

CHAPTER ONE

Scooby Doo and the Centaur Ring 1

A white globe, swirled and frosted as if it had lain in winter's grip, sat on a blue cushion above a carved marble pedestal. On its surface could be seen dim reflections, except in one place where a red-haired young woman could be seen in startling clarity. Her green eyes flashed at some silent joke, and her red lips were open in middle of a laugh.

"What are you doing, watching that young mortal?" The voice sounded melodious and soft, yet a thorny note of jealousy provided a sharp edge.

The woman who had spoken stepped from the shadowy arch. She didn't look much older than the "young mortal" she'd derisively pointed at. Long locks of lustrous brown hair cascaded around her face that all would have called beautiful, if a bit remote. On her head sat a slender crown of flashing silver and set with a white diamond of huge size. Yet it was her eyes that differed

so vastly from the rest of her visage. Old they seemed, full of ancient wisdom and power, marred only by a strong dark emotion.

A tall man with huge arms and legs, broad shoulders, and white hair, stirred. When his voice came, it had undertones of earthquakes.

"I've kept my eye on all the mortals of this group. Not just this one."

"But this one most of all. Why? Why stir ourselves after mortals again? It has brought only sorrow to them and to us."

"I've not." The earthquakes turned into sliding rockslides in great mountains. "Besides, it's great fun, something we haven't had in quite some time."

"Not long enough, is what they'll think. Your last adventure with them nearly ended in this one's death, as well as her two friends.""

"I wouldn't have let the statue crush them," he growled in a tiger's roar. Some curious chance would have made the statue fall to the side. At the last moment, of course."

"Indeed, but you like her."

"She is fair of limb and still has much youth in her." He replied.

"Youth!" the woman spat. "Say the lifespan of a moth that burns too quick. What have we need for youth?"

"Silence!" A volcano erupting could be no louder, or more terrible to hear. "There is no call for this jealousy, and as

always it ill-becomes you.""

"We shall see if there is no cause for my jealousy!

Daphne winced as Scooby slid down the ramp of the trap and slammed into the ghost goat that had been advancing on her and Fred. The creature gave a surprised bleat that turned into a shriek as both of them slid across the barn floor and into the stall.

Scooby slithered out of the tangle of hooves and paws. Behind him the glowing goat regained its feet, giving a dizzy call. The hurried sound of feet announced Farmer Elksen and his family coming around the bend. They stopped dead when they saw the goat.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Luminous paint." Velma announced, walking up to the goat and running her hand along its back. She lifted her fingers to display the fact they were now white and glowing.

"Do you have any idea why someone would do such a thing?" he asked at a loss.

"We have a pretty good idea." Daphne announced, staring hard at the farmer's youngest daughter who shifted uncomfortably.

"The ghost goat was supposed to scare off the bankers that wanted to sell off your land and give someone time to find the

deed your grandfather left behind, as well as his secret formula for getting the biggest hogs at market." Fred explained.

"They were helping us?" Elskson asked, startled.

"Of course she was." Velma nodded. "Isn't that right, Catherine?" Everyone looked at the teen, who burst into tears and fell to the ground.

"I'm sorry!" she howled. "I didn't want to leave the farm! I-I wanted to save our home!"

"Cathy!" Her mother and father pulled her up and hugged her while her older brother stood by protectively.

"It's all right." Daphne smiled at the young teen. "We found what you were looking for as we searched for clues."

"Rhat's Rhight!" Scooby barked happily, leaping up on the astonished girl and licking her face.

"What?!" The family chorused.

Fred drew from behind his back two rolled up papers. Passing them over, the gang watched as the farmer's face changed from surprise, then delight as he read.

"Thank you!" Catherine shouted joyfully. "Oh, thank you!"

"That felt good." Shaggy remarked as they slid into the van.

"Yes. It does." Daphne grinned gaily. Yet she couldn't shake the feeling that something was coming, and she'd best be

ready for it.

"I guess you're right. Let's swing by the malt shop on the way home for a couple of milkshakes before we go home." Fred suggested.

"Sounds good to me."

"Me too!"

"I'm in!"

"Rhet's Rho!"

The sun shone bright and clear through the window. Daphne woke slowly and stretched. Throwing on her robe she wandered down the stairs to find Velma already up and dressed her her sweater and skirt, making breakfast in the kitchen. Daphne caught the smell of bacon and eggs. Mouth-watering, she walked out the front door to get the mail.

There were the usual bills and junk mail. The former she'd pass along to her wealthy father who handled that sort of thing for her. The latter she'd shred.

A smaller envelope fell out of the other bundles and caught her eye. It seemed to be addressed to her, with the name being written in a long flowing script. Oddly, there didn't seem to be a return address on it at all, though she turned the envelope round-and-round to look.

Daphne opened it at the table while Velma set a plateful of

eggs and three pieces of bacon in front of her. On the opposite side she set her plate and began to eat while Daphne perused her letter. In the bottom there was taped a beautiful ring, thinly banded and crowned with a horse's head. The note itself read:

I saw how you helped Old Man Elksen and his family, plus all the others you have helped. I give this gift as thanks, hoping it will change your life.

-An Admirer

Daphne giggled slightly at the thought of a secret admirer. *Freddy will be jealous*, she thought with an impish grin. She loved him, but he could be so dense sometimes. She slipped the ring onto her finger, admiring the glitter in the light.

"Oh Velma! What do you think?" She showed the ring off to her.

"It's pretty." Velma replied. "But I wonder who gave it to you."

"It says 'from an admirer', but it doesn't say who." Daphne told her, showing the letter.

Daphne felt a constricting sensation on her finger. Looking down she saw with alarm the ring soften and melt into her skin, staining it in a yellow band.

"Velma!" She stuttered.

"Jinkies!" Velma whispered in shock.

Daphne couldn't say anything more, because a twisting sensation came over her, like she'd become a long piece of taffy that was being pulled and twisted into shape. Her skin itched as if she'd been doused in itching powder.

She stumbled away from the table, somehow instinctively knowing she needed a lot of space very quickly. She started to feel heavy, as if she'd eaten a dozen square meals, and had kept on eating. *Oh, I don't want to get all fat!* She thought for a moment, but the rush of feeling and sensory overload swept that thought away.

"What's happening?" She managed thickly. She could feel something coming out of her back, there was a ghostly echo of touch back there, growing stronger.

"I don't know!" Velma choked in fear. She almost immediately corrected herself: "Wait! I do know! You're turning into a centaur!"

Daphne blinked, wanting to ask how, but the twin jolts as hind legs struck the floor for the first time interrupted her. Turning to look, she saw a powerful and slim black body attached at her waist. It's red tail swishing agitatedly.

Is that mine? She wondered, staring at it. Reaching back with her hand, she touched her back. Her fingers touching her back came clearly to her, and she nearly freaked. It felt completely unreal.

"I-I think it's over." She said shakily.

"Are you okay?" Velma asked anxiously.

"I think so." Daphne told her, watching the muscles under her shiny coat flex and ripple as she moved. "Oh, that feels strange." She commented. "Was that what it was like for you, Velms?" she asked.

"No." Velma shook her head. "I felt nothing other than the feeling of water pouring around me, and the flash of light of course. This is different."

"Great." Daphne sighed. The adrenaline ebbed, and fear began taking hold of her. "Does that mean I'll be stuck like this...forever?"

"Of course not, Daphne." Velma scolded. "There must be an explanation, and Dr. Granite must know something about this ring. It's still similar to the case of the Centaur ring, after all."

They were interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Velma, Daphne, like we were thinking about hitting the malt shop this morning and-Zoinks!" Shaggy's hair stood on end as he stared at her. Daphne looked right back at him, startled for a moment.

Velma recovered first. "Shaggy, could you have Fred bring the Mystery Machine around? We need to visit Doctor Granite at the Coolsville Gem Museum again."

"Sure thing Velma."

Shaggy backed out of the room. The door closed behind him

with a soft click, and Daphne could hear him hurrying towards the boys' house.

"Now, let's get you ready to go." Velma's matter of fact voice broke through her sudden fear of showing Freddy her new form.

"What do you mean, Velma?" Daphne asked curiously.

"It's very simple. We're going to the museum in broad daylight. Velma explained patiently. ""Lots of people should be there, and we don't want anyone to notice us."

Daphne realized she was right. *What would my parents think if they realized I'd been turned into a centaur?* She shuddered to think of it. She looked up just as Velma walked back from the closet holding a sign saying ""Wet Paint".

"What's that for?" she asked.

"To get us in." Velma replied, reaching on tip-toe to hang the sign on her neck (Daphne still had to bend over for her to do it). "Freddy's got some furniture wheels in the van. You'll be a statue we're delivering to the new Greek Exhibit in the main Museum, only we'll be going in through the Gemstone Museum's loading entrance instead."

"Oh!" Daphne brightened. "Just a minute." Running upstairs she grabbed a white sheet and rummaged in her jewelry for her golden brooch. Stripping quickly, she expertly tied the toga on and pinned the brooch to hold it up. Admiring her handiwork in the mirror for a moment, she spotted the silky black ears

twisting on the top of her head. They looked amazing, she thought, and hurried back downstairs.

"See?" she said when she got back to the main room. "Now I look just like a Greek."

"Jinkies. You look just like one of the exhibits." Velma admired.

"Thanks Velms." Daphne blushed proudly. *And it feels so much more comfortable than those tight rags I had been wearing.* Something seemed off about the thought, but Daphne couldn't think of what it was. She shrugged. The designer clothes she had spent so much on now seemed mostly unimportant, and they didn't fit anyway.

Scooby, Freddy and Shaggy walked in. Scooby and Fred must have been warned beforehand, because they showed no surprise at her change, only concern and anger.

"Daphne! Are you all right?" Fred asked anxiously.

"Of course." Daphne told him bravely. "Now, let's get to the museum.

"Right. Shaggy, give me a hand, will you?"

"Like, sure thing Fred."

The two slid the furniture dollies they had brought in under her feet. Daphne felt off-balance and scared when she stood on them. She tried to concentrate on staying upright as they wheeled her out to the van, battling the instincts of her body that wanted to run, and break free. The broad opening of

the van yawned in front of her, but Daphne noticed a problem as they approached.

"Fred, Freddy! I'm not going to fit." She whispered, trying to hold her pose in case anyone happened to be watching.

"Zoinks. She's right." Shaggy agreed, looking around. Apparently he decided that no one was watching. "'I wonder if she lays down if we could get her in."

"Shaggy, that's a great idea." Velma marveled.

"Glad I thought of it." Shaggy said proudly.

Making sure no one was watching, they had Daphne lay down on the wheeled carts. She waited nervously as they rolled her up the ramp and into the van. When the doors closed, she finally relaxed. No one could see her in here now, though her robe kept catching in awkward places. She irritably smoothed it down again. If she wasn't careful, she could be revealed.

"Whew. I'm glad that's over." She could hear Freddy gasp. "Now on to the Gemstone Museum."

The gemstone Museum looked much the same as before, except now a slender causeway connected it to the larger Coolsville Museum. Fred drove around the back just like they were going to deliver a real statue. Backing up to the loading dock, they rolled Daphne out under the lights and around other workmen without incident, Daphne having already adopted a comfortable pose she liked before they opened the van doors: arms crossed in

front of her, head demurely cocked to one side and eyes partially shut. She fought her instinct to move or run the whole way into the museum, something that got harder and harder to do the more Fred and Shaggy rolled, and she hoped everyone thought trembling was a byproduct of the wheeled carts.

"Well, we're here." Fred announced as they came into it deserted corner of the museum. Daphne relaxed. "'Scooby, Shaggy, you stay here with Daphne while Velma and I get Dr. Granite."

"Right." The two chorused

"Hurry Fred." Daphne pleaded. "I don't want to be stuck as a centaur for much longer."

"Don't worry. We'll figure this out." Fred encouraged. Then they left.

"Like, don't worry Daphs," Shaggy grinned. "You'll be back to normal in no time."

"Rhat's Rhight." Scooby barked.

"Thanks you two." Daphne said gratefully.

She slid into deep pondering while they waited. The middle of the letter in particular occupied most of her thoughts. *Who could have sent it, and why would they hate me so?* Various villains she'd helped unmask came to her and she grimaced. *Okay, so maybe there's no mystery as to why, but then who remains. None of them had any real power like this.* Which was true. Everyone she could think of had always been a fake.

Try she could, no other name would come to her but Dr. Martin Granite himself. He knew about the Centaur's Curse and the ring.

But if that's the case, then the others could be walking into the trap! Daphne thought horrified.

"Shaggy, Scooby!" Daphne gasped. They turned to her frowning and she revealed what she had deduced.

"Zoinks! The gangs in trouble, Scoob!" The team took off with Scooby on his heels.

"Wait for me!" Daphne called. She lurched into a run, unexpected excitement bubbling up underneath her fear. No one would hurt Velma or Fred or Shaggy and Scooby without facing her first!

The two ahead of her turned into the office, Daphne close behind on their heels. Fred and Velma were turning wide eyes at the intrusion while a stern faced woman looked on disapprovingly until she charged in. Then her jaw dropped and her eyes bulged out like a fish.

"Daphne! Shaggy! Scooby!" Velma exclaimed. "What's going on?!"

"Where's Doctor Granite?" Daphne demanded. Her earlier excitement and courage were still coursing through her. She wanted to fight, she wanted to fight now! Her front hooves pawed the floor aggressively while her tail swished agitatedly behind

her.

"He-he retired." The older woman stuttered, still looking at her like... While well, like a legend come to life. "I'm Doctor Patricia Ottery, his replacement."

"When did he retired?" Daphne growled, eyes narrowing. It seemed too coincidental to her.

"Some months ago. Though he did leave a message for a group calling themselves Mystery Inc." she went to the safe and unlocked it. Removing a plain white envelope, she passed it over to Fred to read it aloud.

To Mystery Inc.

Hello my friends. If you're reading this then something has happened with the curse, or to me. I've never felt very comfortable with that cursed ring on display fourteen my fault. Suppose someone should steal it? Suppose some child managed to get ahold of it? Or some Museum employee should put it on out of curiosity?

Therefore, I've hidden the ring somewhere in the museum and set traps and other guards around it. I won't say exactly where, in the case of this letter falls into unfriendly or skeptical hands, but I'm sure you will find it. It is hidden in the statue's hand.

-Dr. Granite

"Statue's hands?" Fred asked blankly.

"I've got it!" Someone snapped her fingers. "The statue of Zeus!"

"That's the one that nearly crushed me and Scooby in the basement." Daphne remembered the terrifying incident. The great outstretched hands reaching out for her to crush her.

"Well, it's as good lead as any." Fred pointed out. "We should split up and search for clues. Daph and I will look at the statue in the basement. Velma; you, Shaggy and Scooby look around of here for any sign that the hands might have been moved."

"Right." They chorused.

"Hey Scoob! Wait for me!" Shaggy hollered as they walked out.

"Rhur rhing Rhaggy!"

Down in the basement, Fred and Daphne looked around the place she remembered the statute being. All that remained of her encounter was a patch on the cement floor where the iron steak had been driven in to chain Scooby. The hands were nowhere to be found.

As they searched, Daphne couldn't help but feel a bit warm; whether from exertion or from something a more she wasn't sure. But she couldn't help noticing the broad shoulders and good-

looking features of Fred. *Oh, why couldn't he have been turned to a centaur to?* She wondered wistfully. She'd love to be alone with him as a stallion, feel his hand along her back, his legs clamped around her middle as...

"Hey Daph, come take a look at this." Freddy's voice interrupted her daydream, and she flushed as she walked over. *Boy, am I glad no one can read my mind* she thought.

She found Fred with his hand on the wall. He'd been running them along a spot on the wall that seemed to be a lighter in color than the rest. *He's probably found a secret passage*, her heart beat excitedly.

Sure enough, Fred pushed in and part of the wall gave way, revealing a man sized door into a dark passage. They peered down, but could see only a short distance before night ended their sight.

"I wonder where it goes?" Daphne asked. "Do you think that's where Doctor Granite hid the ring?"

"There's only one way to find out." Fred said grimly. He looked up at her. "You stay here, and I'll go along the passage of it and see what I can find, then I will come back."

"All right Fred. Be careful." Daphne warned.

He was already inside the passage when he replied. "I will - oops!" Fred tripped on something in the dark and hit the door, causing it to slam shut. There was a terrific rattle and bang. Daphne hammered on the closed door.

"Fred! Freddy!" Daphne shouted. Cocking her ears, she could dimly hear Fred on the other side.

"The tunnel's blocked! I can't get the back through!" He said.

"Oh Fred, what shall we do?" Daphne asked.

"Go back upstairs and find the others. I'll follow the tunnel and meet you up there."

"All right. Be careful Freddy."

"I will."

Daphne waited until she couldn't hear his voice or footsteps anymore before she turned around. The elevator glowered at her across the basement, seemingly accusing her of abandoning Fred. She started towards it when a soft snort stopped her.

Tiny thrills shot through her body in her heart beat faster. The sound had come behind her. *It's okay. There's nothing to fear, just one of the others.* She told herself. Combing her fluttering heart, Daphne turned around.

There, where the statue used to stand, there was the most magnificent centaur stallion she'd ever seen. White hair fell to his great bronze shoulders, framing a noble face seemingly hewn stone, so perfect it appeared. His great palomino body shown in the dim light of the basement like the sun, the golden coat seemingly glowing from within.

Daphne felt her legs lock up in moist heat flared deep in her belly. Her palms shook in rhythm with the rest of her body as she yanked her gaze away and looked down demurely. Her breathing grew heavy while her mind grew muddy. *How could she get away*, she briefly thought, but did she even want to?

Fingers cupped her chin and made her gasp. Tenderly, they lifted her head until she found herself falling into stormy gray towards the delight and power. She barely felt the brooch become unfastened from her shoulder and the thin cloth fall from her body. However the hand that laid itself on her right breast felt like a heated brand burning into her core.

The hands roamed her breasts at will, one note taking her nipples and the other caressing the sensitive underside of the creamy globes, before both were cupping and holding them so that the flesh pushed out against the fingers, the rosy caps pushed inward. The whole time Daphne floated amongst clouds of delight, moving from one height to the next in a swirling tempest of pleasure. Kisses rain down on her throat and face. Hard, demanding kisses that made her submit willingly to his domination.

Abruptly the hands were gone. Daphne cried out in protest, opening her lust-filled eyes to realize the other centaur had left. She felt so cold, abandoned even. Tears sprang to her eyes, why had he left?

A nudge behind her told her where he had gone, ending her

tears. The excitement came back immediately, hotter than ever. She eagerly swept her tail to the side, exposing herself to him.

Without further encouragement, the stallion reared and fell onto her back. Daphne felt the wind leave her a moment; he was shockingly heavy. She been pinned by him, she realized. There was no way she could move now to escape, something she realized she enjoyed. Something nudged her, giving her a start at the alien sensation. She'd only just realized what it could be when it found its mark and he slid deep inside her with one thrust.

Daphne froze, feeling him stretch her like nothing before had ever done. She felt full, satisfied yet still wanting something more, something only he could provide. The feeling grew ever more powerful, prompting her to wiggle under him, seeking relief. Then he moved.

His thrusts were slow and steady at first, spreading her wider and filling her completely before he slid out nearly to the tip and came slowly back in. Pleasure heightened her senses causing them to overload. She gasped and grunted, moaned and cried out in ecstasy. *This is fantastic, this is soo fantastic, I don't want it to-to s-s-stooooop!!!* She howled mentally as she reached her peak.

Abruptly, the stallion gave a powerful pump of his hips that nearly pushed her off her feet and held there, quivering. Daphne pulsed, coming down from her high as ropes of semen shot into her womb, planting his seed irrevocably.

She felt him soften, then slide out with a shudder. She'd never felt so full and content in her life. As he slid off, she just collapsed onto the floor, running her hand back along her horse belly and occasionally giggling to herself.

The stallion came beside her a moment. She struggled to raise her eyes to his face, to know her lover, but all she found were the swirling grey clouds and a deep commanding voice, coming from far away and inside her at the same time.

"Be proud of yourself and your body, Bearer of Life. Do not feel shame in this, or in yourself." And then he was gone. He didn't walk away, he just vanished, which for some reason seemed completely natural to her.

Daphne lay on the floor, unaware of the passage of time. Peaceful, that was all she could use to describe it. The scent of the musk remained like a strong perfume, addling her thoughts and keeping her aroused.

Still, I need to find my friends. She thought.

With a sigh and some effort, she managed to get back up on her shaky legs. Plodding forward at first, by the time she made it to the elevator and pushed the button there wasn't any more soreness and she moved quite normally.

As the door opened, Velma, Shaggy and Scooby raced past her without even looking. Hard on their heels came a...white,

formless ghost? Daphne blinked.

"Keep running, its right behind us!" Velma shouted.

"Wait guys! It's just a sheet and some wires!" Daphne called after them as she raced to catch up. Her hooves flew across the floor and she outpaced the ghost, pulling the sheet off on her way by to expose a round plastic ball suspended by wires with a small speaker in the middle.

"BOOO!" it spoke in a scratchy voice.

"Huh? Daphne!" Shaggy exclaimed, sliding to a stop. The others slammed into him before they could check themselves.

"Where have you been?" Velma looked up from the pile. Her eyes widened behind her glasses. "And why are you naked?!"

Daphne glanced unconcernedly at her heaving breasts before ignoring them. "It feels comfortable, and natural." She spoke flippantly. Before anyone could pester her further, she added "Where's Freddy? He's supposed to meet us up here."

"So I am." Fred stepped out from behind a large rock. "There's a series of-Good Grief! Daphne! Why are you...?" Fred's eyes were wide and astonishment rooted him to the ground.

"Yes, yes, I'm a centaur without human fashion hang-ups." Daphne snapped impatiently. "Now tell us what you found Freddy!"

Fred looked about to argue when she swished her pale tail and stamped he backed down she felt a surge of triumph. Never before has she had such respect as what she wielded now. *I'm fine just the way I am.* Came the smug thought.

"All right." She could tell he was trying not to ogle her. Feeling suddenly mischievous, she inhaled deeply and arched her back slightly. Fred shut his eyes, licked his lips and went on. "Well, I found a series of maintenance tunnels behind this wall. They lead all over the museums, and look what I found near the Grecian exhibit in the main museum."

He held aloft the business card. Daphne could barely make out the Dr. Martin Granite on the face.

"How clever." She laughed. "That must be where he hid the ring."

"Daphne! That's a great idea. Let's go!" Velma exclaimed.

Shaggy and Scooby slipped past, hands over their eyes, as they walked to the tunnel together. Daphne chuckled at their overreaction, until she noticed Fred and Velma doing the same thing.

"Hey, stop that! You're going to run into a wall or something." She scolded. Then a thought occurred to her and she stopped suddenly.

"Hey, it's still early! People are bound to notice me now." She gestured ruefully to her horse body.

"Oh that's alright." Velma told her. "Doctor Ottery closed the museums about an hour ago, claiming ghost problems. We sprung one of the traps and ran around the museum with it following us. Everyone packed up and left."

"Oh." Daphne shrugged. It explained why everything suddenly

seemed so quiet.

The gang set a fast pace to the exhibit, but not nearly as fast enough to suit Daphne. The thrill of the chase was on her, and also she wanted her ordeal over with. Breaking into a trot, then a gallop, she gathered the others in one huge pile. Ignoring their startled cries of protest, she launched them one at a time onto her back. Velma landed closest to her upper body, then Fred, finally Shaggy. Scooby kept pace beside her. Her hooves beat a staccato tattoo against the ground as she ran.

Very soon they were in the place of the Greek exhibit. Coming to a stop, Daphne looked around for Dr. Ottery. She spied the older woman standing angrily next to a huge statue of Zeus. Daphne frowned, then realized the scuff marks she must have made on the floor and winced embarrassed of her thoughtlessness.

"So, you have got here at last." Ottery's voice was full of venom.

"We came as fast as we could" Velma said defensively, speaking out for Daphne. Daphne glanced across to her, marveling. What a herd-mate! A warm glow of affection and protectiveness spread through her.

"Not you immortal, but you." Ottery snarled, spearing Daphne with her glare.

"Excuse me?" She asked in astonishment. What cause had Patricia to be so angry with her? The floor? Daphne was sure she could buff it out if necessary.

"As if you didn't know, mortal." Ottery growled, snapping her fingers. Her form glowed and melted like molten wax. In moments and elegant lady stood there, dressed in a fine toga and graced with an ornate circlet on her head. Daphne felt a stab of jealousy and envy: she was the most beautiful woman she thought she'd ever seen.

"Thank you, mortal. Yet your praise is unnecessary." The woman spoke imperially, assured of her own power over them. "For I am Hera! Queen of the Gods of Olympus."

Silence followed the bringing announcement. The gang exchanged glances, then Velma asked what was on all of their minds:

"You're the Queen of the Greek Gods?"

"That's correct."

"Then you can turn Daphne back from a centaur!."

"Certes. After all, I am the one who cursed her."

"What!" Daphne shrieked in astonishment. She could not have felt more shocked if she had stuck her finger in a light socket.

Hera sighed. "My husband said he had no interest in you after your last adventure, no personal interest I should say. He was planning your next adventure yet I knew he constantly watched you." She looked pointedly at Daphne, shrink back from the fire that was leveled at her. Her aside and continued.

"So, to prove you were his entire interest, I sent you the ring, cursed so he could not remove it. Yet he still found a way

to thwart me and bless you with his seed."

"WHAT!!!" The others shouted as one incredulous voice. They stared at her while she froze.

"The Golden centaur." She whispered.

"Yes, and now you have a foals in your womb. A filly and colt, I believe." She spoke airily, as if it were no concern at all.

Daphne's eyes widened and she looked back at her horse belly, as if expecting to see a bulge already forming then and there. "I'm going to have children." She whispered. It didn't seem quite real.

"Daphne, you mean you-", Fred began, terrible hurt in his eyes, but Hera interrupted.

"That may not be important." Something about her tone made Daphne shiver.

"What do you mean?" She whispered.

In answer, Hera opened her arms. The statue glowed, the hands popping off and coming to settle in hers. She popped open a secret compartment in the left hand, exposing the original Centaur Ring.

"This ring," she explained, "will turn you back into a human, and in addition, it will erase all memory of this adventure from all of your minds. You will go back to the simple, interesting lives you led before."

"How can it?" Daphne asked in spite of herself. *This is*

what I wanted, right? "I'll still have my son and daughter."

"Everything will go back to the way it was before our interference." Hera said regally. No emotion spoiled her voice.

Daphne gasped. "But that's murder!" she backed away, turning so her stomachs were away from the Goddess, trying to shield the unborn child. "'You can't murder my babies!"

"Absolutely not!" Fred roared. The gang fell silent as all eyes turned to him. He'd never raised his voice in anger before, but now he strode forward with hands balled into fists, as if he were going to strike Hera! "You claim superiority over us, call yourselves Gods, play with us like your pets or dolls. Now you claim mastery over a life." He glared. "'You're not Gods. You're sick, that's what you are. You....."

"Silence!" Hera shouted. The room shook and lightning crashed outside.

"You will pay for your insolence mortal." Her eyes narrowed. Then she turned to Daphne. "My offer is refused, I take it?"

Daphne nodded defiantly. "I never wanted to be a centaur," She was proud how controlled and forceful her voice sounded now. "But I won't kill someone just so I can be free. Not that."

"You mortals do it all the time." Hera gestured dismissively. "I believe your country has the ''honor' of having the most abortion clinics? And you've only just conceived. There is no life to kill, by your standards."

"I don't believe in those standards." Daphne felt her mind racing. She'd actually never thought about them much before, as it never occurred to her to think about it. Now, however, it seemed all she could think about.

"I think that they are alive, and I know they will turn out beautiful and strong." She announced.

"Of course they will, considering the runts' father." Hera snapped. "Very well. Since you are being stubborn, I will leave you now to make the best of your mess. And I leave you with this!"

She pointed towards Fred who squawked in surprise as his body started shrinking. His clothes fell around him in a pile, leaving a hole in the middle where a large hawk stood. It screeched in surprise.

"That, mortal, is for your insolence." Hera announced over everyone's loud exclamations of surprise and fear.

"Shaggy, Scooby, Do something!" Velma shrieked.

"Come on Scoob! Let's get her!" Shaggy shouted. Gone was the frightened teen, now hatred twisted his face as he pelted towards Hera, Scooby snapping and snarling next to him.

Hera clapped her hands and everyone flew away from the dais. Shaggy and Scooby slid into a pile in the wall, Velma crashed into a statue with the hawk in her hands, and Daphne found herself staggered by the blow, but still standing upright.

"Farewell!" Hera called out mockingly. "Farewell Mystery

Inc! We'll see how long your band lasts now!"

Her words echoed around the chamber, having already disappeared.

"Velma, Shaggy, Scooby! Are you okay?" Daphne called to them, hurrying over to help Velma down from the statue. A quick check showed the hawk had no injuries, though it looked sad and forlorn.

"We're all right." Velma told her. "But what do we do with Fred?"

"I don't know." Daphne bit her lip. "I just don't know." She whispered again as Shaggy and Scooby came to stand next to her, completing the circle.

Outside, the sky grew dark as the sun sank behind the mountain. The room plunged into shadow as black as Daphne's thoughts. *What will happen to Mystery Inc. now? What will happen to us?* She could find no answer.

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