ignore him.

“Medusa is dead,” I say calmly. “I’m her great-granddaughter.” I focus instead on the man who’d called out. I let my anger sink deep, down to the roots of my hair. The snakes snap and hiss in unison, alive with intent.

The man’s bravado falters.

“And if you’re interested in becoming a museum exhibit at the Met,” I continue, fingers sliding to the frame of my glasses, “I can make that happen.”

I lift them just enough.

Panic hits him instantly. He grabs the nearest police officer and drags him in front like a shield.

I replace my glasses with deliberate care. “Low-life trash,” I say. “Go home.”

I turn and feel a hand clamp around my elbow.

Not a cop.

Not Larissa.

The grip is precise. Controlled and unyielding.

“Enough,” a calm voice said at my side. “You’re done here.”

I try to pull free, but they don’t budge.

“Hey, you better let go before I really lose it...” I turn and find myself looking into the most beautiful one-eyed wonder.

Perfectly tailored suit. Untouched by ash. Expression unreadable. The man looks like he’d stepped into chaos already owning it.

Lean build, compact, and athletic, conditioned like a featherweight combatant, all muscle and efficiency rather than bulk. Built like a fighter but carried himself with the air of a politician. The newest addition to GBI. The Director of Public Relations, Nurbek Khazahk, had come from D.C. to whip GBI into shape. Seems we were a bit lax in the PR division.

I’d met him briefly during the Poseidon debacle.

Apparently, this was going to be our first real introduction.

He kept a firm hold on the crook of my arm, making it look to anyone watching like a courteous escort guiding me away from the crowd. In reality, his viselike grip is precise, controlled, and far stronger than any regular human man’s grip because Nurbek was most definitely not of the human variety.

“Do not struggle,” Nurbek said pleasantly.

He smiled, flashing a set of pristine, unnervingly perfect white teeth.

“Aren’t you on leave?” I continue lightly. “I heard you were grief-stricken.”

“Don’t believe rumors,” he says. “What I am right now is dumbstruck. You walked straight into that trap.”

His single dark brown eye widens just a fraction as he pushes us forward, still smiling, still immaculate. He looks unlike any man I’d ever met. His voice is a deep mix of Dolf Lungren and the Saudi Prince. Exotic, powerful, and regal. And then there was the eye.

One large, beautiful dark slanted brown eye. Centered.

Not oversized. Not monstrous. Just... singular.

But what threw me off the most was his height. Cyclops stood twenty feet tall, some nearly as big as a second-story house, but he stood maybe five-ten, not much taller than me.

Was he part human, part Cyclops? Which only made the math confusing. Cyclops were enormous. Titans of excess, especially in the reproductive areas. If his mom was a human woman and his dad was Cyclops, or was it vice versa? I shook off the thought and decided quickly that I did not want to think too hard about the logistics of that lineage.

He led me away from the noise without breaking stride.

Whatever Nurbek was or how he’d been conceived was ultimately beside the point. The final product is undeniably attractive.

Still.

One eye.

Pretty, yes. But just one.

Call me prejudiced. I preferred symmetry. Two eyes. Two ears. Two nostrils. Two lips. A theme I'd grown attached to over the centuries.

He guides me into a GBI van parked just beyond the barricades. Inside, it is wall-to-wall tech: surveillance rigs, cameras, monitors, screens streaming data from half a dozen angles. A techie's wet dream.

He shuts the door.

The noise outside vanishes, and it is just the two of us.

Nurbek sits across from me and finally lets his jaw tighten. It is a strong face, neither handsome nor pretty, but far from forgettable. He lives somewhere between severity and restraint. Tall, dark, and moody, if one were inclined to clichés. Eurasian, if I had to guess.

Clean-shaven. Square jaw. High cheekbones. Olive skin like mine, though his leaned more golden. His hair is thick, textured, professionally tapered with a precise side part, stylish without being vain. Everything about him suggested intention.

I couldn't get over his pretty slanted big brown eye. I leaned in slightly closer.

And then there is the brow.

Dark. Full. Not heavy enough to be a monobrow, not light enough to be delicate, just enough to form a clean, deliberate line above his single eye. An eye that didn't dominate his face the way mythology would have you believe. It sat where it belonged, beneath his forehead, perfectly proportioned. Monolid. Dark brown. Framed by short black lashes.

Pretty.

He blinked. "Got your fill of staring?"

I snap out of my stupor and sit back on the jump-seat. Chagrined at being caught gawking so blatantly. “Sorry.”

Guess I now understood how others feel when they first met me.

He tilts my chin down with two fingers, not unkind, but decisive.

“Apology accepted,” he says, calm as ever.

“I’m not trying to be rude,” I add, because apparently I had no survival instinct.

“I’ve just never met a Cyclops who was... compact. How did your parents even...”

He laughs. Not offended. More like amused.

“I understand the confusion,” he says. “But I’m not a Cyclops. They’re distant relatives. Very distant. To the west.”

I frown. “Then what are you?”

He meets my gaze steadily.

“Arimaspi.”

I’d heard of them. Ancient even by our standards. A northern race woven through half a dozen myth systems, always just out of reach of conquest. Mortal, but never insignificant. They showed up in Greek records as one-eyed warriors locked in eternal conflict with griffins over guarded gold—stories most people dismissed as metaphor or exaggeration.

They weren’t.

The Arimaspi didn’t worship gods the way others did. They negotiated. Traded. Endured. Pantheons tolerated them because they carried memory older than Olympian borders and a reputation for diplomacy backed by violence when necessary. They weren’t

immortal, but their bloodlines were respected. A line of Scythian warriors descended from the Ural Mountains, a highly guarded territory, known for fighting off Griffins.

The new Director's heritage explained his confidence. The composure. The way he walked into chaos like it already belonged to him.

I relax back and try to regain my cool facade. "So, you're the new media man."

He merely smiles. Unfazed by my flippant words. The man clearly knew enough about me not to let me get under his skin. That's a point for him.

"I don't think I've introduced myself properly. Nurbek Khazhk," he said. "Special Agent in charge of liaisons. Director of Public Relations."

"Tempest Geryon. Special Agent. Terphon Division."

"I know who you are, Princess Tempest of Oceanus."

Of course he did. I smile and give a slight bow of my head in acknowledgement of him using my title.

"I manage our image," he continues evenly. "The media. Reporters. Politicians. Emergency services. Department heads. I prepare officials before they panic and clean up afterward when they do. If a statement is issued, a narrative shaped, or a fire quietly put out, it comes through me."

He looks at me then. Really looks. "Tell me, Agent Geryon, how am I supposed to keep the GBI appearing professional, competent, and sane when hotshot agents like you decide to terrify civilians in broad daylight?"

For a brief moment, shame crept in but quickly turned into annoyance.

"They were throwing rocks at us." I went on the defensive. "At me."

"I saw," he replied. "And you handed them exactly what they wanted."

My jaw tightens. “The cops hadn’t done a damn thing to stop it.”

“Human law enforcement and the GBI don’t always play well together,” he says coolly.

“Tell me something I don’t know.”

“They don’t respect us,” he agrees. “They see monsters. Savages.” He leans back, folding his hands. “Which brings us to your little display.”

My heart sank into my stomach.

“That moment was captured by at least six amateur paparazzi with iPhones,” he went on, “By tomorrow morning, it’ll be everywhere. YouTube. Social feeds. A million views before breakfast.”

Shit. I exhale slowly.

“I need you to keep it together,” Nurbek smiles. “Let me handle the fallout.”

I frown. “Is that why you’re here? I thought you people usually stay in the lobby with polished shoes, press room smiles, schmoozing reporters.”

A flicker of something unreadable crosses his eye. “Normally,” he said. “But the city is on Code Orange. Highest terrorism alert.”

My spine straightens.

“Civilians think this is another 9/11,” he keeps his gaze on me. “Only this time, we’re the terrorists.”

“Nothing new.” I cross my arms over my breasts. For a second, I catch his gaze slip down, then quickly snap back up.

“Manhattan is under curfew. Every city agency is on high alert. The Mayor has issued a warning to non-human residents. Any civil disobedience will be met with force.”

My blood cools.

“Fear has a direction,” Nurbek states quietly. “And tonight, it’s pointed at Teraphons. Riots. Protests. Vigilantes. Every GBI agent is on notice.”

He meets my gaze, unblinking.

“And we’re already understaffed thanks to Poseidon and his son’s failed attempt to control the human population.”

Silence settles between us.

“I’m here,” he says calmly, “because optics matter.” He gestures toward his one eye. “And despite appearances, I see things very clearly.”