Hera was the daughter of Cronus and Rhea, so she had gotten off to a bad start—swallowed by her father and all. But she didn’t think much about her early life. Nor did she care much about the interminable war between the Olympians and the Titans that commenced almost immediately after she and her siblings were freed from their papa’s belly. No, none of that mattered. Life really started for Hera when she put on her gold sandals and strutted before that brother of hers, Zeus, and, oh glorious moment, he looked at her in that way of his. She felt awakened, energized. He was a handsome devil. But, oh, he turned out to be a troublesome devil.

It would have been a jewel in her crown if she’d been his first wife. But, then, Zeus drank his first wife—that ill-fated nymph, Metis. And they called her wise. Ha! So no, no no no, better not to have been the first.

But then he went on to a Titan wife—with a body larger than his, imagine!—and then another nymph, and then, of all things, her own sister Demeter, and next he took Leto, the daughter of Titans. This devilish god was worse than a billy goat, and he was driving Hera to distraction. Most mortifying of all, that doe-eyed Leto bore him a son! It was Hera who should have borne his first son! Everything was going wrong.

But Hera played it smart. No one should guess her smoldering anger. She wore an innocent maiden’s smile and
carried herself as though basking in the admiration of the whole world. Everyone fell for it; she must be a beauty if she walked like that. And Zeus fell harder than anyone; he called Hera the most precious blossom he'd ever seen. She pinched her cheeks to darken them, as if with the blush of modesty, and she looked out at him from under long lashes. He needed her. But she wouldn't yield until he made her not just his wife, but his queen. Queen Hera. The only true wife of King Zeus. Zeus was hers, at last.
But what did he do? Without missing a beat, he moved from Hera’s embrace to the embrace of Maia, the daughter of that stupid Atlas, who bore the heavens on his shoulder girdle, and the granddaughter of Titans. Hera could predict the future: one simpering female after another in Zeus’ arms. It was revolting, actually. She vowed then and there to have revenge on every single future rival, into eternity. In fact, she would teach a lesson to anyone who helped Zeus meet other wives. Her punishments would be severe; they’d give pause. So there, Zeus.

And then the very worst thing happened.

Zeus had drunk that first wife Metis and no one had ever given her another thought. But now, so long afterward, Zeus doubled over in pain and the next thing Hera knew, this . . . this thing . . . burst from his forehead. A goddess, in full armor. Zeus had given birth to his daughter Athena all on his own.

Oh, that wasn’t really the case. No one could believe that. A male had no such powers. Females were the ones who could have babies. Hera’s grandfather had tried to stop her grandmother from giving birth by forcing the children to stay inside their mother. Hera’s father had tried to rob her mother of the benefits of giving birth by swallowing her babies as they were born. And now Hera’s husband, who was also her brother and thus the inheritor
of such malicious behavior, had claimed the ability of giving
birth for himself. It was all part of one giant effort to strip
women of their most important power. Ridiculous! Athena
was the result of Metis giving birth inside Zeus. She was not
the product of Zeus alone. No!

Though every other insult was hateful, this one was truly
intolerable. In a rage, Hera closed in upon herself,
concentrating all her energies on one tiny dot within her.
Her grandmother Gaia had done it before her. Need. It was
all a question of need. Hera practically melted with need.
And, yes! Triumph! Life began within her—and this time it
really was all on her own. A woman could do it all on her
own. Hera would give birth to the god Hephaestus, her first
child and the one that would be totally and completely hers.
No matter what Zeus did, he couldn’t rob her of that.

HERA’S Revenge

Hera was always furious at Zeus’ romances. One
was with the priestess Io. Zeus turned Io into
a white cow to protect her from Hera. But Hera
asked Zeus for the cow as a gift, and she made
the giant Argus guard her. Argus had a hundred
eyes; some eyes slept while others kept watch.
Zeus had Hermes kill Argus and free Io. In
grief, Hera set Argus’ eyes in the peacock’s
tail. And she sent a gadfly to torment Io
and drive her away from Zeus.