



Transforming Olympus

If only the Greek Gods had been able to lead like mortals ...

A new leadership novel

by

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‘Zeus certainly leads by example,’ said Hera.

‘Unfortunately, it is rarely the example we need if we are to transform Olympus.’

Imagine if the Greek Gods woke up one day and realised they needed to change if they were to avoid the worst fate that an immortal could possibly face: eternal irrelevance.

They would need to start behaving as mentors rather than puppeteers. They would need to make life better for the humans below rather than merely observing them from afar.

The way they led the Cosmos would need to change.
The leadership team of Olympus itself would need to change.

But how?

The gods could learn a great deal from us mortals, especially when it comes to leadership. For if you want extraordinary leadership and extraordinary leadership teams: action-oriented, compassionate and genuinely emotionally intelligent leadership that delivers exceptional and sustainable results - for that ...

You need to be human.

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Chapter 1

We need to talk about Zeus

'Zeus is a psychopath.'

An ungodly silence descended upon the Olympians like a thunderclap from the heavens. A silence that reverberated around the Grand Hall atop Mt Olympus as words failed the ten gods and goddesses seated at the ageless, mighty table.

Poseidon couldn't believe such words had even been thought, let alone uttered aloud, and within earshot of others! *It was treason. It was heresy. Worse, it was a despicable betrayal of the deity to whom each of us owed everything – our position, our power, our immortality, our life.*

Even Ares, who lived for the life-affirming thrill of conflict and adored the sound of his own voice, a trait shared by most of his family members seated at the ancient table, stopped mid-flow and gaped at Hera.

Thank Zeus it was Hera who said what we were all thinking, thought Artemis. Her next thoughts tumbled over one another in a rush: *Did He know we were all meeting without him? Yes, Aphrodite had dispatched the most skilled sextuplet of nymphs to distract Him, but surely He knew, somehow. He always did. And now Hera had said the unsayable. Could He hear us? Does He know what we are all thinking in this moment? Why did we ever think we could meet like this without Him in the first place?*

Hera, Zeus' wife and the Queen of the Gods, stood tall and majestic at one end of the vast marble-hewn table, her flawless hands gripping the polished stone, basking in the moment. Yes, she had embarked on a high-risk strategy, but she lived for moments like this. Was this the first time in history that The Olympians had been stunned into silence? She couldn't recall another. For this was a room overflowing with egos; gods and goddesses imbued with the unimaginable confidence that came with immortal power, and she had never known them to be silent. Until now.

Immediately to her left sat her son, Ares, the God of War: muscular, bearded, a lover of violence, addicted to bloodlust. His battle-hardened spear and shield rested against the wall behind him. Ares' fame had been forged alongside his father in the epic defeat of The Giants, an unholy race created from the blood of the castrated Uranus, and he was worshipped by warriors worldwide. When he

was not fomenting hatred and setting tribes against one another, he could be found cavorting with the Amazons, a race of athletic, pneumatic warrior women who lived at the outer edges of the known world. Countless Amazonian children counted Ares as their father. He was hot-blooded and hot-headed with an utter inability to compromise. He was a dangerous, pale imitation of Zeus – and he knew it, which made him even more dangerous, and unpredictable.

Across the table from Ares sat his arch-rival, Athena, the Goddess of Wisdom. A confident and striking goddess with an inner calmness that was unique amongst the Olympians. Athena was not Hera's daughter but she loved her as if she were. She was Zeus' child, born from his forehead after he had regrettably swallowed his mentor, and Athena's mother, Metis. It happens. Athena was unbreakable, her mental strength immense. She was the sort of leader to which the others could only aspire, for she was wise enough to understand that force alone is not enough to bring others with you on any journey. She was able to convince others to do what she wanted them to do – because they wanted to do it. Her physical strength was also immense and she was not afraid to use this power too, when absolutely necessary, much to Ares' surprise, dismay and humiliation.

To Athena, Ares was a traitor, fighting alongside the Trojans against the Greeks in the Trojan War, killing an untold number of their core worshippers in the process – only to succumb to Athena in the heat of battle towards the end of the bloody conflict. Ares was lucky that Zeus had intervened. Incensed that his half-sister had bested him in combat, Ares later challenged Athena to a duel on the Acropolis. The fight was fierce, but Athena eventually emerged victorious, disarming and humiliating Ares in front of an array of mortal heroes, human royalty and gods, many of whom were seated beside him today. There is a reason that the capital of Greece is named Athens rather than AresTown, or PoseidonVille for that matter.

Next to Ares sat Poseidon, God of the Sea, Zeus' older brother and the elder statesman of the group. He was strong and muscular, like his brother, with long hair and a fulsome beard, both speckled with grey. His trademark trident never left his grasp. Like Zeus, Poseidon was the son of Cronus, a Titan, and the goddess Rhea. Cronus had the unfortunate habit of swallowing his children at birth to prevent them from overthrowing him. Luckily for Poseidon and most of his other siblings, his mother managed to save Zeus by hiding him on the island of Crete, where he was raised by nymphs. Which is

probably why He has had a penchant for nymphs ever since. As an adult, Zeus returned to free his siblings after which Poseidon and Zeus worked together to overthrow their father and then the Titans, to become the undisputed rulers of the cosmos. Perhaps it was all those years spent in Cronus' stomach waiting for his brother to free him, but Poseidon was only truly at home in the ocean. He was happy to leave the earth and the heavens to Zeus.

But today, Poseidon was not happy. Not happy at all. Hera had tricked him into attending this traitorous gathering and he couldn't wait to distance himself from the lot of them. But was it already too late? Merely by being here, he would forever be associated with this plot or coup or whatever it was. He knew Zeus better than all of them, and he knew that Zeus put loyalty above all else – above morality, above legality (but then, what was 'legal' when you were the god of gods and created the laws as you saw fit – laws that you and you alone could choose not to follow if you so desired). To Zeus, blind loyalty to Him was the most important quality that He valued in others: far more important than doing the right thing, more important than success even. And Poseidon knew firsthand the extent of Zeus' fury. He also knew that when Zeus found out about what had happened here today, He was going to be furious.

Opposite the Sea God and next to Athena sat Apollo, the god of music, poetry, prophecy and healing. Apollo was also not one of Hera's children. He was the product of a liaison between Zeus and the Titan goddess Leto. Apollo was disarmingly beautiful, his flowing golden locks framing piercing blue eyes and a physique that looked as though it had been chiselled out of marble. He had come to the summit directly from a tour of his temples at Delphi and Epidaurus that were busily dispensing advice and cures, respectively, to mortals. Apollo was loved by millions and he did his very best to love as many as he physically could in return, men and women. And once Apollo had decided upon a lover, he was relentless in pursuit. One of his conquests, a gorgeous nymph by the name of Daphne, had to transform herself into a laurel tree to escape his advances. Undeterred, Apollo adopted the laurel as one of his symbols and used them to make wreaths for victorious athletes. Apollo, putting his constant drive for new sexual conquests aside, could be kind to a fault – or at least that is how he saw himself. He hadn't really been paying attention to what Hera had been saying, but the unexpected silence had awoken him from his reverie with a jolt.

Across from Apollo sat his twin sister, Artemis, dressed in her customary short tunic, her quiver of arrows and bow leaning against her chair. She was fit and lithe, the young goddess of the hunt, wild animals, childbirth and, in a twist that was not as paradoxical as it first seemed, virginity. The product of a long and difficult labour herself, Artemis was given the power to relieve women of the pain of childbirth, if she chose to do so. Strangely, more often than not she chose not to do this no matter how desperately birthing mothers prayed to her.

Artemis was fiercely protective of her own virginity, punishing any man who attempted to violate it. In that respect, she could not have been more different from Apollo. Also, unlike her lascivious twin brother, Artemis was the protector of young women and girls. She was at one with the moon, had the power to control the tides and could influence the cycles of life and death. And of course, she was a brilliant huntress. Artemis was very content in her own company; she was so much happier with wild animals than people and was completely distrustful of men – mortal or god. She thought this meeting was long overdue and had never understood why Hera had put up with Zeus' behaviour for so long. Why they all had put up with it. But this was not the sort of conflict that she was used to or comfortable with. She would rather be left alone to protect women and live in the wild.

Next to Poseidon sat Hermes with his winged sandals, winged helmet, and caduceus staff with two carved snakes entwined along its length. Hermes was the messenger of the Gods and the god of commerce, travellers, thieves and mischief. Some questioned why he had been assigned theft as well as commerce, for 'surely they were the polar opposites of one another?' But no, they so often went hand-in hand. Some of the richest mortals Hermes had observed were among the most efficient thieves on the planet.

Yet another of the gods who had been spawned out of wedlock, Hermes was the offspring of Zeus and another nymph who went by the name of Maia, a daughter of the Titan Atlas – himself often portrayed carrying the world on his shoulders. Known for his cunning and deception, Hermes was the group's go-to god whenever they need arose to trick mortals or thwart the schemes of one of the other gods. To Hermes, life was merely a game – especially if it was someone else's. Business was a game too. His friendly, trustworthy demeanour was a complete façade: he trusted no-one and cared for them even less. As long as there was profit in the venture, nothing else mattered. And today he

sat in silence, perplexed at how he could profit from this sudden turn of events. But he was certain of two things: opportunities would arise, and he would take full advantage of them when they did.

Across from Hermes and next to Artemis sat Hephaestus, the god of fire and metalwork. One of only two seated at this table who were Hera's biological children. Hephaestus was a strong, stocky god whose forge-burnt complexion was ingrained with a permanent layer of soot. He was born with a deformed leg giving rise to a pronounced limp. Hera was so ashamed that she had produced a child of such disfigurement, that the moment he was born, she threw him off Mt Olympus, and has been wracked with remorseful guilt ever since. Hephaestus landed on the island of Lemnos, where he was raised by the Sintians. He grew up to become a skilled craftsman and blacksmith, creating magnificent weapons and armour for the gods, demigods and mortal heroes including Heracles and Achilles. He even forged Zeus' weapon of choice, His trademark lightning bolts. But in spite of all this, the vanity of the fellow gods that were seated around the table was so great, none of them could see past his disability. Most didn't even try. Unlike many of his fellow Olympians, Hephaestus was not a naturally vindictive god. However, under instruction from Zeus, he could be. When the mortal Prometheus stole fire from him, Hephaestus was commanded by Zeus to punish the whole of humanity by creating the first human woman, Pandora. Despite instructions to the contrary, Pandora opened a jar that Zeus had given to her as a gift, thereby unleashing countless plagues and evils into the world, as Zeus knew she would. *Yes, Hera was right, Zeus was a psychopath; a terrible leader, but this lot thoroughly deserved Him.*

Next to Hephaestus was his insanely beautiful, sensual wife, Aphrodite, the goddess of love, beauty, sexuality and pleasure. Her origin was a mystery to Hera. Rumours abounded that she was the daughter of Zeus and the Titaness Dione, but Zeus had sworn blind that this was untrue: 'specious gossip' he had labelled the stories, and Hera was inclined to believe Him. He had fathered so many others around this table, why lie about one more? So, she decided to believe the other tale: that Aphrodite was born from the sea foam that formed around the severed genitals of the old sky god Uranus that had fallen into the ocean after he had been castrated by his son (and Zeus' father), Cronus. And by Zeus was Aphrodite beautiful. Even Hera had to admit that her beauty was unsurpassable.

Throwing salt into her husband Hephaestus' obvious and very open wounds, Aphrodite took countless lovers. She also had the gift (if 'gift' is the right word) of making people fall in love. As she did with Helen, the wife of the much older Spartan King, Menelaus, who, caught in Aphrodite's spell, fell madly in love with Paris, the Prince of Troy, thus sparking the long and bloody Trojan War. Aphrodite knew that Menelaus' unbridled male ego would all but consume him forcing him to seek the bloodiest revenge. She knew his warrior king brother, Agamemnon, was looking for any excuse to sack Troy. She knew this would lead to the wholesale slaughter of Troy's boys and men, and the rape and enslavement of its girls and women. Aphrodite knew precisely what she was doing, but she did it anyway. Like all gods, she could be as mischievous as hell.

Aphrodite couldn't see what the fuss was about. Here was Zeus' wife (His sixth wife and also His sister it had to be said), the goddess of marriage, standing in front of them ranting about her husband. Yet Hera had been happy that nymphs had been dispatched to keep Him occupied so this very summit could occur – which Aphrodite had been delighted to do, as nothing gave her more pleasure than giving others pleasure, physical pleasure. Sensuality and sexual satisfaction were more important than anything – than loyalty, than duty, than fidelity, than marriage, than life itself. Aphrodite was worshipped from one end of the known world to the other.

Demeter occupied the last seat on the right-hand side of the table. She was the senior goddess at the table and the sister of Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Hades and Hestia. As the goddess of agriculture, harvests and fertility, it was up to Demeter whether mortals had an abundance to eat or died of starvation. When her daughter, Persephone, was abducted by Demeter's brother, Hades, and taken to the underworld to be his wife, Demeter was so distraught that she began neglecting her duties causing a devastating famine to ravage the Earth. Eventually, Zeus intervened and arranged for Persephone to spend part of the year with her mother above ground and part of the year with Hades in the underworld, thus explaining the lived existence of summer and winter.

Demeter knew what Zeus was like, as a husband and as a leader, but she was indebted to Him and, like her brother, Poseidon, could not approve of this gathering. She was deeply disappointed with herself for attending and could not believe she had fallen for Hera's cunning yet again.

The final seat on the far-left side was occupied by Dionysus, the god of wine, fertility and the theatre. The good times god of Olympus, his wine had the ability to ease suffering, bring joy or inspire divine madness – in equal measure. He was born to Semele, a daughter of the Theban King Cadmus, and Zeus (soaring above the world in disguise as an eagle, He spotted Semele and instantly fell in love with her). Actually, Dionysus was twice born. When Hera found out that Semele was pregnant, she disguised herself as a crone and caused Semele to question whether her lover had actually been Zeus. After all, it could have been any old eagle. Semele then demanded that Zeus reveal himself in all His glory to prove his divinity which, most reluctantly, Zeus did. Mortals cannot look upon gods directly and Zeus' splendour was simply too much. Dionysus' mother perished, consumed in a fierce fire, ignited by lightning. Thinking swiftly, Zeus rescued the foetus within and sewed the pre-formed baby into his thigh. Months later, Dionysus was born – again.

If he had stopped to think about it, Dionysus had a glorious purpose in life: to free mortals from doubt and self-conscious fear. He was a champion of the individual, the universe's first true 'liberal'. He carried a fennel-stemmed sceptre that he either used as a wand to grant favours or as a weapon to destroy those who opposed his cult and the freedoms he represented. He thought Zeus was far too controlling and completely inconsistent, but Hera was displaying her power-hungry side today, and it wasn't pretty. He would rather be partaking in one of the many festivities that were underway in his name or overseeing a mortal performance one of his sacred dramas than endure this dreary meeting.

The last seat, a majestic throne twice the size of the others, at the far end of the grand table from where Hera was standing, was empty.

Hera surveyed the scene before her. Ten incredibly powerful individuals who could agree on very little, and trusted one another with even less. Every one of them was looking at her, transfixed, wondering what on earth she was going to say next. She had to admit to herself it was a delicious feeling.

I sense Poseidon and Demeter's default will be to resist any sort of change – unless the change is led by Zeus. Same with Ares, a natural born saboteur, so he, too, goes on my 'against' list. Hermes is

likely to be neutral but he can't be trusted and could swing either way, and back again, in the blink of an eye. I don't trust Apollo either. Aphrodite? Neutral at best, and will require attention just to stay that way. But could she be up for change – as long as it doesn't affect her adversely? Artemis, Hephaestus and Dionysus may lean to the positive side of neutral and Athena is definitely up for change. Hera had spoken to Athena before she called this meeting.

Three against, two negative, one neutral at best, three slightly better than neutral and only one true ally. And that is before they know what we have planned. Hera smirked. They had a fight on their hands. Our 'case for change' had better be good!

Hera was Zeus' sister who also had escaped being swallowed by their father, Cronus, due to the quick wits of their mother, Rhea. Raised by Tethys, the Titan daughter of Uranus and Gaia, the goddess of the Earth, the beautiful Hera spurned her brother's advances for a long time until Achilles finally convinced her to succumb. She had been with Zeus for an eternity already; their wedding ceremony alone lasted three hundred years. She had left Him once. She prayed, to herself, that she would not have to do it again.

Hera was a brilliant strategist, an excellent tactician and as cunning as a skulk of foxes. She could recognise the outcomes she needed to achieve in almost any given situation and would use all the powers in her armoury to do her very best to achieve them. She could also be incredibly jealous and vindictive if crossed, as many of her husband's lovers had belatedly discovered. Hera had a burning sense of right and wrong: she believed in fidelity, in duty and in loyalty. Yet today she was being disloyal; more disloyal than any of them had ever imagined was possible.

'Gods and goddesses of Olympus,' Hera continued, 'we need to talk about Zeus.'