

## ***Gaze of the Beast, Touch of the Beauty***

A man and a woman walked into a cave. The man was walking with the help of the woman as she supported him through the narrow entrance. They found a place to rest and she led him to sit there.

"It's a surprise. Just wait here, I'll be right back with your present."

He was excited. It was going to be the first present he'd get in years, how could he not be? So he waited.

And he waited...

His back and bottom almost went numb while he was sitting on top of the cold rock. He stood up and started walking baby steps. The pebbles on the ground didn't help his walking pace as his old age and legs didn't allow him to walk at a steady pace. Soon he was forced to sit where he stood; on jagged rocks that hurt him more than the cold.

More time passed with silence. His stomach was growling and he was feeling the burden of sleep. He wanted to find the exit, but couldn't. It was then he heard her.

"Oh, what have we here?"

The subtle and feminine voice clearly wasn't his wife's. He felt a cold shiver among the air in the cave, something unnatural to him. He tried his best to understand it but to no avail.

"Another man... Came for me I see."

He found strength in his voice to reply.

"I'm sorry to disturb you but I was waiting for my wife."

"Really? Your wife?"

"Yes, miss. I'm tr..."

The voice responded with thunderous rage.

"Miss?! Who are you calling miss?!"

The man was frightened down to his core. The only thing he could do was to stand still. The voice continued.

"Look at me silly old man. Look at me so I can see your face!"

He complied, turned around to face the voice and whatever fate she was preparing for him. He was expecting a swift blow but instead, he heard an interested tone of the voice.

"Now that's fun... A blind man in my cave..."

He was taken aback by the words the voice said.

"Y-your... cave?"

He felt her presence closer, almost to an arms reach.

"Yes, my cave. But it's enough talk about me. Who are you and your wife? Why are you here?"

There was no other choice but to answer her.

"I am Croesus of Lessa, married to Medeia of Lessa. Today was our anniversary and she decided to give me a present so we came here. She went off to get it and... here I am."

The owner of the voice seemed more curious.

"She's gone for a long time. Do you know when she'll be back, silly old man?"

He realized he was being watched by her the entire time.

"No, mi... sorry, I don't know how to address you. May I ask you your name?"

She spoke softly to his ear as her cheek touches his.

"They call me Medusa, the Last of the Gorgons."

He felt that name in his bones, chilling them from inside out. He had heard the tales of a serpent woman who eats men that were unfortunate or stupid enough to wander into her territory. He then realized what his wife really did.

He was overwhelmed with sadness more than anything else; he dropped down to his knees on the uneven pebbles. He was crying.

Medusa expected him to beg for his life while praying for her. But he was just sobbing in peace. She moved even closer to him and crouched down to see his tears.

They sat down for a while in the uneasy silence that was accompanying his silent lament.

He was the one that broke the silent truce between them after what it felt like an eternity.

"I guess this is it for me then. Fate has brought me here to let you finish my life and feed on my remains."

Medusa stopped him on his tracks.

"No. Fate had nothing to do with it. Your wife brought you here for you to die, whether by my hand or time. It wouldn't matter to her. She was a coward for not killing you herself."

His tears found a way to his cheeks again. She continued.

"But I will not kill you. And definitely not eat you. Other people made a monster while they were the monsters themselves. I will not abide by their rules as they prance around high and mighty."

He was stunned by the words she spoke.

"I will not kill you, silly old man. But I will help you get your revenge."

She held him on his shoulders, swept away his tears on his cheeks with her scaly hands and hugged him. Though she was cold, the hug was the warmest he felt for a very long time.

"Let's get on with it."