

Almighty
Hercules

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DEDICATION

To my nephew Jordan and wife Sandra. You and Jesus are my inspiration.

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INTRODUCTION

So you think you heard all Hercules epic stories. You know of the twelve labors orchestrated by the wicked goddess Hera. The maniacal gods tricked Hercules in to killing his family, and then sentenced him to perform unfeasible feats to cleans his condemnation. Hera persuaded King Eurytheus to give Hercules twelve impossible tasks no man or god could complete. First was the Nemean Lion. It was covered with a hide so tough no blade, spear, or arrow could scratch its skin-yet kill the beast. Hercules choked the roaring giant to death between his mighty arms. The Lemean Hydra proved to be no match either. Hercules found clubbing off the lake monster's nine heads only made the situation worse. Two sprung in its place. The solution was found in reason. He beat the beast first eight mortal heads to pieces and then seared each of its necks with his torch. He lopped off the ninth immortal head killing the monster.

Neither Ladon the hundred headed dragon or Atlas's cunning nymphs could stop him in attaining Heperides golden apples. He wrestled the behemoth Cretan bull to the ground. The colossus Erymanthian bore he snared in his net and carried back to Mycenae. Even Hades pet Cerberus who guarded the gates to the underworld was no match for this demigod. The gargantuan three headed dog covered with venomous snake heads and sporting a spiked dragon's tail was beaten into submission by the might hero.

These are some of the stories you may know. But there is one that has been lost in the legends of time. Hera's labors were just preparing Hercules to overcome the unconquerable. She had a fiendish secret that was never to be record in the history of the gods. Hercules next task would surmount everything he had achieved before. This last trial does not test just his mind and strength. This will test his very heart!

CHAPTER 1: HADERUS

The dust of the battle field settles unveiling piercing red floating eyes. Spartan generals yell to their formations, “Hold ranks!” A deep gurgling sound grows louder as the beast lowers its head below the rising sea of dust. The fearless Spartans' bake in the summer heat as they baste in their dripping anxiety. There is good reason to fear. This giant Titan descendant destroyed five armies and countless cities along its journey here. These Spartans are the last obstade standing between this monster and their families and homes. Ten thousand Shields clang together as the order “Close ranks!” is given. An eerie silence covers the hidden battlefield. The army now waits for the beast to strike out.

Agonizing screams drag towards the center of the formation as shields, spears, and bodies fall from the sky. The beast returns its slithering spiked tail back into the cloud. The sound of soldiers hearts beating mingle with the choking evil stench of sulfur. The formations shuffles close to replace the gaps left by their fallen compatriots. Through the heighten quietness, eyes bulge watching the massive barbed tail swerves like a serpent in and out of the dust just ahead. Soldiers see the shredded remains and the useless pieces of shields marking this cemetery. Quivering lips whisper redeeming prayers to the gods asking for immediate help. It seems nothing in their arsenal will stop this monster from Hades!

Haderus's four wings rise slowly and stretch out in the noon light. A

million glistening brass shields lining its wings blast blaring brightness blindfolding the Spartan army. Soldiers lift their shields to protect themselves from the burning heat cast upon them. A roaring head lifts fifty feet upward showing its four gigantic staring faces. The roaring face of a lion gazes down with fangs longer than the tallest Spartan soldier. Fright grips this fearless army. The faces of a raging bull on the right side, and dragon on the left, look toward the opposing flanks. Both mouths erupt with deafening blast strong enough to blow the ranks backward. Fire shoots over the right flank baking the men alive. The lion face pounces on a dozen men, snatching them in his chewing jaws. The bull thrust his horns in the left flank impaling soldiers seven ranks deep. Every spear is ordered thrust at the beast, as archers rain down a thousand arrows. But, their spears graze off the metal monster as arrows ding down marking the beast hundred foot boundaries. The Spartans hold fast waiting for a glorious death. All seems lost!

From the distance a voice shouts out, "Mount Olympus!" The thumping feet of a rushing army runs towards Haderus. The monster seems nervous and begins shaking inside the dirt cloud. All of a sudden, its four faces repeatedly dart and jab toward the darkening cloud below. Thunder cracks as lightning reveals glimpses of the battle stirring in front of the retreating army. The ground violently shakes beneath their pounding feet knocking the soldiers off their feet. They reverently kneel and watch helplessly. A gargantuan human face jolts upward screaming in torment. It jabs down before the army as they watch it begging for help. No mercy is given. Its anguished head lifts upward and then twist completely around before slamming its long neck to the ground. The army waits silently.

A smaller bouncing head pierces through the top of the dirt cloud. It draws toward the center of the formation. Slowly a dark muscular silhouette appears carrying a spiked club on his shoulder. The Spartans break rank and abandon their position. The cloud settles to the ground as shouts of heroic appreciation erupt. "Hercules!"

The Spartan general orders the soldiers back to formation. Nearly ten thousand thankful faces smile as they stand proudly at attention. The general approaches this hero. He gazes at the grim faces of the

beast revealing its demise. Hercules tore the tail from Haderus and used its spikes to slash its neck. The four horrified faces lay dead in front of the army with its own tail still stuck in its neck. The general kneels before Hercules and bows his humble head.

“We Spartan thank you for vanquishing this dread beast. We too are grateful for saving the lives of our families and protecting our homes.”

The formation breaks their silence as gratuitous murmurings flood over the ranks, “Thank you Hercules!” Some honor him with their voices as savior, as some with prayers to this half god. The smiling Hercules rejects these men for their beliefs. He reminds them, “I am just a man.”

Festivity begins as word spreads thought the land that Haderus is dead. Great joy fills the hearts of men once more. The Athenian and Spartan kings decide to host games in honor of Hercules. The countryside farmers and villagers take leave of their work to attend the celebrations throughout Greece. A parade of dancing maidens follow the ox drawn carts filled with food for the banquet at the Athenian acropolis. The praises of Hercules rest on every tongue. This does not delight the gods!

The messenger god Hermes climbs the great stairway to the tower. The giant golden doors of Mount Olympus open. Inside the humungous cathedral to the gods sits the distressed king Zeus. His sad face looks down upon earth. The other gods seem just as solemn as the king. They watch from their thrones as the events unfold before their eyes. Ares shakes his head side to side in disbelief. He cannot believe what he is seeing. Poseidon lowers his trident in disgust.

Hermes kneels before King Zeus waiting for his acknowledgment. Zeus commands him, “Speak.”

I am given a message.” Hermes opens his sack. He retrieves the head from the four faced beast Haderus and holds it up before the king. “Majesty, I was told to give this to you as a gift. Hercules wishes your blessing and says, 'May all the gods and goddesses be honored in my victory'.”

This present infuriates Zeus. “Does my son rival me? He steals the praise from my people and wishes I adorn him with my blessing?” The

king stands and faces away. "Tell Hercules he shall see my blessing!"

Hermes looks upon the gods to see every face is filled with fury. He knows Zeus is about to curse Hercules with all the gods approval. Hermes responds, "Is there anything else my king might wish I deliver?"

"Yes!" Zeus touches the horrified faces of Haderus with his lightning bolt scepter. A flash, and then earsplitting cracking sparks over the head of the beast. Suddenly, the four faces turn to gold. "Return this gift to Hercules. Tell him he has my blessing. Lift my gift high where all can see so my blessing may be poured out on all people. Now go in all haste!"

Hermes rises. He ties the bag shut. "Majesty, I go as you command. May praise be poured out upon you and all the gods." He marches toward the golden doors passing the amused gods. They know not what the future holds for Hercules, but they assure each other with their sarcastic snickers that Zeus will honor his son with a repentant heart.

As he enters the threshold of the doors Zeus commands, "Wait! Tell Hercules to speak these words after raising my gift to him. May every man know the heart of Zeus!"

Hermes spirit secretly urges him to warn Hercules as he walks away.

Zeus states, "Do not attempt to forewarn him Hermes. I will be watching and listening."

Hermes dashes off while leaping upward. His winged shoes fly him over Olympus before descending through the thick clouds below. His heart weighs heavy with the burden he carries. He knows he must fill his commission under the kings order. He knows Zeus and the gods are full of trickery. This gift is not a present, but is a ghastly curse upon all men. He thinks of a way to alert Hercules while pondering how a father could hate his son so.

The crowd looks up to see the shimmering messenger of the gods hovering above. The people bow as he streams by them toward the acropolis. Hercules smiles at the approaching Hermes, waiting for him to descend. He lands alongside him. The gathering grows reverently quiet watching as Hercules kneels before Hermes.

"Rise Hercules. I have a gift from your father." Hermes swings the

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bag from off his back and lowers it.

Hercules reaches up to retrieve the gift, but fails to reach the sack. The twenty foot tall god kneels to a more obtainable position.

“Take the gift your father offers you.”

Hercules humbly takes the sack with outstretched gracious hands.

“I am ordered by your father Zeus that you should raise this gift high where all can see so all may experience the gods blessing. I am instruct to tell you to repeat these words, 'May every man know the heart of Zeus!'”

Hermes feels the gods eyes are upon him, and knows the ear of Zeus listens. The only warning he can give Hercules is his solemn face. Hercules senses something is wrong, but he is blinded by this godly gift. He hoist the golden faces of the beast above his head for all to see.

Hermes leaves Hercules with the words, “Pray to the gods for mercy. Pray to Zeus he will forgive.”

The sensation of the poisonous gift is greater than the merciful antidote. Hermes looks down one last time wishing they would take heed. But he is only left with the sight of them celebrating and a sharp pain in his heart as punishment from the gods.

CHAPTER 2: BLESSINGS OF ZEUS

A veil drapes the monument towering above the Parthenon. A marble column is the podium that holds the gift from Zeus. Two files of men stand on each side tugging the lines that restrain the wind blown veil, as two Greek kings finish dedicating this trophy to Hercules.

The man of honor stands before the audience with his head tilted skyward. His fist rest on his waist supporting his propped arms. Clapping hands and cheering erupt in praise to their hero that has vanquished evil for so long from their land. The two kings give the order to drop the veil.

The magnificent golden head with its four giant faces radiate over all Athens. Their humble hero bows in acceptance to their repeating celebrating chants, "Hercules, Hercules, Hercules..."

As the crowd quiets Hercules remembers the words his father Zeus told him. To honor his father he must speak the words.

"We dedicate this monument to the gods. May it forever stand in remembrance to their kindness." Hercules waits for the audience to subside their clapping hands before speaking the final phrase. "May every man know the heart of Zeus."

The ground beneath slowly begins to vibrate. The surrounding buildings begin to crack. Dark menacing clouds appear out of a clear blue sky. A spider web of lightening bolts rain down on the Parthenon as deafening thunderbolts explode chunks of marble from off the temple.

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The audience disperses in every direction but there seems no safe place to hide. The people scream out, "Help us Hercules!"

A momentary silence is restored as the people huddle near their hero. They hear the golden gift as it begins to twirl upon its pedestal. It spins faster and faster as a vision of Zeus's face appears amidst the blur.

"I have heard your prayers. But they are not to me. Since you worship another god, I will let him be your savior. I give you four more gifts. If you survive them I will again hear your prayers."

Zeus's face dissolves as the spinning head slows to a stop. The trembling audience begs mercy from the gods. The golden face of the man speaks.

"No mercy was shown to me in life. Neither will you receive mercy. We bring you four torments. I bring you the first."

The people move away from Hercules. They curse him for bringing this damnation upon them.

"Since you are devoted to Hercules, I give you the power to praise your mortal god without ceasing."

The sinister face laughs as it looks down mocking the human god.

Every tongue whispers prayers to Hercules. Their voices become one chanting choir that is unable to stop. Hercules is the only one not under the spell. A passing mother hurries by as both her and her new born shout blessings before running homeward. An old man stands before him wishing to ask what Hercules plans to do to break this spell. But, he is only able to say, "You are the most high. You are my god."

No matter where a person runs to, or how far they travel from the demigod, his praise remains on their lips.

No one has slept in three days or been able to communicate their needs or desires. Eating and drinking leads to choking as their words never cease. Citizens of Greece lay in the streets waiting for their demise as Hercules watches knowing he is powerless to help.

Hercules whistles for the winged horse Pegasus. The white stallion lands in the acropolis as he races to mount the winged creature. "To Delphi," he orders Pegasus. "Be off," he commands.

Hours later they descend through the morning mist covering the rough mountainous countryside. Hercules tells Pegasus, "Wait here at

the base of the temple steps.” He climbs the rugged stairway leading to the ancient temple. A cloaked being awaits at the entrance.

Hercules stands before him and then kneels. “I’ve come to request a solution from the Oracle. My people are in great distress and torment. May I inquire of the Oracle what to do?”

“I am the priest and protector of the temple. You may ask your question of the Oracle, but you must pay a penance first.”

“What do you require and I will pay it.

“Be careful what you ask Hercules.” The protector lifts his budding rod from under his cloak and lays it over Hercules shoulder. “Are you really willing to sacrifice your most cherished possession to save your people?”

He humbly whispers, “To save my people I will do any righteous thing.”

The buds of the rod grow into vines that crawl around Hercules neck. They blossom with leaves as they twist three times around his throat.

“What you require cost more than the normal tribute of gold and silver. What you need is divine intervention. This comes at a higher cost.” The vine begins to close tight as the Protector continues. “I will ask you a riddle. If you are successful, I will allow you to inquire of the Oracle. If you are inaccurate with your reply, these vines of Vulcan will choke the very strength from you, and then your life. Do you agree with these terms?”

Hercules feels the supernatural strength from the leafy noose choking him. He realizes this is his last chance to save his life. The fearless Hercules responds, “Ask your question!”

“Here is my riddle. What is greater than Zeus, is more wicked than Hades? The rich desire it, the poor have it. And, if you eat this you will die.”

Hercules feels the mounting pressure around his neck as his hands grip the vines closing around his throat. He feels his strength vanishing as he frantically searches for the solution. He pulls apart the vines with his mighty hands to retrieve a single gulp of air, but he can only slow their squeezing that steals his breath and power.

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His mind rest in his thought he is about to die. A dream comes to him as he begins his eternal sleep.

Hercules sees his dear departed mother. She runs to him and wraps her loving arms around her darling son. "How I missed you my son." He cries and trembles in her embrace. "Why are you so upset my child?"

"I have let you down mother. I have brought a curse upon all Greece."

She continues to embrace him as she strokes his hair. "It is not you that has brought this curse. It is your prideful father that kills the people. I will help you with your answer. You will awake again. Remember this. What greater love is there than mine for you? What greater love is there from you to your people?"

His mother slips from his embrace as he so desperately tries to hold on. He wakes once more to see the skull face of the Protector hidden just inside his hood. He remembers what his dear mother said. Instead of answering the Priest riddle he answers his mother's instead.

Hercules strains to cough out his one word solution, "Nothing."

"You have answered wisely." The Protector disappears revealing the path to the Oracle.

Hercules continues up the worn stone path toward the fissure in the earth. A marble table lay before it with a veiled woman sprawling across its top. Mist dimbs up through the fiery crack below. It swirls over her as its coldness eerily strokes Hercules feet. It invites him to step closer.

He cautiously obliges the ominous presence by stepping five paces forward.

I know your question Hercules. The answer you seek is found in another riddle. I will tell you. First, know this" She laughs as she speaks. "The gods and goddesses require your prayers. This is the source of their eternal strength. To destroy the curse you must weaken the gods." She twist as a snake over the table and raises her head to his face.

"How can one beat a god? Is it through might, or is it through cunning? How might a farmer rid himself of ravenous wolves. Is it through strength, or is it through wisdom? That is the first riddle you

must answer.”

Hercules mind repeats her words so as not to forget the riddle. He listens as she speaks once more.

“This is green as the Elysian fields, and as sweet as honey nectarine. It is taste of ambrosia to man, but as sour as rotten meat to the gods. Men search for it, but gods hide it. If you can retrieve it, the people will devour it. These are you answers. Now go.”

The Orade slithers off the table and descends in the earth. Her veil ripples in the current of the mist still churning atop the alter. From under it comes a green hideous gas. A whiff of the odorous substance causes Hercules to convulse. He runs from the poison toward Pegasus.

He quickly mounts the winged friend before yelling “Away!”

Hercules mind recalls both riddles but is clueless to their answers. There is one special place he believe he might find the answers. It lay due east across the great Aegean sea. He knows he must hurry as thoughts of his people perish.

Two hundred leagues from the coast of Greece is an island. Hercules orders his friend to descend. On the beach he strokes the side of Pegasus cheek. “Wait her my friend. I will return shortly. If I do not return by sunset, leave this place. For then surely, all hope is lost.”

Hercules climbs the side of the mountain that is laden with a thousand cave entrances. He worries more for the safety of his winged friend than the dangers he faces ahead. He knows there are creatures that guard this place. Some crafty wait in hiding as others fear nothing of their prey.

Once before he has traveled here. He remembers the secret to find the correct entrance. All the other entrances are traps to kill the unwise. Just below the middle of the precipice he stops his ascent. From off the cliff's face he yanks a bush. He pulls a flint-stone from his pocket and begins striking it against the mountain face. He catches the sparks with the bush and begins to blow upon it. Fire and smoke rage upward as he holds his torch. He patiently watches the smoke rise leaving trails of fingers into the caves. Coughing and growling drift out of the entrances the smoke crawls in.

Hercules sees it. It is the one cave entrance the smoke blows away

from. He carries his torch as he climbs toward the opening, jabbing it at Harpies, and beast peeking out their caves. He hoist himself into the opening while pointing the bush ahead. He burns the webs of spiders that light the entire passage through the long tunnel. He ventures one hundred steps before the light burns out. There is still a light ahead at the end of this darkened shaft.

He enters a vast chamber. He is amazed at seeing magnificent mechanical devices that dick, grind, and churn. Some rise to the height of the chamber, and others small enough to perform intricate task. In the center of the chamber sits a very old man. His gray straggly hair touches the floor. His hand beckons Hercules to come near.

“It has been a good long time since I saw you last Hercules. Come close so my failing eyes my view your presence.”

“I have missed you Methuselah.”

“It seems you have grown as huge as a human man can before he explodes.” Methuselah laughs at his comment as Hercules smiles at his amusing complement. “Well, what do you want? That is the only reason anyone comes to visit.”

“I have come to inquire of you, but I also come with a gift.” Hercules holds up a golden apple, a trophy from a previous adventure.

“Great Zeus.” Methuselah proclaims. “I thought you gave them all back to Athena?”

“No, I hid but one. And, it is now yours.”

He snatches the prize from Hercules hand. “The gods and goddesses would kill for this. One bite will make a mortal wise as one of them and give him eternal life.” He stares at his gift as he journeys to a case were his numerous scrolls are kept. He lays a clean white cloth atop the case before neatly centering the golden treasure. He ponders it momentarily before returning to Hercules.

“Ask your question Hercules. I know you desire haste in your return to your Greek's.”

Hercules states, “I have two riddles and a question. Might you answer them?”

“Tell me your riddles.”

“How can one beat a god? Is it through might, or is it through

cunning? How might a farmer rid himself of ravenous wolves. Is it through strength, or is it through wisdom?

Hercules finishes the first riddle and waits for his answer.

Methuselah use everyone of his nearly thousand years of knowledge to ponder the question.

“You must make the gods and goddesses more jealous of themselves than of you. What is the next riddle?”

“Before I go to the next riddle, I need to know how to accomplish this feat.”

“If the people praise the gods, the gods become stronger. But if the people praise only the most worthy god, the gods become jealous of who this god might be. Thus, the gods fight amongst themselves. Now, tell me the next riddle..”

Hercules recites, “This is green as the Elysian fields, and as sweet as honey nectarine. It is taste of ambrosia to man, but as sour as rotten meat to the gods. Men search for it, but gods hide it. If you can retrieve it, the people will devour it.”

“This answer is simple. It is the moss of Endure. Gods hate it because it has the most repugnant smell. One taste is poison to their very tongue.”

“Why is it so good for man but so awful for the gods?”

“That too is simple. This moss grows only on the trees of humility in the Endure forest. Its very essence vanquishes vanity. This is why the vain gods hate it so.”

“Where can I find it?”

“Follow the Spring of Olympus to the hidden garden of All Innocence. The moss grows just past the Pool of True Reflection. There you may cultivate your antidote. Bring it to the people and wipe small amounts on their lips. This will not break Zeus's curse, but it will allow you to control whom they pray to. Finally, what is your last question?”

“Why did you not bite the golden apple?”

Methuselah laughs. “I'll tell you why with all wisdom. I do not wish to be like the vain gods. To be all knowing would destroy the joy of adventure. There would be no need to think. I enjoy solving things. What do I need with eternal life? I've already lived too long. Go now.

The darkness approaches and your horse is at risk.”

Hercules runs out the chamber and then leaps from the cliff. He watches as Pegasus rears up fighting several flying Harpies. Pegasus notices his falling friend and takes to flight to catch him,

“Mount Olympus! Away.”

About midnight on the fourth day of the curse the glare of moonlight reveals the spring. Its sparkle trickles down the side of Mount Olympus. He guides Pegasus over the twisting stream that disappears below the ground ahead. He sees an opening in the ground that he follows downward. The rushing river settles into a still pond just ahead. The beauty surrounding him is a marvel to his eyes. He thinks *I know why the gods hid this place from man. It is as beautiful as the Elysian Fields.* Giant sunflowers illuminate this heaven. Every color of flower decorates the entire gentle roaming countryside. He sees there are all sorts of fruit trees bound heavy with ripen harvest. He thinks *this sweet fragrance must be the perfume of the goddesses. This must be the Garden of All Innocence.*

He sets down on the edge of the pond that reflects like a mirror. He dismounts while telling Pegasus, “You’ve earned a reward. Feast on the sweet grass this place must hold. The stallion’s thirst is greater than his hunger. He moves to drink from the still waters. Hercules feels his thirst needs quenching also. He bends to sip but sees Pegasus reflection in the water. It is the innocence of a newborn colt reflecting off the pond surface. Hercules looks down and sees himself, but it is not as he imagined. Half his face belongs to his adoring loving mother, and the other half is wrinkled with the warring face of Zeus. He realizes this pond reflects what truly exists on the inside. He takes this memory with him that he will carry the rest of his life.

In the distance he sees the green outline of small hills. This is where he will begin his search. He does not see any forest as he climbs the soft plush hill. He reaches down and grabs a small amount of the green growing at his feet. He plucks a bit before raising it to his eyes. The texture feels like moss. He smells the sweet aroma that is more delightful than honeysuckle. He dabs the tip of it on his tongue. He instantly tastes ambrosia, the wonderful food of the gods. He knows this

must be the moss of Endure. But, he sees no forest. Just to make sure, Hercules jabs his hand in the green he plucked the moss from. His fingers are surprised to feel roots running in every direction. He yanks up and pulls over and over to find it is a tree. He realizes these trees grow downward. This must be a tree of humility because it bows down. The forest of Endure must be hidden all around me. He hurries and gathers handfuls of the moss. He pushes the moss deep inside his empty sack.

He whistle to his steady steed. "Come Pegasus! To Athens and away."

Hercules sees most of the citizens lay as they die in the streets. Their prayers to him can hardly be heard. He faces another perplexity. He thinks *I could never get this to all the people in time to administer the antidote.* "Pegasus. Land on the Parthenon." He dismounts and then rushes to the roof's edge. "Rise up quickly Pegasus. Wait in the sky until I tell you what to do."

As his winged friend rises, Hercules summons all his strength by yelling the source of his power, "Mount Olympus!" He tears half the roof off the Parthenon and holds it straight up in the air. He balances it with one arm as his other hand crushes the sack containing the moss. He holds the sack to his mouth and rips it open with his teeth. He flings the contents high in the sky. He quickly returns his hand alongside his other arm holding the roof's edge. He quickly begins fanning the moss up and up.. "Pegasus. I need you to stretch out your wings and spin around." His friend does not question his tactic as he begins turning in circles. Faster and faster he spins as Hercules flaps higher and higher the green moss spores. The green cloud breezes off in all directions high up in the atmosphere. When he is sure it will reach all Greece he commands Pegasus, "Stop. We have finished here."

He mounts his trusty friend and flies over the city. He shouts out, "You are free to pray to the god you desire. Not by name, but by worthiness!"

The green mist settles to the ground as Hercules watches these starving tongues lap the green delicacy. The substance has empowered their voices as their prayers shout out once more. These prayers are

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directed to the most worthy of the gods. These prayers are for the most beautiful of the deity.

The ground rumbles and splits as the four face beast speaks once more. Every tongue becomes thankfully silent.

The man's face shouts with the voice of Zeus, "You have caused strife amongst the gods with your trickery and deception! I have ended the first curse. See if you are as cunning with this next blessing!"

CHAPTER 3: GOLDEN BULL SPEAKS

The golden gift from Zeus spins once more. The ground rumbles beneath the citizens shaking legs. Anxious faces cry out. "Hercules, help us!" He is helpless to do anything except watch as the spinning gift stops.

The giant golden bull leaps forward. It snorts and roars in Hercules face. Its angry head returns to the monument. It speaks.

"No mercy was shown to me in life. Neither will you receive mercy. We bring you four torments. I bring you the second."

The vengeance of the gods weights heavy on every human heart. "Do something Hercules!"

He stands in humble reverence to the powers that work at hand. The ground moves violently under their feet as the statue speaks once more.

"Since you are devoted to Hercules, I give you the power to bow before your mortal god without ceasing."

The sinister face laughs as it looks down mocking the human god.

Hercules covers his worried face with vibrating hands. "What have I done Zeus for you to hate me so?"

Screaming voices fall to their knees' amidst the intense trembling. The people begin to curse the name of Hercules as his reward for bringing this torment upon them. He whistles for Pegasus to rescue him

as he watches every knee bowing before him.

“Look at the coward. He attempts to leave us in our misery. What a wretched god.”

The winged stallion flies above. Hercules leaps to join him. “I go to undo what Zeus has brought upon us.” He has no idea where he is to go. But, he knows in his heart he must let the people see him leave. It may give them hope he knows how to help them.

Pegasus gallops up to a great height so Hercules may observe all that is occurring. All Greece truly bows before him. No legs can withstand the shaking earth. He realizes he is all alone. His mighty strength has no power to serve him. His heart hurts in knowing his father mercilessly punishes him. He has no one to turn to, and nowhere to go. He weeps the only name whom has ever given him true unconditional love, “Alcmene. Mother.”

In his solitude he stares through the fingers that cover his tearful eyes. Through his blurry vision he sees her smiling face. She appears in a misty cloud that formed from his sprinkled tears. As he removes his hands he sees her softly speak, “Come to me.” He is perplexed at her request. He knows what she asks is impossible. She rests in the part of the Elysian fields reserved for the worthy dead. His heart furnishes him with the memory of his last vision of her. It was in the Pool of True Reflection.

Mighty Hercules raises his winged friend upward and commands. “Mount Olympus, away!”

The sun has set below the horizon forcing him to remember the urgency of his situation. He flies to the east of the mountain waiting for the moonlight to once again reveal the holy stream. They descend toward the twisting sparking surface as they glide along its course. Pegasus dives in the opening to the earth.

Hercules leaps from his true friend as Pegasus lands near the pool. He kneels over the still pond waiting for his mother to appear. A single tear of remorse falls from his cheek and stirs the pool below. His silhouette casts the boundaries as his true reflection appears. This time only Alcmene's face materializes.

She smiles and then talks. “Quickly my son, I must speak. For your

godly father fast approaches.” Her face turns to her side and then stares back at Hercules.

“In the world lay a secret gift. This is the heart of your troubles. You must find the one the world lifts, He'll reveal the source the world wobbles. To return the earth as before, You must hear the herd that rumbles. And lock the gate of the door, and then force the world to tumble.”

Hercules repeats the words in his mind as his adoring mother waits for him to remember.

“My son. I must tell you one last thing. You are made of two halves. I am, and will always be, a part of your heart and soul. I truly love my adoring son. There is another part that wars in you. Your father is full of pride. Let your heart always guide you in all that is true, good, and right. Please continue to be the defender of the innocent. I will always be watching. For, no mother could ever be more proud of their son.”

Alcmene's face turns to the side as if it views something quickly approaching. “My son. Hurry and sip from the pond. It will give you the strength you will need for your journey. Remember this, your momma will always loves you.”

Her face is abruptly replaced as Hercules finishes gulping from his cupped hands.

The angry face of Zeus speaks, “You try and trick me again son! You find secrets hidden in this pond. You will regret the day you were born, as I forget that you are my son.”

These harsh words drive a dagger through Hercules heart. The river flowing into the pool suddenly stops. He watches as the calm pool is renewed with vibrating ripples. Lightning showers down exploding in the water. The flowing countryside raises up and begins rolling boulders of destruction toward him.

Hercules hurries to mount his trusted steed. He shout out, “To the bottom of the world! Away!”

They escape through the entrance to this truly magnificent place as the earth bites down and devourers forever the broken peace of this heaven. Hercules knows where he goes now. He feels the pond water strengthen his body and mind. He and Pegasus soar swiftly away.

ALMIGHTY HERCULES

Between the snow cap mountains of this icy wasteland stands the holder of this world. Pegasus lands short of the straining man containing muscles as big as boulders.

Hercules leaps from his horse as he salutes his old friend. Atlas does not seem to be as excited to bid Zeus's son hello. Hercules smiles before he speaks. For, he knows his last encounter was one that is better not remembered.

Atlas speaks, "Have you come to trick me again my so called friend?"

Hercules ponders how he deceived Atlas into regaining the weight of the world.

Atlas reminds him, "I go and retrieve Hera's golden gift to Zeus and this is how you repay me?"

Hercules thinks what he might say that will release the weight of his burden.

Atlas suggests, "I should have rested while eating every golden apple while watching you continue holding this eternal load. Was I not your friend when I filled your impossible request? Was it too much to ask you to share my burden a few moments longer?"

Remorse fills Hercules face. "I am truly sorry for tricking you my friend."

"Friend, friend, you call me friend?"

"Believe me Atlas. I regret that I was not honest with you. Please understand. I was in haste to complete my labors. It was the gods that forced me to trick you."

Atlas knows the debauchery the vain gods play upon all innocent of such tactics. "I might forgive you if you will again hold the weight of the world."

Hercules words surprises him. "For my friend I will surely alleviate the pain of your load."

Atlas test his word and invites him under the world. Hercules lifts up as Atlas lets down.

"My aching arms feel much better." He finds a block of ice to sit upon and relax for a moment. "I guess I was wrong about you Hercules. You truly are a friend. I never thought you would return as I watch you

travel the world in your adventures.” His face saddens. Hercules takes notice.

“Might you like your own adventure?”

Atlas face begins to think.

“Might you like one that would intimidate the very gods that have given you such a lonely life?”

Atlas face fills with a vengeful smile, “Would I”!

“I was told there is a place to enter the center of the earth, but only one most wise knows where it opens. The gods hide this secret from man. I guess they are afraid man might find some secret to their power. Ahhh, but who would know such a thing?”

Atlas arms puff up as his proud mouth burst forth, “I am that wise man!”

Hercules responds, “You mean you no where it is hid?”

Atlas states, “I’ll be right back.”

Hercules aching arms pray he hurries to reveal the secret the gods and goddesses hid. He watches as Atlas returns.

“I guess I am the most wise. I found the hidden door and raised it. Do you see it over there?”

Hercules lifts his head and strains to see in the direction Atlas is pointing. “No I do not. Are you sure you opened it?”

Atlas again states, “Its over there.” He repeatably jabs his arm in the direction he returned from.

Hercules squints again to increase his vision, but replies, “No, I cannot. Maybe if I was closer I could see it?”

Upset Atlas frustratingly grabs the earth from Hercules shoulders and yells, “Go see for your self you blind fool!”

Hercules pats Atlas's straining bicep and tells him, “I will go investigate.”

Hercules finds the entrance and whistles for Pegasus. Both fly down into the belly of the world as they hear Atlas scream out, “Not again!”

The dark cave glows with an orange haze that penetrates miles and miles below. A bright red yellowish beacon radiates far ahead. It turns more yellow as they near to it.

ALMIGHTY HERCULES

The pair breakthrough to an enormous cavern. Off to the east is a forest. Hercules determines this may give Pegasus some concealing protection. This is where he decides he will descend.

They approach the forest as they watch the treetops sway back and forth, like waves in a stormy sea. They land on the ground as the earth violently rumble. Hercules commands Pegasus to lay down and wait here for him. He hopes this will ease the shaking of Pegasus's body while he ventures to the cause of the shaking.

Off in the distance, he sees the shine of an army of brass beasts. As he draws close he recognizes what these massive creatures are. It is thousands upon thousands of behemoth brass bulls. Alcmena's message now makes sense. He watches as the beasts roam freely wherever they care. The shaking earth follows wherever they go. To the west he sees a humongous gate that seems to be broken open. He knows now what he must do.

Hercules charges the thirty foot tall creatures with outstretched arms yelling, "Ya! Ya!" The herd charges toward him as he charges toward them. He sees the leader breakthrough the multitude. His burning red furious eyes fix on Hercules as he frantically snarls in anger. Right before they devastatingly meet, Hercules yells, "Mount Olympus!" He then leaps high in the air over top the fifty foot high brass beast. The creature springs up to meet his descending foe with twelve points of his horns. Hercules dodges these thrusting razor sharp spears while snatching the huge gold ring in the bull's nostril. From the snout of the beast he yanks upwards which causes the monster to leap up in pain. He bucks his massive head in every direction attempting to rid himself of the source of his pain, but the thrashing hero refuses to let go. The beast trounces the bulls around him with agitated hoofs. But, nothing he does seems to loosen the suffering he feels. The colossus tires and accepts the shackle in his nose.

Hercules gently loosens the beast's agony as it submits to the request of his foe. He leans the gold hoop forward causing minor discomfort suggesting the beast move forward. As it moves the pain subsides. He notices something written. On the ring reads the words *A gift to my love Hera*. He knows these creatures are the creation of his

father, and were a gift to his wicked stepmother. His attention returns toward the bull. The creature walks forward. It continues straight in that direction as the other beast follow along. Hercules steers the leader rightward with a slight twist of the hoop right. The beast again follows the direction of his pain that slowly disappears as he turns.

He ushers the beast inside the fenced fortress. He leaps onto the open gate and waits as the leader strides further inside. He stands at the base of the gate as the last of the thousands strolls in. He hurries and slams the gate. He finds where the massive latch is and sees that it was melted off. He determines only one of Zeus's lightening bolts could have broken this lock. He cries out, "Mount Olympus," as he summon all his strength. He begins to bend a huge protruding bar around the gate, which ensure this lock will never be broken again.

He leaps off the gate but still feels the ground rumble. He knows his task is still not complete. He ponders his mother's words. He remembers the last part of her riddle. It was, *...cause the world to tumble*. He dimbs to the top of the metal fence and suddenly realizes the solution to her riddle. He sees this place lay on a world of its own. It gently curves at the far horizon. He sees the fence narrow and continue off past the horizon. He looks behind and sees what must be the same fence as it runs unbroken into this one. He determines by the well beaten path that it runs around the entire center of the world. Hercules knows what he must now do.

He whistles for Pegasus to come. He and his winged friend soar over the herd. Hercules leaps once more onto the leading beast. The monster becomes violent and tries to rid his nostril of the pest. He charges at the standing menace not understanding he rides with him. The herd charges alongside following the roaring beast. Hercules leaps onto his following friend and halts him in the air. Both watch as the thousands charge after the leading beast, which finds he is being force along with the herd. He is blocked from turning side to side because of the monumental metal fence. Hercules lands on the ground to see if his hunch was right.

The rumble slowly changes to movement. He soon finds he is walking to keep himself from tilting over. He mounts Pegasus and

suggest his friend lift skyward. From this height he seems the ground revolving. The engine of the world is the beast that churn the ground beneath them. The earth turns and tumbles once more.

Hercules rears Pegasus up in his attempt to turn him. "To Athens, and away!"

They near Athens and see the world has stop shaking. That is, all except Mount Olympus where the gods reside. It shaking must be caused by the anger of the gods. He looks below for a place to land as he watches the citizens attempt to pick up the pieces and place everything in order once more. Thankful praises lift skyward as grateful hands attempt to shield the glare of the sun while they gaze upward. He lands at the base of the monument hoping this tribulation has ended. But, Zeus will have none of that.

The ground shakes once more as the golden gift spins faster than before. Zeus appears in the blur that marks the twirling monument.

"You think to outwit the gods?"

Every weary citizen drops what they are doing and fearfully awaits.

"I order you a new blessing which you will find you will never end." Zeus laughs hysterically as the spinning golden faces stop. Zeus's face transitions into the jutting roaring Lion's.

"No mercy was shown to me in life. Neither will you receive mercy. We bring you four torments. I bring you the third."

The people praising their hero moments earlier move away from his side. They curse him for bringing another damnation upon them.

"Since you are devoted to Hercules, I give you the power of reverence to your mortal god without ceasing."

The sinister face laughs as it looks down mocking the human god.

The people do not hear any rumbling or feel any shaking. They stand in confusion wondering when the curse will begin. Everything seems eerily normal. They begin to ask what this new curse will bring. Hercules watches them talking, but no sound comes out their mouth's. It looks, by the speaker's actions, they can hear their own words. For, if they could not hear themselves speaking they would not be shouting to the one whom is trying to listen.

Hercules feels slightly amused watching this silence play-out. It's as

if he is watching a theatrical comedy where all the worlds a stage. Realizing this curse cannot possibly be as devastating as the two prior, he is more relaxed to find the cure. He thinks *this is not so bad, they do not hurl insulting curses at me*. He sits to ponder how he might find a solution enjoying the quiet bustling street.

He notice a fire has broken out in a building at the edge of the acropolis. He sees a woman with her child dashing across the street away from the fire and smoke. An ox drawn wagon laden with heavy barrels of water races toward the burning building. Hercules suddenly realizes no one can hear the sounds of anything else except those they alone make. The woman and child will collide with the wagon because they do not hear the screams of the driver or the loud clapping sounds of the ox hoofs.

Hercules leaps to his feet and rushes toward the doser wagon. The driver is mystified to see his heavy wagon has stopped. He watches helplessly as his ox and cart rises skyward. The anxious man looks underneath his cart to see what he had not before. The child and lady pass under as he stares at the smiling hero hoisting the ox with one arm and his cart with the other. He returns his smile as Hercules sets him down. He races off again with a little helping push from Hercules.

This situation is worse than he thought. He watches several different areas of the street as one persons tries writing out their question, and another using illustrations to draw what their need is. It's as if the writings and drawing are invisible to anyone but the creator. He looks around and sees no one is able to communicate their very thoughts. It's not just outside sound they have been robbed of, but the treacherous gods have stolen their very ability to communicate to one another. Hercules now realizes how devastating this will become. Farmers will not know if the citizens need food. The injured and sick will not be able to ask for help. Hercules helplessly watches as fights of frustration flare up. The poor and less fortunate run and hide. The wealthy and powerful prepare to defend their fortune. A quiet war rages over all Greece.

“Come to me Pegasus!” Hercules flies off as he realizes the chink in the gods armor. Not even the all mighty and all knowing are able to

know what the future holds. This is evident by the result of their action. He thinks *there is nothing reverent by what is happening. This is irony at it's best.*

“To Mount Olympus, away!” His mind tells himself *the vain gods must see all that's happening, and must quarrel in whom is the blame?* His righteous anger rises inside him kindling his heart's furious flame. *This is the time to strike all of them and end all of their selfish games.*

He lands on the steps to the temple of Olympus. “My dear friend, this is where we must part. What I do now I wish you no part of. So, I command you fly off!”

Pegasus stands firm refusing to obey his lifelong friend.

“I go to push the gods temple off the top this mountain. I want you to leave here and be safe.”

Still, the white winged beast stands fast.

“If I fail, the gods most certainly will torture me all eternity with the most painful suffering they can contrive. The one thing I could not stand is to look over and see you alongside enjoying the same infinite torment.” He swipes the side of Pegasus cheek. “Now go!”

The stubborn stallion leans backward, as if to battle his friend. He buries his rear hooves in the ground as his front rare up and begin kicking in the air.

Hercules heart breaks as he grabs his friend by his stamping legs. He twirls the beast round and round before throwing him into the far distant sky.

Great sorrow fills his heart for what he has done. *I thank you faithful friend for never leaving my side. I pray one day you will forgive me, but my brave loyal friend must not die.*

He leaps mightily up the steps toward the temple foundation. He lands near the center of the base, and then begins pushing the gargantuan structure. He scream, “Mount Olympus!” He feels the vibrating friction as the temple slightly moves. Off to his side he notices the towering Hermes coming to do battle with him. He does not flinch from his task. Every musde pulsates in his body as his legs crush the stone beneath his feet. He remains determine to finishing these merciless gods or die trying. Hercules turns his head away to defend

against Hermes mighty blows. He is willing to sacrifice his mortal body to save his immortal soul. He suddenly realizes the temple is sliding faster. He turns his toward his foe to see he's actually helping him push the temple.

"I've come to help you Hercules. It's time to end the reign of vanity and selfishness these self-righteous immortals hold over mankind."

"I thought you come to destroy me." He stares at Hermes as all Mount Olympus shakes. Hermes continues to shove and smile.

Both watch as the rear portico snaps and crashes off in the clouds. Hercules feels amazing satisfaction, but a slight pain grows in his heart. It confuses him.

"Search your heart Hercules. This is not right. I know another way to beat the gods. Especially your father Zeus. Show mercy this moment and they will be indebted to you. Trust me!"

He knows now the source of his heart's pain. It screams *mercy!*

The thought paralyzes him into submission. Both wait for the army of gods frantically descending. Hermes whispers two last words. "Trust me."

Ares prepares to thrust his enormous spear as Poseidon rares back to launch his giant silver trident. Hermes yells to Zeus, "If you truly be just gods, you must justly judge this god before you!"

His claim forces Zeus to loudly order all the angry gods, "Stop!"

The only power keeping this holy hoard from smashing Hercules to pieces is the holy law that binds this band together. A god must be given an opportunity to defend their action before punishment can be carried out. The legal gauntlet has been cast down. Zeus knows without justice there can be no righteous order. Without law Mount Olympus would fall in to chaos.

Zeus commands, "Restrain him. He will have his trial."

Angry Ares grabs the miniscule Hercules by the back of his head. Zeus feels the debauchery inside this god of war's heart. Alert to his intent to break Hercules neck, Zeus sticks the edge of his lightening bolt scepter to Ares throat.

Zeus states, "You will be given the same sentiment you judge this moment. Decide now!"

Furious Ares shakes as he stares over all the gods faces. He watches them pondering the possibility one less immortal god might make, and their joy of his demise. He obliges King Zeus as he moves his hand off Hercules head and denches it around Hercules arm. Ares again stares at the gods faces seemingly turning sad that he obeyed. "Where will you have me take him King Zeus?"

"To the temple dungeon. Chain and shackle him. Then, throw him in the empty cage of the Titans where he will stay till he is tried before the gods."

Hercules solemnly waits for the justice he believe he will never get. The weight of his captivity is not as heavy as the thought his people perish. He has no one to pray to for help in this direr matter. His worried head can do nothing but hang down in shame.

Off in the dark he hears a faint whispering. He cannot hear the words but he knows it's a poem. He grabs the massive brass bars and clangs his miserable shackles. He presses his face against them for a closer listen. The words still are too faint to hear pass his breathing. He rest while holding his breath as ears strain to hear the words. The tender voice softly whispers the song of the poem.

"There's a place no man has ventured. An island no human could live. It's where deity store their treasure. Gifts gotten no god would give. There is a room in a secret chamber. Under colossus feet you must sneak Where no stairs are covered with amber. Below is where you must creep. When you lay you can hear it beating. A gold box is where it stored. One word can reveal the thing hiding. And make well the king once more. Take care, beware of the tempting. Don't touch what belongs to the gods. Be swift for the king's life is fleeting. Fight the giants and win his love."

Hercules is suddenly overwhelmed by the knowledge his father Zeus may be dying. This news is much greater than his anger toward father. He stretches the chains that trap him to find the godly magic they are made of are stronger than even his mighty strength. He leans his weeping head against the cold bars as he submits to the futility of his situation.

Off in the distance he hears keys jingling. He listens to a

conversation that is garble to his ears. He knows it comes from the top of the stairs leading down to this dungeon. Two sets of footsteps grow louder. He sees Hermes approaching as the dungeon keeper says, "You have five minutes with the traitor." Hermes waits for the keeper to ascend the stairs before speaking.

"Hercules, I have been chosen to defend you."

Hercules asks, "Can a god defend a half mortal?"

"Not only will I represent you, but I have been demoted to demigod status also."

Hercules does not know what he can possibly say.

"The gods saw I had helped you. Their verdict was my demotion. I am also faced with the same sentence they give you."

Hercules shakes his head side to side. He has no words to explain how sorry he is.

"The gods are so angry they have given us a gift they are not ever aware of."

Hercules's puzzled face looks at Hermes wondering it might be?

"I must represent you in your absence. None of the gods are willing to let you out of your prison. And, your father refuses to take your power until a conviction is rendered."

"How is this a gift Hermes?"

"This will give us time to do what you must now do. I will drag your defense on as long as I am allowed. You must find a way to heal your father and win his love. I too heard the singing poem."

Hercules prepares to ask him how he's suppose to loosen his captivity and find where the secret island is.

Hermes places his first finger to his lips warning Hercules to be quiet. "One other helps us. This god must not be known." He sticks two objects inside Hercules's tunic while smiling. "I go now. My time is up. Play the tune exactly at the moment the sun rises to reveal what is hidden from all man. That is where your journey begins"

Both demigods listen to the dungeon keeper as he returns.

Hermes whispers, "Save your father and you will bring justice again to the land. Fly five leagues due east of the Cyclades in the Aegean Sea, and then blow..."

The keeper orders, "You are finished talking." He then walks between Hermes and the imprisoned Hercules, forcing Hermes toward the stairs.

Hermes last words are "Look up and pray, for your redemption draws near."

Hercules watches the smiling Hermes being ushered up the steps as his search for an answer to the clue that Hermes just left.

A very small trail of light shines on the floor far away. He follows its path along the floor and sees it bends upward. He surmises there must be a window on that wall. But, it must be hidden by the beams that run along the ceiling. He fumbles his hand inside his tunic to find the second item Hermes put. It is a vial. He lifts it to his mouth to twist the stopper off with his teeth. The contents smells sweet. He hears it slosh around and realizes it's a potion made of the moss of Endure. He pours one drop on his chains to see what reaction it might produce. He watches as a link vanishes. His hand is free to assist his other. With in moments he is free of the chains and the bars.

He quietly maneuvers toward the light. He sees the window and finds a surprise. His redemption really does draw nigh.

"My dear friend. After all I have done to you, you still stand by my side. I am truly sorry."

Hercules leaps to the window and places a few drops on the bars. The bottoms of two disappear. He summons his strength and bends them up far enough for him to escape. His face turns sad to see he has injured Pegasus when he tossed him. His wing bends where the other does not. He leaps on Pegasus. He pours a drop on the injury. Pegasus reacts to his wing healing by rearing up. He watches the bend disappear along with his pain.

Hercules softly speaks, "Off to the Aegean Sea my friend. We have not a moment to spare."

They arrive just before the sunrise at the exact location Hermes stated. From inside his tunic he withdraws the godly gift. It is a flute made with five short golden tubes bound together with a golden strand. He thinks *there is only one god or goddess that possess hair like this. But she would never help me.*

The tip of the sun peeks over the horizon as the pair hover. He blows the flute that plays its own special melody. He sees the ocean open as great waves percolate up and up. White sea foam bubbles on the surface as a fountain of white water explodes upward.

“Pegasus, hurry rise upward!”

His trusty steed's wings frantically dig at the air to stay ahead of the growing gusher as he races up. The sound of the ocean settles as the pair hover in the white mist of the clouds. Hercules notices a shiny brass object protruding the mist ahead. They slowly fly toward it.

“Great Zeus!” Hercules knows what it is and is very careful to steer away. They circle around as they descend, staying as far from it as they can. It holds a spearhead as large as a house. Hercules determines its height to be at least one thousand feet tall. They glide down below the clouds following the path of its arm.

The first lines of the poem sing in his memory as the riddle begins to make sense. He sees the distant shoreline and all that is between. There are dozens of giant bronze and gold statues that range from hundreds to a thousand feet tall. Some look as if they're trophies to the gods. One figure holds a discus he is about to hurl. Another statue holds a javelin that is about to soar free. The pair quietly and cautiously continue downward. Hercules recalls the warning to sneak and creep. But most of all, not to touch what belongs to the gods.

He settles on an empty spot of ground in the center of the statues. “Pegasus, remain here ready to fly at a moments notice. Do not touch anything except the ground you stand on. Be quiet. We do not want to alert the gods we are here.” He quickly walks off looking for the giant Colossus.

His head spins around looking. He thinks *I never thought finding the Colossus would be so hard.*, He is finding it very difficult amongst figures that dwarf the ninety fathom tall bronze brute. It was so tall vast ships would sail side by side between its giant legs. Its feet stood on each side of the wide harbor entrance. Legend says it just vanished, and folklore suggest a stormy sea reclaimed it. He knows now the gods stole it for their own treasury.

He finds Colossus. It hides in the shadow of humungous golden

chariot. He realizes this giant chariot belong to Helios, god of the sun. Inside it is a mountain of gold crowns, diamonds, rubies, and sapphires. Gems trickle down like a mountain spring that flows into a glistening pond of jewels. He carefully maneuvers around the mound making sure not to touch even one rolling gem.

Mountains, hills, and mounds glow with riches in every direction. He fixes his eyes on the path he must take while fighting his temptation.

A gradual sweet music comes from somewhere that echos all around. Hercules hurries to hide at the base of the Colossus and watch to find whom is playing the musical harp. He sees it! The golden strings glisten in the sunlight playing and moving on its on accord. He determines the enchanted music is trying to draw out the unsuspecting. Hercules crouches amongst the darker shadows and waits for it to go by. He worries that Pegasus might be discovered, but the magical harp heads in the opposite direction.

He concentrates on the singing poem and recalls *there's a room in a secret chamber. Under Colossus feet you must sneak*. Hercules looks up to the face of the giant and sees the statue is really alive. Its face turns very slowly as the bronze head rubs and squeals upon its metal neck. He watches its gold eyes searching the ground for trespassers. He concludes that is what the poem is trying to say. To stay away from Colossus's gaze he must sneak behind the statue to find the secret entrance. Carefully he moves behind the bronze beast.

Hercules arrives at the heel of Colossus. The music of the traveling harp grows louder. He must hurry and find the hidden entrance before he is discovered. The giant's feet perch upon a raised seamless marble pedestal. No cracks or lines mark a possible entrance way. He becomes nervous hearing the strings of music coming near. It sounds as if it near Colossus other foot. He taps the stone lightly to find a hollow spot that may suggest a hidden room. He carefully walks the length of the base tapping. *Here it is*, He wants to punch a hole and break open a passage, but he knows that will definitely alert the approaching traveling harp, and possibly wake the giant. He suddenly remembers the vial tucked inside his tunic and thinks how it dissolved his chains. He pours a line of the liquid on the stone surface about head high. He waits and watches

as the substance flows down. The stone vanishes before his eyes forming a jagged door. Hercules leaps inside just as the strings clearly pluck as it rounds the rear of Colossus left foot.

He hides just inside the passage while peeking outside. The sound heads his way. He decides if the traveling harp discovers the entrance, he will snatch it and crush it. Hopefully, it won't wake the giants.

"Heee," echos quietly off in the distance. The sound by Pegasus immediately changes the direction of the harp as it goes to investigate the source of the sound. Hercules heart silently thanks his winged friend before moving further into the dark passage. He hope Pegasus is not under attack or hurt, but he knows he has one chance to save his father's life. He scurries along.

A glow ahead lights the far wall. Its the only thing he can see in the darkness. He blindly progresses towards it with outstretched hands. He feels his way along while hoping he does not touch what belongs to the gods, and hoping he does not fall in a trap.

He makes it to the glow and finds it is a heap of shiny amber. He suddenly remembers the passage from the poem giving him a due to what he must do. He thinks *Where no stairs are covered with amber. Below is where you must creep.* He passes his hands over the heap as giant hand shadows pass overhead. In startles him a second as his mind realizes these menacing hands belong to him. He desires to grab a handful of the magical glowing amber, but he knows this stuff belongs to the gods. His mind hurries to reason how he might retrieve it so he can find the hidden steps. His hand accidentally bumps the caldron containing the amber which causes it to tilt. He nervously waits to see if he alerted the gods. Nothing happens.

Hercules thinks this must be how to move the amber without touching it. Very slowly, Hercules tilts the waist high container. The amber pours down on the ground and "tings" as it spreads downward. The glow reveals the hidden stairway as the light shows parts of the stairs below. He dumps most of the caldron bringing all the steps alive. The steps shimmer with pulses of glimmer inviting him to come and see. He leave a small amount in the swinging vessel to light his return path.

He creeps downward as the vast chamber reveals its treasure.

Mounds of golden coins flow over top a sea silver. A golden halo shimmers that lights the most of the chamber. Hercules draws close as he recognizes what it is. It is the ram skin that heals all mortal injuries in a moment, and can even bring the dead to life. He ventures further past the Golden Fleece as he approaches an armory of godly weapons. His eyes feast upon this godly arsenal that his desiring hands so much want to touch.

The owner of each object has their name inscribed over it. He sees Eros' bow, which holds the power over those shot by it to hate or love. Next to it is the Shield of Zeus. No mortal object can penetrate its metal and has the power to blind an entire army. There is the Sword of Peleus. Its wheeler is made unbeatable. He moves along staring. Atop the arsenal rack of the gods sits the Cyclopes helmet. It renders the wearer invisible. He stops in reverence to view Cronus Scythe. It was an unbreakable weapon used to kill the father of all the gods. His name was Kronus.

His eyes marvel at the last weapon on the long rack. It is the golden bow belonging to Zeus. If ever there were a present he desire, it would be this one. Its arrows always hit its desired destination and will fly as far as the eye can see. It has the power to project its missiles through any substance. It also possesses the power to kill or heal. It has but one caveat. Only a god has the power to draw the bow's string it back. His eyes notice Achilles might armor. But his stare is tempted back on Zeus's bow.

Many other most desirable objects fill this massive chasm. His heart warns him to hurry along, screaming *time is of the essence!* His mind refocuses on the poem.

When you lay you can hear it beating. A gold box is where it's stored. He tries to reason what this might mean, but is left clueless to its intention. He thinks I have to just trust the words for they must answer for themselves. He struggles to finds a spot on the floor that is not covered with treasure. He lays down and attempts to settle his body, heart, and mind.

He gradually notices the slight thumping sound. He remains still as his eyes search for the golden box the poem sings of. Toward the rear of

the chamber is a large gold cube. He carefully steps over and maneuvers around the godly obstacles, making sure not to brush against one. He stands in front of the solid gold block. There are no lines or markings on the monolith. It is seamless and perfect. Hercules was expecting a box. Not this impossible block. His frustration invites him to just rip it apart. But, his touch will wake the giants.

The thought of his father dying plays on his mighty heart. It brings tears to his futile hands that can only cover his mortal eyes. His head somberly slides side to side as his sorry mind admits his defeat.

CHAPTER 4: COURT OF THE GODS

Each of the gods take turns recalling all the wrong Hercules has ever done. They sit in their throne's accusing Zeus's son for even being born. Zeus has a sudden pain in his chest. His hands clench tight his throne's armrest as he leans back to brace his ailing body. This seems to weaken the throbbing at the center of the pain in his chest. Hermes watches and notices. The other vain gods have no compassion except to force their selfish points of view.

Hermes rises and pours a cool goblet of nectar. He humbly offers the king his gift. Zeus acknowledges him with a slight bobbing of his head. The king sips the nectar that seems to alleviate his pain. Hermes respectfully replies "Your Honor," as he returns and sits again. Hermes listens to them bicker. It seems the king grows tired, as he orders, "Court today is done!"

Every godly face seems confused and angry to hear this godly proclamation. They have barely begun to list their charges. Zeus realizes now how all these gods are jealous of, or how much they hate, his mortal son. His pain and this revelation continue to pierce his ailing heart.

"I go to my chamber to rest from all your vain babbling. You may continue to make condemning evidence once I return from a needed rest. Temporarily adjourned."

Hermes feels a temporary relief. This recess will buy more time for

Hercules. But, he senses the king's hidden sickness is becoming much worse and more obvious. He realizes this court and jury is not about Hercules treason, but it is a race against time itself. Once these selfish gods catch on to Zeus's weakening condition they will tear this temple apart to steal his seat of power.

Hermes leaves the great hall of the gods searching for a more peaceful place to organize his legal defense. He goes to walk the Elysian fields. The sweet flora relaxes his mind as he stroll over the peaceful rolling pastures. His thoughts are momentarily interrupted by little giggling children chasing dancing golden butterflies. He stops to absorb all the wonderment of heaven as a small nestling catches one. His wandering mind is amused with this tapestry of the afterlife.

He hears the rushing brook hid by rolling green hills. He journeys over top to investigate. He spots the babbling peaceful waters and the shade tree next to the stream. Its cool shade invites him come visit. Hermes glides over as a plan forms in his mind. The sweet grass, the cool shade, and the soothing water relax him. Within moments of sitting he falls asleep.

His mind travels in this mysterious journey. Thick clouds give way revealing the majestic island of Ishtar. Veils of mist drift off the towering monuments to the gods. His body flutters down and down through falls of cool gray vapor that stretches thinner into strands that change into an invisible blur. He spins his head to perceive how small he's become. His eyes follow the tall cold towers as he races the gold and bronze river to the ground.

He finally settles in a pasture. He leans back and notices all the sleeping giants. His mind prompts him don't meddle with the metal, it's the precious poison of this greedy place. His spirit glides along the footpath where no man has walked before. He finds a set of footprints that lead him to a door. He passes through a golden harp that plays a lovely tune. His spirit tastes its bitter essence as he passes through a room. He floats down the glowing steps to the chamber of the gods.

He wisp back and forth behind the crouching Hercules. He finds there is no way to consult with him. He can only circle the fallen hero and watch him weep. Hermes spirit hears the sound of steady beating

coming from the gold block.

Hermes feels the disparity and understands the dilemma. He knows the solution to the problem, but he has no way to tell Hercules. He was the only god present when his father locked his heart inside the golden block. He is also the only god to hear the key word Zeus locked it with. He sealed it in a manner that makes it in possible to unlock by other means. Zeus made the cube divinely indestructible. There is only one way to open this golden riddle. He has to make Hercules say the one word key. But how?

Hermes spirit settles over Hercules in his attempt to comfort him. He tingles as they both meet. Hercules reacts to the encounter with a momentary cessation, alerting Hermes *he must feel my presence*. Hermes joins with his spirit.

Hercules mind pictures his father's deathbed. His heart hurts watching the gods carry his holy remains away. Hermes interjects better times into Hercules memories. He replaces these sober moments with childhood recollections when Zeus would magically appear.

“My son, can you see me?”

Hercules searches for his hiding father as he listens to him giggle. He feels the joy of his presence as he sneaks over to the source of his sound. He helps his son by sticking his belly slightly in his view. Hercules sees him sticking partway out. He delightfully dashes to his hiding spot screaming. “I found you father behind the column!” But, his father vanishes the second he gets near. His giggle comes from another direction, as the game continues on.

The delightful memory causes Hercules to unintentionally speak into his hands, “Father.”

He is startled by the sudden sound forcing his tears to stop. He drops his hands off his swollen cheeks as the golden box dissolves away. In the air in front of his face floats the beating heart of his father. A halo of gold light surrounds it. He leans over the deep red heart as his eyes follow the pulsing veins and arteries. A bright slither festers in a dark patch.

Hermes feels Zeus scream out. He immediately is awoken from his sleep.

He hurries to rub his eyes and force attention to his waking mind and body. He rises and soars his way back to Zeus's side.

"I heard you call great king. What is your problem?"

Zeus tosses back and forth while clutching his chest.

"I have great pain in my heart. I believe I am dying."

Hermes rushes over to his side. He sets on the king's bed and then grabs the king's arm. He whispers in the king's ear, "Trust me Zeus. You will feel great relief in a moment."

Zeus screams in agony as he rolls off his bed. On his hands and knees he sucks a great breath. His eyes stretch wide open as he holds his breath in place. His right hand covers his chest, as his face fills with questions. It's as if new life fills him as the pain disappears. He looks to Hermes for the answers his mind knows he holds. He foreknew his healing heart.

Before he demands his answers, his eyes are alerted to a thieving act. He stares to see his son holding a wooden splinter in his fingers, as he stands before his healing heart. In this moment, Zeus realizes the feat his escaped son had to face to find this treasure. But, the only thing he's stole is the hidden splinter in his father's heart. Zeus immediately comes to Hercules in a vision.

"I am sorry son for the way I have treated you. You must leave now! You have woken all the giants. Take my golden bow and quiver filled with endless arrows. This gift may help you survive. I love you son. Quickly, go!"

Hercules fills with joy. These are the words he's dreamed one day to hear. The ground grumbles with a great earthquake. A gargantuan brass hand thrust into the earth. He retrieves father's heart and gently slides inside his tunic. He leaps for the bow and quiver as the chamber collapses all around him. A giant golden hand penetrates down through the chamber. He grabs a golden arrow and shoots his arrow in the massive hand. Hercules leaps and grab the golden arrow. The hand scoops through the chamber as Hercules holds tight to the arrow. It lifts up giving Hercules a way out. He thrust up through the crust as dust blinds Hercules, and his father's anxious vision.

Zeus enters the temple chamber while staring below. He notices

the mesmerized gods staring too. Zeus takes his thrown with a new vigor. He watches this gigantic army try and finish off his son. He frantically thinks of a way to help him. But all the gods remind him of the rules. Ishtar is the most sacred secret place of the gods. No man or god is allowed there unless all the gods agree. Zeus demands an immediate unanimous consensus, but the villainous gods and goddesses state "These things take time." And, "A decision on this magnitude takes great thought."

Zeus yells, "Silence!" He thrust his mighty scepter into the floor that forces holy reverence. He shakes in anger which causes the chamber to rumble, but he surrenders to the gods to prevent the heavens from being pulled apart. He whispers to Hercules, "Kill the giants with my blessings."

Hercules rises to the light and sees a dozen giant faces searching the ground. He is lifted to the golden giant face beneath its probing eyes. The giant crushes Hercules with his closing metal fingers. They screech and squeal as they squeeze closed. Zeus's heart pains him greater than before, He lowers his head into his trembling hands announcing his son's final defeat. The other gods portray smirking smiles of victory and justices. All except the faces of Hermes, and mysteriously, Hera's. Zeus has an awkward feeling where there should be none. He senses hope.

The gods alert the king something unusual is happening. He immediately removes his hands from his eyes and looks down at the Ishtar giants. Giant finger pry open as his son screams, "Mount Olympus!" Amazement paints Zeus's face. Hercules stretches his body upward and snaps the giant's golden digit off. Colossus retaliates by smashing his fist into Hercules, but the son of Zeus leaps to safety as the golden metal monster looses its hand. He lands on the shoulder of Colossus. A rush of wind blows toward him. He slides down the bronze tunic to avoid the smashing bronze fist. Colossus face shatters in the impact. An avalanche of bronze metal bounces off as a bronze dust cloud rains down.

In this moment, Zeus feels an unusual urge. It's as if his body is in the very hands of his son. Hercules reaches in his tunic and grasp his

father's heart making sure it still remains secure. Zeus reacts by grasping his chest where his should be. His nervous palm feels the beat of two hearts with his hand where none should exist. Hercules feels it too.

He leaps onto another giant. A loud crashing sound causes Hercules to look back toward Colossus. A massive bronze disc is lodged in the Colossus chest where he was a second ago. A crack forms splitting him in two. Colossus falls to the ground destroyed. Hercules heart races. Zeus can feel it too. In this second, both their hearts join in unison, as if they now beat as one. Zeus feels everything Hercules feels. Hercules sees everything his father sees. Both now battle the giants together.

Zeus's heart reveals a godly secret to Hercules. Each of the remaining giants were created with vain hands. Hercules realizes his father's plan. He climbs to the golden neck of this javelin thrower and waits for the next nearing tower to thrash him. He leaps onto the waistline of a sword wielding bronze beast. This giant stabs his sword at the spot Hercules leaps from on the javelin thrower. A javelin stabs into the giant swordsman's belly. Hercules leaps and grabs the belt on the waist of the javelin thrower. The javelin rip's up through the metal swordsman. A crack forms running from the right chest across to the left abdomen. A loud metal screeching sound screams out as the top half slides off the bottom torso. Both sections of the swordsman smash to the ground.

Zeus's heart screams, "Yes!"

Hercules is overwhelmed with his father's excited approval. His muscles pulsate with a new exponential energy he has never felt before.

The other gods look down in horror. A gold hand reaches toward Hercules. He avoids them by leaping to the golden strap holding to the bowman's quiver. The bowman's hands reach toward Hercules. A missile soars through the air. Hercules looks to see the wrecking ball shot-put slam down upon the javelin thrower. The ball as big a two houses cracks the giant in half. Hercules hurries up the strap of the bowman. Before he reaches its shoulder, the swooshing of air passes over his ducking head. The giant' bowman's head is lopped in to the air. Its hands continue to search its chest as they continue hunt for

Hercules. He leaps onto the shield of a giant soldier just as the headless giant's body is sliced through by its own blade. The sword lifts up as the giant hands stop searching. Its metal body slowly sequels as it crashes to the ground. Hercules moves just in time as he hears the propelling gold spear stabs through the shield. It pulls out as he climbs higher to the top of the shield. The warrior giant holding the shield turns it toward his face. It reaches in front of his shield to grab Hercules. The soldier slices with its sword through the shield and severs its probing arm. Hercules flies on to the giant soldier's chest. As he lands, the warrior thrust his damaged shield into the chest of the giant soldier. Hercules immediately leaps toward the approaching shot-put thrower. He grabs the end of his swinging sash. The upper part of the giant soldier's body cracks and folds away before smashing to the ground. The warrior statue swings his blade at the dangling Hercules. He lift his body as the blade passes under him slicing the lean off. The Shot-put thrower tilts and slams to the ground.

Pegasus joins the battle. Hercules glides down on the floating body of his steed. "Away Pegasus!" The second they fly away a sword slashes across the area. Pegasus gallops up and up past the reach of the warrior. Hercules looks down and watches the sea return. He stares at the one armed warrior as it disappears below the rushing waves.

Zeus yells out, "That's my son." He vindictively pokes his pointing finger towards the faces of defeated eyes. "That's my son!" His face overfills with superfluous anger as prepares to launch lightening blast. He's suddenly overtaken with a strange emotion. It's so powerful he drops his scepter in confusion. His heart is overfilled with this most strange desire, His weaken bodies orders him to sit. It's as if something marvelous is happening. He feels he must yield to this invisible substance that fills him with great joy and eternal peace.

Hercules feels his father's gentle heart is experiencing something inexplicable.

Zeus tells his son, "I feel childish. I am light as a heavenly feather. What is happening?"

"You are filled with compassion and forgiveness."

Zeus strangely asks, "Is that what I feel?"

Hercules places his hand over their hearts and softly caresses his dear father's. "I feel it too."

Zeus looks at all the goods as he giggles. "I forgive you." He stands and laughs while walking around the holy chamber. He points and states, "I for give you, and you, and you!"

All the gods believe the king has gone berserk. But, they know he still contains the power to destroy everyone of them.

Zeus enjoys the festive feeling. "I don't hate you, or you, or you."

All the gods except one reverently kneel in repenting submission.

Zeus stands mighty. He feels all powerful. The gods and goddesses pray to Zeus asking for his forgiveness. Zeus notices the one goddess not in attendance. He sees her in the shadows hiding. She is alert to his gaze as she prepares to retreat. A just anger slowly rises in Zeus once more.

"Hera, come forth!"

She stops instantly in her retreat. His commanding voice grabs her and forces her to obey. She approaches stating, "Yes my lord."

"Of all the gods and goddesses you have the most to repent. You have hated my mighty son since his birth. You have plotted so many plans to destroy him that I cannot count them all."

Zeus's eyes fill once more with vengeful fire as he raises his mighty scepter. Lightening crackles as his staff fully charges preparing to pronounce righteous judgment. "Yet, you still refused my forgiving grace!"

Hera humbles herself before the king. She kneels before him with her bowed head. "Do what you must my king. For your punishment is just!"

Zeus stabs his bolt down, as Hercules crashes open the temple doors.

"Stop father!"

It takes all Zeus's strength to hold back his wrath, but he manages to just in time. He freezes in place as Pegasus lands at his throne. Hercules dismounts and bows.

Zeus is angered by his son's judicial announcement, but his new sense of compassion warns him to wait.

Hercules rises. "I wish to show you something." From within his tunic he pulls the flute. "I submit this in evidence that Hera should not be condemned, or even accused."

He hands it to Zeus as the king orders Hera, "Arise." Zeus asks, "How does this exonerate your wicked stepmother?"

"Please study what binds the flute together."

Hera's hung head stares around towards Hercules just to find him smiling at her. Her eyes burst with tears.

Zeus sees the golden strand. Hercules asks, "Whom else but my mother could have bonded the flute together?"

Hera's eyes sparkle to hear the words her heart has always so desired.

Hercules continues his defense of Hera. "Without this flute I could not have raised the secret island of Ishtar. Without her whispering poem I would not have been able to solve the source of your heart ache." He looks over at Hera and nods his thankfulness. Hera accepts his revelation as truth by her confirming nod of gratefulness. "And, I would not have been able to escape your confinement father if she did not faithfully trust me to defeat the impossible. It was Hera whom gave me a way of escape with this. May I introduce my next piece of evidence?" Hercules hands father the potion of endure.

Zeus opens the tiny vial and sniffs it. "This smells very, very sweet."

May I ask you to introduce the vial to the jury?" Hercules knows his father's change of heart has delivered him from what gods normally smell.

Zeus hands the vial back to Hercules. Hercules holds the vial beneath each god and goddess nose as he rounds the chamber. Each of them reacts to the pungent poison by coughing and sneezing out the potent stuff. Each proclaims the ghastly substance as the moss of Endure.

Zeus asks, "Why did it smell so sweet to me?"

"Father, it's because your vain ailing heart has changed.

Zeus feels slighted by this summation. He looks at his son wondering how he could be so callous.

"I say this in love father. It is true. But, you are now wiser than you

have ever been because your compassion makes you new." Hercules bows his righteous head.

Zeus knows this is true. "While I do not enjoy your proclamation, I too agree with your loving truth."

Hercules pronounces, "I rest my case."

Zeus stares at Hera's watery eyes and asks, "Why? Why have you wasted all these years on trivial trickery?" He stands ready to forgive her, but he needs to have more of a reason than a lifelong practice of deception.

"There are two reasons my king."

Zeus states, "Have I not always treated you fairly, giving you respect, power, and godly gifts?"

"Yes my lord.

"Have I not trusted you with all my secrets?"

"Again, yes my lord."

"And, have I not cherished you faithfully always?" As he finish speaking these words his new heart reminds him of his past lust in earthly women. He looks to her eyes and begs her for forgiveness in his infidelity. "I am sorry for the pain I have caused you Hera." He bows is shameful head.

"I forgive you husband." She watches as he now cries. She compassionately stares knowing these tears cleans this sin forever changing his new found heart.

She draws near him to comfort him, but he instead lunges with his longing embrace. The temple rumbles once more. Both cleans away the eternal sickening distrust, as a new flame is infinitely ignited. They rest in its warmth a moment longer, holding onto the burning love inside.

Hercules interrupts the special moment. "I introduce my last piece of evidence. I end my defense." He reaches inside his tunic and then hands his father his heart.

Zeus stares in his son's eyes, "I only trusted you when I hid my heart to protect it from the vain gods. I knew one day they would attempt to overthrow my power and try and kill me."

"I found that out when I cried out father. I am the only one that could have called you that."

Hera takes her turn to interrupt there special moment. "Do I not get a chance to answer my defense?"

Zeus's hands gently embraces her arms as he moves at arms distance away. "You have my ear dear."

"There was reason I acted so. I was there when you locked your heart away. I hid in the chambers shadows. Do you remember when you took it from your chest my king?"

Zeus's mind recalls the moment.

"You plucked it out and then prepared to settle your heart inside the box."

Zeus's mind replays the memory in a vision as he follows along.

"This is very important. Do you remember hearing a startling sound drawing you attention away from your heart?"

His mind remembers there was something unusual about that moment, *but I looked and saw nothing.*

"I saw what you did not."

Zeus's eyes look strangely at Hera asking her to reveal her hidden secret.

"I saw a sparkling slither slide into your outstretched heart when you eyes looked away."

Zeus stands in anger waiting for her. "Please continue."

"You returned your gaze upon your heart while reacting to the small prick of pain. Not seeing anything unusual, you locked the golden box safely securing your infected heart."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Remember my king. At that time I found out your lust for another. It would not have been the proper time for you to believe me."

Zeus's mouth stretches as his remorseful breath sucks his cheeks up in agreement.

"I waited in hiding for you to leave. I waited to find the culprit wishing you ill."

Hera looks around the temple chamber as Zeus senses her reluctance to proceed. He knows the perpetrator is here. Zeus stands facing the circle of seated gods. He draws high his bolt of lightening.

Zeus firmly warns, "I give that god or goddess one chance to come

forward and defend their treason.” His eyes search for any reaction that might reveal this god or goddess. He bolt remains fixed in ready position as he says, “Continue on my love.”

Hercules mounts Pegasus. He circles in the air over top these nervous deities awaiting his stepmother to speak.

“I watched as the Helmet of Darkness materialized atop the gods rack of weapons. That is when I first saw him as he rematerialized.”

Zeus knows half the suspects in this room have been eliminated. He now focuses his attention on all the gods.

“I knew no god would believe me. They would have attributed my accusation to jealousy. For every god and goddess was aware of your philandering ways. I too though you would act the same my husband. I was too ashamed and embarrassed to come forth.”

Zeus understands now how insignificantly he treated her and why she'd hide the truth. He was not worthy of her love or trust. His shameful head hangs slightly in his embarrassment. But, not enough to relieve his eyes off the gods.

“I knew I must wait for the right time. I would hold this burden for ever if it required it. But, I was going to tell you when I was sure you either would believe me, or if you became too ill. The later happened first. During this time you thought I hated your son. It seems I gave you every reason to believe so. All my actions seem I was attempting his assassination. I never would have let that happen. I was just preparing him to do what was impossible. All his trials were to give him strength to complete the most important task he must ever face. All his pain would develop compassion, and all his suffering to give him the necessary wisdom he would most desperately need. And he handsomely defeated the giants of Ishtar, for that I am so very proud of. For this I will never apologize. Hercules, please know this. I always suffered alongside you. I secretly wept when you wept. I always wanted to be the godly mother you so desired but never had. I truly wanted to hold and hug you, I made sure that your other mother did.” Hera falls on the crystal floor under the weight of her tears. “This culprit here also disguised himself as me when you family was murdered, I had nothing to do with it.”

ALMIGHTY HERCULES

Hercules heart is doing what it so longed for, to love her and forgive her. He so wants to hold her and comfort her for the very first time in his life. But, he knows he must hold fast until the attempted murder is unveiled.

Zeus's comforting voice asks her, "My dear, for the last time tell me who he is!"

CHAPTER 5: MOUNT OLYMPUS ERUPTS

Hera watches from her humble position. Zeus lowers the greatest of all his gift suggesting Hera take his heart and protect it. His furious roving eyes steadily search the circle of sitting gods. All the goddesses carefully rise from their throne's. They stare at the king as they remorsefully back away from the center of the chamber.

Hera sneaks his offered heart from off his off lowered hand. She softly clutches it to her chest.

Zeus quietly tells her, "Leave my dear. You know what to do."

Her fingers feel the steady pulsing beating next to her heart. Both her hands safely secure his tenderness and his life. She rises while replying, "My lord." Hera scurries away under the watchful protecting eyes of Zeus and Hercules.

The King's mind reasons which god might have a motive to attempt his life. He remembers how he has given good reason to every enraged face he looks at. In this moment, he pledges to himself to be a worthy just king hence. But, this insight still does not give just cause to the perpetrator's actions.

It's as if the gods may know. Their fear of Zeus's wrath helps uncover the concealed offender. The supposing innocent gods part way as if they are aware to his identity. Only one god now sits.

Zeus asks with great compassion, "Why Ares? Why would you do this thing? You are my son." Zeus sadly waits for his answer as his

righteous anger drains him weak.

Hercules hovers just behind Ares throne waiting for him to respond to father.

The god of war crushes his throne's golden arm rest with his mighty squeezing hands. Each one crackles as it pulverizes into gold powder. Yet, he defiantly refuses to defend his actions. His face cannot bare to stare at his father. He strains his gaze straight ahead.

Zeus asks, "Do you not know what you have done is deserving of death son?" He patiently waits for a response. None comes forth. "Please do not force me to do what I must."

Ares sternly states, "Do what you must good king." His response seems more of a threat than submission to Zeus's just findings.

Zeus's caught in a dilemma. He must be just or face a revolt. The other gods and goddesses will question the king's authority if just punishment goes unequal to to the extent of the crime in question. He has no choice in the matter but render the strictest of verdicts. Only one thing may change the situation. If Ares can explain a possible reason that averts treason, or a defense he was not part of this treacherous act. Either way, Ares must speak.

Ares continues staring ahead. "You want to know why father." The chamber freezes in silence. Every ear awaits his reason. "I'll tell you why." He begins to nervously shake in anger.

Zeus's compassion has a moment of weakness waiting to hear what he may have done to force his son to act so. He lowers his threatening bolt to compel Ares to speak what is in his heart.

Ares turns his head around and fixes his gaze on the hovering Hercules.

"I did it because of him!" Ares swats his brother as if he were a flying pest knocking him and the minute Pegasus outside the open temple doors. "

Zeus quickly raises his bolt and launches a warning at Ares feet. Ares jolts his feet away as he shoves his throne backward. The floor explodes sending dust upward. Another bolt materializes in Zeus's hand, Ares dives forward toward his father. Zeus drops his bolt as the pair wrestle for control. The chamber violently shakes shut the temple doors

trapping Hercules outside. The other gods and goddesses rush to the aid of Ares as the surprised Zeus lay restrained under his son's grasp.

Hercules leaps from Pegasus. He rushes to the monumental temple doors and begins to push with all his might. The doors move open slightly, but he cannot budge them open more. He sees what is keeping him from helping his father. A dozen set of royal legs are pushing back from their side of the doors. Hercules yells, "Mount Olympus!" He feels his holy strength greatly increase as he shoves the door. But, even with all his extraordinary might he cannot budge these determined gods. He yells to his father, "I'll find a way to help you!" He is left helpless as the doors slam shut. He listens as the gods locks them. The only thing he hears is the massive metal doors reverberate as the large beam slides inside securing the doors. He decides he must leave and find another way to save father.

He glides on Pegasus down to Athens's acropolis. The citizens gather round him as they both touch down. The people are once again thankful. They praise their hero freeing them from their curse. He listens to them speak as they explain when it happened. It would seem his father lifted the spell about the same time the giants were defeated.

He alerts them, "A great misfortune has occurred." The crowd grows silent. "My father Zeus no longer rules the heavens. A great evil now rules instead." Every eye watches their hero for encouragement on what is coming next, but he too is left with his head hung down in disbelief. A horror takes hold as the great golden faces spin again. The people stare in torment waiting for their last blessing.

The ground rumbles as it spin faster and faster. A foggy blur covers where the head spins. Everyone stares as Ares face appears over the blur.

"My all the gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus bless all the citizens of Greece." He laughs sinisterly. "So, you wish to offer your worship to this half god. Do so with our blessing."

Ares face dissolves as the dragon's face spreads fire. The people scream as they fall away. Hercules can only stand and hear what horror befalls them next. The dragon speaks.

"No mercy was shown to me in life. Neither will you receive mercy.

We bring you four torments. I bring you the last.”

“Since you are devoted to Hercules, I give you the power of repentance to your mortal god without ceasing.”

The dragon roars as it looks down mocking the human god.

All of a sudden the surrounding people are filled with urgency to turn to their neighbor and tell them every sin they committed against them. They are powerless to control their tongue. Even their deepest thoughts are not safe. The things they would never say are revealed.

A mother tells her children, “I wish I never had you.” She attempts to stop her next words by squeezing her rude mouth with her hand. But, her yelling mouth blurts out, “It's because of you I gave up a better life!” She chases after her youngsters as they dash off screaming, “We hate you, we've always hated you.”

Hercules learns this twisted curse is more about uncontrollable accusations than sorrowful repentance. These evil gods and goddesses have even corrupted evil and twisted it for wicked. He watches the good citizens violently begin to fight. He listens to them as they become more vile. Hercules thinks *They seem be getting some sort of distorted enjoyment by yelling louder and insulting deeper than their neighbor*. He whistles for his friend feeling the urgency to solve this last curse, before everyone destroys what is left of themselves.

“Pegasus, away!”

Hercules is beside himself. He has no where to go, or no one to turn to. His father is captive of the gods. He knows not where Hermes or Hera is. He thinks they are smart to run and hide somewhere far away from the other gods. His sad head thinks he cannot even converse with his dear departed mother Alcmene since the Pool of True Reflection is destroyed. He cannot go to Methuselah or ask any mortal for assistance. He knows the gods look down and soon will take vengeance on him and any person willing to help him. The only thing he is sure of is he must hurry. The only place he can think of is the house he raised his children in with his adoring wife. Maybe, he will be able to obtain some peace and collect his thoughts on what he needs to do.

Hercules sees the stone heap where his house use to lay. It is a place filled with mixed emotions. He remembers the joy and love still

emanating here. But, it is also a place of great remorse and anger. One new thought fills his heart. While he still hates what the gods and goddesses did, he can forgive Hera. She must have had no part in this great deception cursed upon him. A small amount of his burden is lifted.

Hercules sits on the stone wall near his old cottage staring at the rolling green countryside. His right hand is dedicated to holding his heavy tilted head up, as his right arm rest on his right knee. He asks himself *What I am to do?* Pegasus nudges a space between Hercules left arm and body before poking his comforting face through. "My faithful friend. How you have stood with me through the toughest of times." He pats his white soft cheek as he continue to ponder the current situation. But, all seems hopeless. He tells his friend to fill himself with the sweet grass in the distant pasture. "You'll need nourishment for our task ahead." He stares at Pegasus as he trots away.

A distant gentle woman's voice asks, "Are you thirsty stranger?" Her intrusion is a welcomed relief from the mental torture. "Might I bring you a ladle of cool spring water to quench your thirst on this hot summer day?"

Hercules turns his head to see the source of the voice while never removing his head's supporting hand from his face. He responds to her kind request, "Yes please." He watches as she leans over and retrieve the water from the well. Her long blonde hair flows in the mild breeze. He seems to be locked in some spell as she approaches. His eyes are captivated by her beauty as he continues to stare through his humble fingers.

She walks with the water being careful not to spill any. "What a beautiful day the gods have made." Her eyes remain fixed on the ladle or water as she stands before him. "Here's your cool water sir."

He removes his hand from off his face as he says, "Thank you kind maiden." He tilts the ladle up and begins to sips the sweet spring water. His raised arm blocks his vision which gives her eyes a chance to truly view this stranger finding him full of muscles. Her mouth cannot hide what her heart sees as it surprisingly speaks, "Oh my." She does not wish to be rude, so she decides to sit alongside this stranger. She smiles as he finishes drinking his water from his tilted ladle. "You must have

been in dire thirst.”

As he lowers his drinking utensil she introduces herself. His handsome face forces her nervous smiling lips to crackle out, “Hi, I am Viola.”

His first real gaze confirms his heart's suggestion. Her stunning beauty takes his breath away. He too has a problem speaking. Her smile widens as he clumsily introduces himself. “And I am Hercules.”

Both of them gaze into each others eyes and are at a temporary loss for words. It's as if time stands still.

Viola immediately realizes she might be sitting next to a god. She uneasily utters, “You're not the son of Zeus, are you?”

He notices how tense she's become. “I am just a man.” His reply seems to settle her.

“Why have you come here sir?”

“I was passing by and felt the peace emitting from this place.”

She senses there is more to his story than he is telling. He looks like he carries a very heavy burden. Her heart begs her to somehow comfort him. She touches his shoulder with her warm soft hand. She does not wish to pry so she generalizes her statement. “Life sometimes gives us impossible loads to carry.” She sees she has hit a cord. Hercules places his hand on his worried face while propping his elbow on his knee.

“Sometimes we just need to talk about our problem.” She knows her words still have not challenged his heart to speak. “Sometimes we just need someone to be alongside us and just be quiet.” She watches him as his mouth begins to smile. “I will just sit awhile and share this wonderful view of the country in silence-if that is alright?”

“I am sorry Viola. I am not attempting to be rude, but I have an impossible task that no man or woman could possibly help me with.” His words weigh heavy on him. He accidentally speaks what is in his heart verses what his mind means to say. “I cannot believe how beautiful, I mean, wise and caring you are.” He stares out of the side of his eye to see what her reaction might be.

“May I return the compliment. You too are very handsome, I mean, strong to carry such a heavy burden.”

Both of them giggle at their revelation's. He turns his face towards

hers as a ton of worry mysteriously lifts off his shoulders.

She smiles at him with her very pretty face. "May I tell you a story?" She soothingly slides her hand down across his arm. He tingles inside to the power she hold over him. Her hypnotic eyes come in front of his. "Relax a moment more and I will speak an amazing tale."

Hercules nods his approval with his serious smile.

"My grandfather once told me this astonishing child's bedtime story." Viola stands amidst her stage as she acts a character in her play. "There once was a son of a Titan named Prometheus." She proudly stands in authority, with her bent arms propped on her sides and her bosom pushed outward. "This son of a god looked down on mankind and was moved by their humble actions. The people gave their worship to the gods, along with their bountiful offerings." She bends and bows as if she is the presences of majesty. "These poor but honest farmers gave all they might give. But the gods and goddesses rewarded their hard work with cold and endless winters." Viola rubs her arms and shivers.

His eyes dance in joy as he laughs at her most amusing antics.

"Prometheus accepted their offerings of worship with gladness in his heart. But, he grew frustrated with the other gods for their cruel and selfish actions." She looks at Hercules as her activity relays her incoming thought. "I know, I'll give man a gift to keep them warm and a light for them at night."

Hercules has heard this story before many times, but he acts if it were his first time. "So, what happened next?" He knew Prometheus tricked Zeus in a bet, so father took fire from man as punishment. Prometheus later stole fire from Helios, the god of the Sun, and brought his torch to man.

"Prometheus waited for a time when all the gods and goddesses where occupied doing godly things." Viola sees his burden lifting. "He sneaked his torch down Mount Olympus one night during a fierce snow storm. He found a farmhouse where the farmer was fast asleep. Prometheus stacked a pile of wood, and then lit it with his torch. He hid amongst the trees and waited for the fire to grow. The bright light woke the farmer from his sleep. The mysterious glow from outside beckon

him to come see. Nervously he walked through his cold home and out into the night. He looked around in amazement to find he could see around at night. Mankind has been without fire so long they forgot what it was. The warmth felt so good he decided to bring a pale of red hot amber's inside his home. He slept warmly the rest of the night. Prometheus found joy in secretly giving man this present. He returned to Mount Olympus. In the following days, the farmer shared his fortune with all the villagers. Soon, the night was lit with warm cottages. The gods summoned Prometheus as they pointed down to Greece. Prometheus proudly proclaimed that he was the one to give man this present. He insulted them further by telling the gods he left man with the skill of metal work. This infuriated Zeus so much that they decided to punish him forever with a torture so hideous man cannot speak of it." Viola joins Hercules alongside the wall.

"I have heard that story many times, but never the way you told it. Thank you for lifting my spirit."

She grabs his arm with both her hands. "Wait. There is more. Everyday Prometheus lives this eternal torment. But, what is strange is he does it with a smile. Do you know why?"

This part of the story he has never heard. "Yes Viola. Why does he smile?"

"It's because he stole another gift from the gods just in case this happened. It was another kind of fire he discovered but hid from the gods"

Hercules listens as he has not before. He wonders if this could possibly be true.

"My grandfather told the story like this to me. No one knows exactly where it is hidden, but if someone could find it they could control the very gods. It burns with a cold blue flame. What is so mysterious is it has the power to bring the dead to life, and even control time. The holder can go where ever they wish on earth and to any time in the past. Now you know the reason why Prometheus smiles. He even hopes the human finder will release him from his eternal punishment.

Hercules questions Viola as to the validity of the story.

"I always thought it just a child's story, but my grandfather believed in it with all his heart.

He grows excited with hope to think there maybe even the slightest chance this flame exist. "Might I be able to speak with your grandfather?"

Viola becomes confused to see him grow so anxious by this myth. He looks so desperate she fears to tell him that he's dead.

Hercules senses her dilemma by asking, "He walks the Elysian fields, doesn't he?"

Her sweet sad face just slowly nods up and down.

Hercules feels this glimmer of hope burn out as his hasty burden returns.

"I do know one person who knows more about this story than I. My old Granny still lives."

He apprehensively looks at her as his heart ask where he might find her.

Her power over him helps her detect what he wants to ask. "Would you like to visit with her Hercules?"

He forms a smile as his answer.

"I need to go and grab my cape for the long journey."

He whistles for Pegasus as Viola returns with her cape. "Heee" proceed the approaching winged steed as he trots over.

In this moment she totally realizes this is the son of Zeus. She feels so embarrassed how she has acted in front of this demigod. She moves away and then humbly bows before him. "My lord." The winged horse nudges her aside as he competes for the space in front of his master.

Hercules will have none of that. He grabs and kisses her. "You Viola will never bow before me again. I should humble my self before you."

She does not know what to say. She shyly blushes and giggles in his presences.

"It seems Pegasus likes you. Well introduce yourself to my new friend Viola."

Pegasus nudges her once again, and then nibbles her cheek with his flapping lips."

"Oh Viola, I think you have a new boyfriend."

She laughs as she kisses Pegasus cheek. "I've only heard of you in fables my winged friend."

Hercules amusingly asks, "have you ever flown?"

"Only gods and birds fly."

He hoist her on to Pegasus and says, "Well you're about to."

Hercules leaps on his stallion's back and tells Pegasus, "Away."

Viola holds tight around Hercules waist. Pegasus flaps as he gallops upward. Hercules feels her excited body tremble knowing she is experiencing what only gods and goddess have.

One hour passes before Viola sees her Granny's cottage. She points down to tell Hercules where to land. He steers right while saying "Down my friend."

Hercules stands at the quaint cottage door as Viola knocks.

A faint crackly voices states, "I'm coming dear. Please wait a moment for these old legs to catch up to my young mind."

Viola smiles and whispers, "My Granny is sweet as honey."

He waits behind her as Granny opens the door.

"Oh, what a surprise my little lady bug." She hugs Viola as the pair joyfully embrace.

Their warmth and love overflow as Hercules's eyes cover in mist.

"Who is this very handsome friend of yours? If he's not your boyfriend, I may have to steal him from you." She politely nudges Viola aside before wrapping her arms around one of his. She giggles while slowly ushering the blushing man inside."

Embarrassed Viola follows them in.

"Viola, I think you caught a keeper. Not only is he big and beautiful, he is full of musdes."

Viola asks him. "Might you like to rest a spell?" She points to a worn cozy chair by a big window. He is joyfully overwhelmed by all the affection.

He bends his head down near Granny's. "Not before I give my new girlfriend a kiss." He pecks Granny's cheek.

She begins fanning her face. "I feel young again!" As she blushes she asks, "Might the pair of you like some nice honey nectar and a bite to eat?" She walks step by step towards her kitchen to fill their order.

Hercules feels the urgency to hurry, but Viola's big beautiful eyes and questioning expression ask him *might we stay just a little while?* He feels powerless to her majestic might as he confirms her request with his nodding head.

Viola replies, "Yes please. Thank you grandmother." She stretches upward and rewards him with a warm peck on his cheek. He blushes.

Granny invites them to come join her at the diner table. Hercules pull Granny's chair out for her. "What a well manned man." She sits and smiles as he pushes her toward the table.

Viola is captivated by this god. He seems so caring. Her heart melts forcing her adoring face to proclaim, "Yes Granny, he most certainly is." She grabs a warm diner roll from the basket as her eyes fix on him. Granny slaps Viola's hand, stinging her back to reality. "We must pray first and thank the gods for this blessing."

Everyone reverently bows their head as Granny speaks. "Thank you for what we are about to eat. Thank you Zeus for providing for us meager mortals. And, thank you for...? Viola, I just realized I do not even know your handsome friend's name."

"It's Hercules Granny."

Granny's mouth sticks open to learn this man's name. She hurries to speak. "Dear Zeus. Hercules?"

Viola clarifies her wandering mind, "You know Granny, Hercules, the son of Zeus."

Granny becomes numb and nervous as she tries to bow before him.

Hercules rushes to her side and leans her worried face toward his.

Viola grows concerned about Granny's aging heart. She listens to her gasp.

Hercules kisses her face several times. It soothes Granny enough to giggle, "I never thought a god would ever visit my humble home, yet kiss these old cheeks."

He smiles and reminds her, "You're my girlfriend too."

Viola's face turns as red as Autumn's apple to hear him say what her throbbing heart so desires. He suddenly recognizes what his heart accidentally said.

Granny bashfully notices what their hearts are saying. She asks, "Does this mean I may have grandchildren one day?"

Hercules coughs out a piece of dinner roll as humiliated Viola says, "Granny!" Hercules looks at Viola. She shyly smiles at him as his red blushing face smiles back. There is a momentary silence.

Hercules asks Granny, "I do not wish to be rude but there is another reason we've come here."

Viola explains the bedtime tale grandfather believed was true. She finishes the story at the part where the blue fire is introduced. "You told me once you also believed Prometheus stole this substance and hid it from the gods. Is this true Granny?"

"Yes my dear. This son of a Titan believed in the prophecy."

"What prophecy Granny? I never heard grandfather say that."

"It is a little known secret that before Prometheus betrayed Zeus, Metis, the goddesses of all wisdom, told him what he would do. Part of the prophecy was giving mankind the yellow fire of the sun. The last part warned him if he was brave enough to steal Chronos' blue fire of fate it would one day free him from his torture. This cold fire burns with the embers of time itself. If Prometheus was successful in obtaining it, one day a brave hero would free him."

Hercules gently grasp Granny's hands. "Do you know where it might be hid? This is very important."

"I don't know why, but the gods hide clues in riddles. Let me see if I can remember. I think it goes like this.

There is a place beneath the waves where fire cannot burn.

Within this space are children graves, dead monsters toss and turn.

Amidst their chains, on ocean's bed, they think, no I mean, they dream to be awaken.

The blue sea flames, might lift their heads, when their fire's taken.

You must take care, when you draw near, to see the string of time.

Either cut this hair, or wake this layer, the reeling fire will rewind.

Hercules asks, "Do either of you know what this riddle means?"

Granny says, "Grandfather tried to solve the puzzle for years. The only thing he could figure out is dead grandchildren of Titans rest there.

Somehow the blue fire can bring them back to life. He could never imagine where their graves are except somewhere deep under the sea. Father imagined the hair the poem speaks of is likely from the god Typhon. It seems touching the strand will alert this god to bring on great calamity. After all, he is the god of monsters, storms, and volcanoes. If you do not cut the strand you risk bringing all the Titan back to life. It seems impossible to retrieve the blue fire."

Hercules kisses Granny's cheek. "Thank you. I must be going. I have much to do." He looks at Viola with urgency in his face. "It's time to leave."

Viola hurries to kiss her Granny and tell her, "I love you and I'll be back soon." She rushes toward the front door that Hercules holds open.

"I will bring you home Viola. And then I must be on my way."

She waves and smiles to Granny as the pair mount Pegasus.

Granny cannot believe her eyes to see her granddaughter flying off on the mythical horse with this princely demigod. She places her hand on her excited heart and says, "I see the gods go with you." She stares in this magical moment until they vanish out of sight over the distant horizon.

Viola holds tight as Hercules gives the order to descend. Pegasus gallops to a stop in the green pasture where he grazed earlier.

"I thank you for all your help Viola."

She graciously curtsies before him. "Will you be back sometime?" Her mind hopes she is not being too forward asking such a question. But, her heart desperately prays he might consider the notion.

He leaps on Pegasus. Hercules swoops down and gives Viola a surprise kiss. "That you can count on." He smiles while raring Pegasus upward. "Up, up, and beyond!"

She watches them gallop skyward as her body tingles all over. Her hand covers her lips as she falls secretly in love with the stranger she just met. He disappears in the clouds before her heart comes down to earth. She tells herself *I'll be here waiting new boyfriend*.

Hercules knows of only one human that may know where to find this graveyard of the Titan's. He is off to find Ulysses, the only man to have circumvented the known world by sea. If there is a way, he will

know how to find it.

Ulysses looks up to see the flying white stallion. He covers his eyes with his saluting hand to block the blur of the bright sun. He is able to make out who rides the marvelous beast as he quietly whispers, "It's been a while my friend."

Moments later, Hercules lands the galloping Pegasus on the sparkling beach near Ithaca. Ulysses lays his wood-plane tool on the ship he is building. He watches the pair trot toward him. The ocean waves crashing and the chattering gulls make talking impossible at this distance. They smile and gaze at each other instead.

Hercules pats Pegasus and pushes him towards the glistening rippling sea. Ulysses stares in delight as the magnificent beast romps and frolics in the cool blue sea. Hercules draws near the king and captain of so many adventures.

"My good friend Ulysses. How have you been since we last met? Looks as if you are close to finishing your new home away from home."

"Good. You're here just in time." Ulysses moves toward the Stern of the vessel as he bids Hercules with his hand to wait here at the bow. "I need help in turning this monster over."

Hercules asks, "Is she seaworthy?"

"This ship is the finest I've ever built. Yes, she is. I was just placing some finishing touches on her."

"Well then." Hercules slides under the sixty foot boat and hoist it upward. Ulysses stands and watches. He carries it to the edge of the sea before setting the wooden hull down.

"Look ma, no hands." Ulysses laughs as Hercules chocks the ship's hull upright. "Thanks my son. That would have taken forty strapping men half a day to do what you just did in two minutes."

"What risky venture are you off to now? Haven't you experienced enough astounding adventures in your life?"

"That my son is what keeps me so young. At least at heart. Take my ship away and you may as well invite the Ferryman man to pay me a visit. I'm not ready for Hades yet."

Hercules decides to change the subject.

Ulysses notices him seriously thinking. "I don't think you came here

just to do a good deed. Now that you gave me a gift, what can I help you with?"

Hercules knows the gods are probably watching from Mount Olympus. "Is there a place we might go where the gods cannot see?"

"If there is, it is one place I've never found. Tell me what is on your mind. Do not worry. This won't be the first time I angered the gods. Just hurry before your father hurls a lightening bolt down from the heavens."

Hercules sternly states, "That is one reason I am here. The gods and goddesses imprisoned Zeus."

Ulysses understands the seriousness of the situation as he bids the hesitating Hercules to continue.

"The people of Athens are under a curse that I have no current way of breaking. They are soon to perish. My father was taken captive by the other gods wishing to steal his power and might. I pray my stepmother Hera and friend Hermes have not been captured. And, I need to find a mythical substance I'm not sure even exist. Maybe then I can start to unravel this noose chocking the life out of me."

"Is that all. I thought you were going to ask something impossible of me. Where do we start?"

"I start at the graveyard of the Titans. This is something I must do alone. It is too dangerous for a mortal."

"You mean if you survive the vengeance of the gods, and are lucky enough to out maneuver monsters and mayhem, and can figure out by your self the riddles the gods speak in, then you may avoid detriment to your life. Does this sound about right?"

Hercules bows his humble head in silence to all the unimaginable obstacles that lay ahead.

"And, you think you can handle this all alone?" He stares at this hero that is at a loss for words.

That's what I thought. This is why I am coming too. Blast you Poseidon!"

Hercules lifts his face slightly up to acknowledge another person would be helpful.

"Lets shake the pillars of Mount Olympus together. And together share the eternal glory. If we perish, at least we'll keep each other

company in the dungeon of Tartarus forever. When do we start?"

"I pray you may know where we need to go."

"It's two days journey from here. But first, help me load the ship with the supplies we will need as I assemble my best sailors."

"Make sure the men understand the peril that awaits them Ulysses."

"Don't worry. I'll tell them 'we all sail to a certain death'. But, this will not be their first adventure facing the impossible."

Hercules finishes loading the last of the equipment as Ulysses leads a band of burly bronze men toward the ship. He turns to Pegasus and says, "My dear friend. I thank you for all your loyal service. I go on a journey you cannot come on. I will call you when I return. Bye my dear faithful friend." He watches as Pegasus obeys. His steed gallops up and away.

"I bring you thirty of the finest sailors and warriors Greece has to offer." Ulysses stops just short of the ship to let the men file past. "This is Demetrius. He has been my second in command for over twenty years."

The gentleman approach Hercules with his outstretched hand.

"I have heard many heroic stories of your adventures. It is an honor to sail with you Hercules."

He welcomes him with his hand. "The honor is mine Demetrius."

The line of men receive a congratulatory back pat from this larger than life hero as they pass into the ship. Ulysses is the last over the side of the ship.

He leans down and commands, "Shove off and hoist sails men."

The men marvel as the ship slides a hundred feet from the beach to the sea. As the ship's sail fill with the fresh sea breeze, Hercules leaps on board. You can see their heads shake side to side in disbelief as they take their position's on ship.

Ulysses orders, "Hard to port twenty degrees Demetrius." He comes alongside Hercules. "I guess we sail toward our greatest victory, or damnation." He looks his friend in the eyes waiting for his response. Ulysses laughs with a menacing voice. "I guess we'll find out together what tricks the gods of Olympus will play upon us."

Hercules predicts their fate as he yells out for all the crew to hear, "To our greatest victory!"

The crew cheers to hear his prodamation. But, they all know treachery awaits just ahead.

Amidst the applause Hercules asks Ulysses, "Who watches over your kingdom?"

"I leave charge to my son Telemachus. Ithaca remains in good hands."

"Where do we sail?"

"To visit an old friend."

"Whom might that be?"

"King Chrysaor."

Hercules wonders if this is a good idea. This giant king is a child of Poseidon and Medusa. "Is there a reason you risk seeking him out?"

"I have an idea where the sea monsters are buried. King Chrysaor will know exactly where the graveyard lay, and how to deal with the hindrances awaiting our mission." Ulysses pats his arm and says, "Trust me."

Hercules passionately waits for what lay ahead. Ulysses informs him he is retiring for the night. He warns him to take this opportunity to rest up as well. The only noise is from the half of the crew making their bed for the night, as the rest quietly perform their duties. He stands looking at the thousands of stars that twinkle in the darkness of night while questioning many things. But, his body alerts him to take heed to the captains suggestion as his mouth is forced to yawns.

Ulysses wakes Hercules with his pounding. He raises his sore neck up from the roll of rope his head sleep upon.

"Sorry if I disturbed your beauty sleep Hercules. I heard gods don't need sleep anyways." He laughs as he continues to pound the metal object.

Hercules stumbles over alongside. As he stretches he asks, "What are you making?" He notices the crew staring at his expanding muscles.

"I am making a gift fit for a king. Never come before royalty without a present."

Hercules sees the red hot object that Ulysses pounds upon. Golden

sparks fly up with each strike of his heavy hammer. This is something Hercules has never seen before.

“What makes this gift so special is the Adamantine it is made of.” Hercules ponders how Ulysses could have gotten this unbreakable metal from the gods. “I can see you're thinking. I made a deal with Hephaestus, the blacksmith of Mount Olympus.” Hercules thinks what he could possibly give that the gods might want. “It seemed he was willing to trade for something even more valuable. It took some haggling for Hephaestus to part with his precious ore. I offered as payment the Golden Fleece.”

“I thought Jason stole that from the king of Colchis. Did you steal it from Jason?”

“No, no. I made him a deal after the fleece filled its purpose.”

Hypnotized Hercules stares as the sparks fly and the hammer smashes before it repeatedly dances along the stretching hot metal. He cannot imagine what shape Ulysses is attempting. It just looks to be long. “So, what actually is your gift?”

“That is exactly what it is, a surprise gift. You'll find out later.”

Hercules walks the wooden deck toward the bow. He peers off into the distant horizon seeing nothing but sea.

CHAPTER 6: ISLAND OF ERYTHEIA

At the eve of the second day Ulysses reveals their destination. “There she lay. The island of Erytheia. Prepare for landing!” Hercules comes alongside the captain waiting for his instructions.

Ulysses informs Demetrius where they will need to land the ship. “Steer to the south side of the cove. There is deeper water over the jagged rocks that lay hidden below the surf. I leave you in command. Hercules, follow me below deck to retrieve a few things for the king and his son.”

Both men are jerked forward as the return topside. Ulysses smirks while suggesting, “I think we just pulled on shore.” They each carry one end of the long metal present wrapped in canvas upon their shoulders. On it hangs two very large slabs of meat. Hercules carries a canvas bag over his other shoulder. He knows not what is inside it, but it seems heavy.

Two men are ordered to defend the ship as the rest assemble in formation on the beach. The men come to attention drawing their spears tight and their shield's close to their body. Hercules waits with Ulysses in front of the men.

“We are going to visit the king of this place. There are a few secrets on this island. Do exactly what I order and we will all return to the ship alive. Now follow me.” Ulysses marches toward the tree line of the forest. Along the way the crew notices giant foot and paw prints.

An uneasy chatter passes between the ranks to the sheer size and depth of the holes. Hercules heighten senses prepare him for what may come next.

They come upon an opening leading to a sandy field. A massive roadway made of rock in the middle of the field leads over the distant hill ahead. Ulysses slows the pace to allow the men to form two protecting columns on each side.

One of the men asks, "Do you hear that?"

Ulysses orders, "Quickstep march." It seems he is the only man that knows what is coming.

The other men begin to hear it also. Loud thumping trembles the ground as growling echos over top the hill. Ulysses commands the men, "Halt! Form battle formation." Hercules watches as the two columns file in front as they turn in to three lines of defense. The unit bravely waits for what approaches.

Ulysses tells Hercules, "Set your end down, and then help me at this end." Ulysses holds his end up as he grabs a slab of meat. Hercules realizes he is trying to remove the slabs, but they are slightly beyond his reach. Hercules snatches both of the pieces.

"What do you want me to do with these?"

Ulysses says, "Hold them until I tell you to toss them up to the kings pet Orthrus."

Two distinct dark shapes grow over top the hill. The company grows restless that's evident by their spears rattling against their shields. Ulysses warns them, "Stand fast. Remember who is with us." Their mind remembers the might of the god that is on their side,

Ulysses orders torches lit. A pair of men hurry as they fumble to light their poles. They raise the fire high before them. They see the two headed monster jousting up and down before them.

Ulysses orders, "Now Hercules!"

He throws the slabs high into the sky as the gnarling teeth jab down. Both greedy dogs fight each other for the meat. Each tugs one slab away from the others mouth.

A thundering voice approaching yells, "Stop that fighting!" Above the flames an even taller figure materializes. It looks like a giant child.

Two of his faces seem to show anger as the third tells the two headed dog, "You know better than that. Share or I'll give you a kick you won't soon forget."

Ulysses yells, "How has my pal Geryones been? All three heads immediately turn their attention toward the source calling out to them.

"Is that you Ulysses?" The face draws near the fire as six eyes search among the soldiers. The scared men automatically raise their spears up to defend themselves.

"Lower your spears. Yes Geryones, it's me Ulysses."

All three faces smile over top the trembling company. His giant pet thrust its two panting faces alongside its master as it drools down on the unsuspecting men. Ulysses smiles and laughs as his men try scooping and swiping the mass of goo away. Hercules relaxes with his balled fist propped on his waist now that danger has passed.

"I have a gift for you Geryones. But first, let me introduce my friend Hercules."

This announcement excites the boy. "What is it Ulysses. Can I have it?"

"You'll have to wait until I visit with your father. Then I'll give you your gift."

"Hello Hercules. I heard my father talk about you. I am glad to finally meet you."

Geryones stands as he calls his dogs, "Come Orthrus." He walks toward the hill as his pet follows alongside him.

"Hercules, grab the other end of the king's gift." The men regain formation as the command is given, "Move out. Follow after the lad." They quickly march over the hill. "Now that went better than I expected. No one got eaten and we have an escort to protect us along the way."

Hercules shakes his head side to side thinking how everyone cheated death. "It would be nice if next time you prepare me for encounters with giants or monsters. Ulysses just laughs.

The gargantuan fortress of King Chrysoar appears as they travel down the hill. Excited Geryones stands ahead waving for the company to catch up.

Panting Ulysses breathes out, "I think he is eager to see his

present.” Hercules snatches the kings present from Ulysses. “Thanks. It's nice to see you gods don't loose wind like us mortals.” Both men just smile.

Geryones pushes the forty foot tall gates open ahead of the tired procession. He stands aside petting each of Orthrus's heads. “Good dog. Wait here and watch the gate boy.” The men file pass avoiding his waterfall of drool. Ulysses enters the Kings court just behind Geryones.

“Father, father! I brought you some guess.” Loud footsteps approach that cause the stone floor to vibrate.. “Can I have my present now Ulysses?”

“I guess this would be a good time. Hercules, may I have the sack?” Ulysses hands the bound canvas bag to the boy. “I hope you like your gift.”

Geryones tries to untie the bag but he only makes the knot tighter. He clenches the canvas between his teeth and rips the sack open. His gift falls to the floor. All three of his faces fill with amazement. Three mouths converse all at once. “It's a sling shot, What a great gift, I want to shot it first.”

Father arrives to see his joyful son playing with his new gift. With a loud stern voice he instructs his son, “That is for outside use only.” He looks down and smiles. “It's been a long while since you've grace the presence of this great court Ulysses.”

He hoist up the wrapped object he has been working on the last two days. “A gift for the great King of Erytheia.” He bows his head as Chrysaor accepts his offering.

One suspicions eye remains fixed on Ulysses, as the other one marvels at the gift. “Okay Ulysses, what do you want. When you bring me a gift, you always ask for something in return.”

The king begins unraveling his gift as Ulysses says, Nothing your majesty.”

Chrysaor stops what he is doing and cynically laughs. “What do you mean you do not want anything. That would be a first.”

“Well your majesty, there is a first time for everything. Please accept my gift.”

The king decides to continue unravel his gift. His eyes open wide.

"Well, this sure is a fine gift." The king proudly stands his new quident on end with the four prongs pointing up. He stares at it while saying, "Yes. It has one more prong than my father's." His eyes remain entranced on his shiny new scepter and weapon.

"What's more is it is forged with unbreakable Adamantine, the metal of the gods."

"My, my." The king smiles. "I believe this will make even My father Poseidon jealous."

"I am glad you are so pleased great king."

"Now I command you to tell me what you want in return before I use this quident on you." The king juts it up in his hand several time, checking its weight and balance. "This even makes me feel more powerful."

"I sincerely do not wish anything at all in return. Except maybe."

"Go ahead, out with it."

"Maybe just some information mighty King Chrysaor."

He smiles while saying, "I knew it. Go ask your question. It seems a fair price for such a fine gift."

"May I introduce my friend Hercules."

The king's eyes fix on Hercules. "Your legends precede you. Have you come here seeking mischief hero of the Greek's?" He slowly lifts his quident to his shoulder as Hercules prepares to address him.

"I mean you no ill King Chrysaor." He waits till this revelation sinks in. He bows over while keeping an eye on anxious giant king.

He sees the sincerity in Hercules face and his humble gesture. The king lowers his new scepter to his side as he cautiously watches Hercules proceed.

"My father Zeus is in great danger. The gods and goddesses of Olympus hold him prisoner wishing to steal his throne and possibly take his life."

"I am sorry for your direr situation, but how I am to help you against all the gods?"

"I only need some wise advice great king. If you would allow me."

"You do know you risk danger to me, my house, and my family by your very presence here. I should just kill you and win the approval of

the rest of the gods. What do you think of that?"

"Please bid me to continue with my question and we will be on our way as fast as we came."

Ulysses suggests, "How might you like to win the eternal favor of the king of Mount Olympus?"

King Chrysaor ponders the notion. "What happens if you are unsuccessful. Maybe I should side with the other gods."

"That is true. You know as well as I, they would tear Mount Olympus apart before one of them shares their power."

Ulysses and Hercules humbly wait for the king to decide.

"I'll let you ask your question. Then you must hurry on your way. What is it you seek?"

Hercules explains, "Where in the sea might I find the place Titans and monsters go to die? And how might I venture to that place?"

The king ponders what Hercules asked. "To find it is impossible."

This not the answer he sought. His heart urges him to force the king to think of some solution. He challenges him with provocation. "You are the son of Poseidon, are you not?" He stares at the king as he fidgets in his throne. "I know the gods intelligence far surpasses mere human thought. You must think of a way great king."

"I do not know where it lay, but I do know how you might journey there."

This new insight causes Hercules to state, "That is all I need great king."

"The problem is you would die before you could travel there."

"What do you mean King Chrysaor?"

"My sister Charybdis guards the passage. You would have to enter under her very nose the whirlpool she resides in."

Ulysses remembers the tale. It is in a place at the edge of the known world where sailor forbid themselves to go. Great danger and sea monsters lurk in those dark waters.

"Might you at least tell me the name of this place?"

Both Ulysses and the king speak its location at the same instant. "The Straits of Messina."

The king commands, "Now you must go!"

Hercules rises as he speaks, "I am forever in your debt great King Chrysaor."

The king remains seated as Hercules and Ulysses retreat outside the great court.

Ulysses orders the men. "Form up! We move out immediately!"

They march in two columns back toward their ship. No one talks, but you can hear their busy minds think. Ulysses knows the story of Charybdis. She was chained to the cliffs of Messina as punishment, where she remains till she perishes. The great whirlpool is created as punishment by the gods. He looks at Hercules wondering. He speculates if he might know about the danger they face. He is wrong though. Fearless Hercules is thinking about the people of Athens, and the fate that awaits his father, stepmother, and friend Hermes if he fails.

They hear the screams of the guards and crushing of the wooden ship. Ulysses orders the battle cry, "Charge! The ship is under attack." The sunrise gradually unveils the grasping jaws of the giant crab. The men charge the beach to aid their fellow crew members fight off the snapping six clawed beast. Ulysses tells Hercules, "This must be cancer's revenge."

The men on shore get close enough to jab their spears at the colossus crustacean. Several of the crew merge atop the ship to help defend top-deck. The crab's crust is thicker than their spears can pierce. They clink and slide off its red armor. The beast rises from the water as its claws change direction. It attacks what is beneath it. Hercules tosses the creature toward the beach. It soars overhead and it lands on its back. Its body rocks back and forth as its frantic claws and legs reach toward the ground below. The crew forms a line in front of the creature to bar it from returning to their ship. Hercules rushes out of the water and hurries to the crab before it flips itself right-side up. He slides his legs against its shell and begins pulling on its claw. The creature makes an awful gurgling sound as his entire pincer pulls off its body. Hercules moves to the next leg as the helpless beast aimlessly snaps its remaining claws in the air. He yanks the second leg from off the creature's body as it gurgles in pain once more. The four remaining claws jab skyward.

Hercules asks the creature, "Have you had enough?" He mercifully

drags the monster to the edge of the sea, and then tosses it past the ship. Everyone watches it land in the water. It scurries off to the safety of deeper water. "I guess we eat crab the rest of our journey." Several of the laughing crew assists Hercules in loading the two massive claws on board. The rest whisper their thankfulness to each other for the Greek god that sails with them.

Ulysses assesses the damage to the ship as Hercules comes to his aid. "Luckily the harm to the ship is only to the deck and rail. Nothing that might make her less seaworthy." He assigns several men to fix what was broken. He commands, "Shove off. We sail again."

One day later the ship nears the end of the Ionian Sea. Ulysses stands on the bow of the ship waving Hercules to come join him. He looks ahead toward the narrow space between the island and the land that lay on the east side of the strait. Hercules shares the view alongside the captain.

Ulysses tells him, "Zeus's curse lay just ahead. No man dare fish this area. For strange creatures of the deep abound in these waters. Sharks with two heads have been pulled up in fisherman's nets. Deformed things have been known to crawl over the sides of ships."

"I have heard the she giant's legend. On the east side is where she serves her punishment for helping her father Poseidon war against my father. Zeus chained her between the cliffs ahead and left her with unquenchable thirst for the sea. Three times a day she sucks the water down before vomiting it out on the sea floor. Even those favored by the gods dare not sail this strait. For if they avoid the times she swallows the sea, they must pray to stave off another of the seas monsters. Sailing to the west side of the strait to avoid Charybdis and her whirlpool is no safer choice. For the six headed sea monster Scylla protects the waters on this side of the strait."

"Trapped between two dangers. Trapped between Charybdis and Scylla."

Hercules cynically laughs, "I am the first man to wish to be sucked down in her whirlpool."

"Pray my friend she does not see you in the swirling waters, or she may crush you instead between her teeth." Ulysses laughs while staring

at the demigod. "Drop anchor! This is where we wait."

As Hercules prepares for the long swim, Ulysses hands him two gifts. "This may aid you in your venture." He hands him a short sword. "I made this for you from the metal of the gods. May it keep you out of the hands of danger."

Hercules places the blade in its sheath and lashes it to his side. He looks at Ulysses and says, "May the fates keep you safe. For I know the gods will not."

"Place this gift on your head. It will give you air to breath when you are below the sea. When the shell clouds over you will know your air is spent."

Hercules slings its strap over his shoulder. He stands on the side of the ship preparing to dive in the sea.

"Hurry back my friend. May your father Zeus somehow protect you."

The crew join their captain in watching Hercules swim the three miles to the mouth of the straight. They become one in spirit hoping he has the courage and strength to do what is hopeless for man.

CHAPTER 7: DON'T WAKE THE TITANS

Hercules realizes the fortune of the fates is not upon him. He sees this is not the time the she giant thirsts. All the water in the sea tries to pass through the narrow opening creating a torrential current. He fights the rushing water trying to keep himself in the spot where the whirlpool should form. He thinks *Charybdis does not thirst. I must fight the passing sea till she does.*

The high noon sun parches his throat as his hands and legs dig at the sea. And eerie feeling comes over him during the quiet and peace of the passing water. He thinks *I have waited too long in this sea for nothing to happen.* Suddenly he sees a school of fins rushing toward him.

Something under the water wraps around his leg. A thousand pricks stab it forcing his other leg to kick the creature off. He watches as a row of metal like fins circle up and down in the sea. A shark like head leaps up snapping at Hercules face. He grabs what he thinks is its neck, preventing the two mouthed beast from biting his head off. The thing thrashes in the water as he sees two rows of short sharp legs run under its swerving body. It wiggles like an eel and full of legs like a centipede. He chokes the life from the 20 foot monster. Its jabbing jaws full of teeth cease. He lets loose the dead beast as he sees a half dozen of its friends have followed. There are too many to fight. He knows these creatures must be defeated below the sea.

He dives deep toward the dark water through the red mist of his blood. The water is so dark he cannot see his hand. He stops and turns toward the light coming from above to see six or seven serpents wiggling toward him. He draws his sword and swims upward as the creatures file after each other. He holds his sword up as he swims quickly under the belly of the beast slicing the first six wide open. The last adjust course so Hercules cannot maneuver to its underside. Its two jaws open wide preparing to swallow him whole. Hercules defends himself by grabbing the serpent's snout. He holds his body out of its gnashing teeth by thrusting his legs against its bottom jaws. He reaches behind and below to snatch the floundering remains. Angrily he thinks *You want to eat. Eat your self to death.* He stuffs this final beast's belly full till it burst.

He swims through the carnage and grabs a hunk of flesh. He surfaces and immediately bites off a piece of his victory. He thinks *Its taste is not so bad.* He knows this will give him much needed strength for the mission ahead. He finishes chewing the last of the serpent as a small funnel forms in the sea. He hopes the commotion has not alerted this giant to his existence. He floats in the gentle swirling current as it turns into a massive sucking spinning pit. He swirls down and down the water slide and he twirls round and round toward the giant mouth in the sea.

Tons and tons of pressure force him down through the dark churning orifice. He is thrust along the torrent past the giant jagged teeth. The current slows enough for him to place the conic shell over his head. He looks around inside her belly through the polished shell as he begins to breath again. The startled creatures of all sorts seem to have lost their hunger. Every thing is dedicated to searching for a way to escape this dark death. The current begins to reverse as these creatures swim toward the sudden light at the opening.

Hercules propels out into the dark abyss as fast as an arrow is shot from its bow. The current slows as the swirling debris drag to a stop before settling to the sea floor. His eyes adjust to the dim light that makes its way to this depth. He gains some of his vision allowing him to see ahead. He notices a distant glow and swims in its direction.

The point of light becomes a dancing blue beacon luring whatever swims in the deep. A blue haze blankets the rolling seafloor. Dark mounds of sand help block the flickering blue flame as he draw near the edge of where the light reaches. He navigates through the valleys that run between the many hills as his eyes search for what sleeps here. It seems the sand of time covers their beds hiding their still graves. Carefully he passes over what he knows must be the monsters that rest in peace.

A great brightness illuminates the sphere that lingers above Hercules. It shines like the moon. Its light rages with roaring blue flames. A sparkling golden strand spins round the base of the fire. His eyes follow the line to see where it runs to. He turns away from the fire to find it connects round and through the end of a massive chain. From this side of the hills a dozen giant blue faces are discovered. The riddle makes sense now. Typhon's strand wraps the base of the fire like a string around a toy top. If I take the fire I'll cause it to spin and turn back the hands of time. That will wake the dead Titans by giving them life once more. If I cut the strand I will alert Typhon, the god of monsters and storms.

Hercules swims back to the burning sphere to investigate why he just cannot grab the cold blue flame. He finds out why as he propels on to the shell of the fire's invisible armor. His hands search the cold glassy globe to see what it might be made of. He is faced with problems his mind has no way of answering, except to wake the Titans, or alert the god of mayhem. His vision blurs as he notices his helmet begins to fog over. Whatever he is going to do, he knows he must do it now. Haste forces him to remember something.

Out of curiosity he reaches in his tunic. He grabs the vial containing the potion made from the moss of Endure. He reasons *Typhon is a god, and gods hate this potion. Why not give it a try.*

He tilts the vial he can barely see on the surface of the sphere. The water clouds as the last of his potion streams out the vial. It seems the area he poured it out is clearer than the rest of the protecting globe. He place his hand there to find a whole. It is only large enough to stick his hand and arm in. He slowly reaches inside to find himself inches short of

obtaining the cold flame. Frustration attacks him with the thought he is so close, yet still so impossibly far away.

A vision fills his mind. He's not sure if it is his lack of air, or if his father Zeus really is trying to show him something. He cannot hear father's voice but he does understand he wants him to turn around and look down. He holds his breath and removes the fogged helmet. He follows his father's instruction and turn around searching for what he is trying to tell him. Fear suddenly alerts him he must be waking the giants. Dozens and dozens of red and blue eyes pierce the dark waters. He knows he has to hurry and find whatever father was telling him that lay somewhere on the seafloor. He sees it.

He darts to the bottom and tears off a length of the weed growing up. He swims to the globe with a hand full of kelp. He reaches inside the hole as far as he can and holds the weed with the of his hand. The cold flame begins to ignite the blue weed. Quickly, he removes his arm and swims up with the blue bright torch. His lungs pain him, feeling like they're ready to explode. He looks a last time below to see Titan eyes return to their sleep, as the blue light in their eyes go out one by one.

He breaks the surface as his lungs suck all the air they can hold. His head floats in a fog the lack of air created. The cold flames still burns in his hand which warms his desperate heart. The joy of the moment does not last long. Six heads of Scylla scream out as her giant squid body rushes toward this intruder.

Hercules has an idea. He turns away and swims toward the opposing cliffs. He watches behind to see the huge crests of waves propelling toward him. He reaches the desired area and sticks the fire in the water. He yells mightily, "Mount Olympus!" All the commotion awakens Charybdis to suck down the intruder in her mouth. The whirlpool forms as he swims away. It seems his plan works. Scylla's heads twirl around as she remains stuck in Charybdis' current. The length of her chain keeps her trapped at the edge of the swirls. Charybdis' vengeance chokes Scylla's shackled neck tight in her current.

Ulysses sees the blue flame held above the water as it approaches. "Lift anchor and prepare to be boarded." The crew hustle to follow the captain's command as he smiles and shakes his elated head. "We're

stealing this one from your greed grasp Poseidon.”

The blue flame rises above the side of the ship as Hercules' hand comes in to view. Ulysses reaches over the side to help him up the side of the ship. “You cheated death once more my friend.”

Hercules leaps down on to the deck. “I think it may be a good idea that we put as much water as we can between us and those angry giants.”

“Drop sail! Believe me Hercules. We've already prepared for it.” The ship turns starboard and then proceeds southward away from the Strait of Messina. It is none too soon as horrifying screams emanate from Scylla's six torment heads. It might be Charybdis biting down on Scylla's tentacles.

Ulysses takes the torch from Hercules. He tells one of his crew, “Find him something to eat while he sits and rest. I will find a safe place for this strange fire that burns cold, and water does not put out.”

Hercules rest but oddly is not worn. All he has been through should have drained his strength. He wonders about the flames power to heal. Might be the reason he is refreshed? He is glad to know his father is still well by the vision he seen him in. He stares at the safe place Ulysses has found for the flame. It burns in its lantern's case mounted near the bow of the ship. A steaming plate of food moves toward him. He continues to look at his dancing trophy as he savors the sweet delicate crab meat.

He spends the rest of the day thinking of a plan that will defeat both the gods and goddesses, and the curse that lay on his people. It's been three days since Zeus's blessing fell on Greece. A thought comes to him. He remembers the prophecy. One day Prometheus would be freed by Chronos blue flames. He does not know how to solve all the problems that still plague him. But he knows this is probably the best place for him to start. He feels the eyes of the gods looking on him. So he does not inform Ulysses of his plan. Instead, he tells him where he must be let on shore. This is to confuse the gods of his intent, and help protect Ulysses from their retribution. From there he will enlist the assistance of his faithful friend. They will venture to the valley where Prometheus is hidden for all time.

Hercules waves to Ulysses goodbye amidst the farewells of the

crew. "I am in your debt. Thank you all!" He stands with the lantern as the ship shoves off.

"You think you've seen the last of me Hercules?" Both men smile at each other knowing this will not be their last meeting. "Someone has to keep an eye on you to keep you from trouble. Till we meet once more my friend."

He stands on shore waiting for the ship to sail out of sight. The sun sets as he whistles toward the heavens. His blue light cast over the descending stallion making Pegasus look more like a giant butterfly than a winged stallion. He leaps on his friend and pats his neck. "Thanks Pegasus. Now off to the east."

They soar through most of the night toward his destination. He does not say allowed where he goes. They fly toward no particular place that lay far, far to the east. The blue flame lights their way amidst this moonless night.

Dawn returns shining its first rays of day upon his mysterious destination. The tops of the Caucasus Mountains glow red as their sides flow down with a rippling purple blanket. He whispers in Pegasus ear, "Land my friend. As soon as you do, take to the sky again. I will call you when I am finished."

His steed descends at the mouth of a hidden valley way up near the summit of the jagged precipices. Hercules leaps off as Pegasus gallops upward carrying the blue fire tied around his neck. He watches his friend zoom off toward the west. He waits till he is sure he made it away safely. The last of the night makes the flame he carry look like a shooting star. He stores this picture in the memories of his life as he proceeds to carefully venture on.

He climbs the cliff toward the opening above. He is diligent not to make any unwanted noise by grabbing a loose rock, or pressing his feet against a shifting rock face. Any noise would greatly amplify as it echo through the mountain pass. The last thing he wants now is to wake the eagles or tell the gods where he is.

He pulls himself up to see the entrance of the valley. A path wide enough for the gods to travel leads to a wide open lighted space. The path is worn with giant footprints. Some are recent. He sees a narrow

chasm that runs just below the trail caused by rain or melting snow. He travels the path least used to conceal his presences. The swerving chasm tightens forcing him to squeeze through sideways. He climbs over fallen rock debris that made its way into this crack in the earth. Light reveals the end of the chasm. Screeching of eagles echos through this chamber as they pass by the exit just ahead. Hercules suddenly realizes he has to hurry before the fowls begin to feed.

His head leer out the chasm toward the thrashing occurring below. Prometheus kicks at the eagles that try and feast on their daily meal. His chains hold him trapped on a giant column slab painted red with his blood. Hercules sneaks nearer and nearer as Prometheus postpones the etemal inevitable. His chains rattle as he toss and tums making it hard for the eagles to land. Hercules forgoes his stealth by drawing out his sword. "Mount Olympus!" He slashes Prometheus chain that cause sparks and thunder to explode. Prometheus leaps up as his chains fall away. He snatches the eagle that has caused his belly to bleed so many times. He bites its neck separating its head from its body.

"How does that feel you pesky bird?" He tries to snatch another, but the flock flies off in fear. He swings his legs over to the side of the red stone to see whom it was that freed him. Hercules looks up above this Titan's knee to see him smiling downward.

"Thank you for freeing me from my eternal torment. I have one question though. How were you able to cut my unbreakable chain?"

"I used an unbreakable sword."

Prometheus can only say, "Ahhh."

"We must hurry and escape. I fear we have woken all the gods."

"Quick, jump on my hand and we shall run away."

"No Prometheus. I have my own way. Do you think you can make your way to Athens?"

"I am the son of a Titan God. There is little I cannot do. We must hurry!"

Hercules whistles for Pegasus as Prometheus rushes down the giant's path. The blue flame gallops toward him as he prepares to leap upon his horse. "Away Pegasus!" They rapidly climb upward as they soar over the Caucasus cliffs. They hide in the clouds as they zoom back to

the city of Athens.

They near the Aegean coast before they leave the safety of the white mist. Pegasus swoops downward as they hurry to the great Greek city. He nears the acropolis to see the citizens did not survive father's last blessing. He cries as sees all the carnage as the crows feast on what remains. They land at the foot of the golden monument. His weight of his heart breaks his heart in two. The only thing he is left with, is knowing he is too late.

The ground around him begins to rumble as he sit on the steps leading up to the column. He lifts his head up to see the giant Prometheus running up the street. Hercules remains seated thinking what he might tell the Titan son. For, there is nothing left here to do. All hope is lost.

Prometheus slows to a pace and sees Hercules solemn face.

“What's wrong? Have you lost all hope?”

Hercules has no answer except to point to what is all around them.

“Are you not forgetting something Hercules? I do not know all that has happened, but I do know you posses a substance that could change this current situation.” He points toward the lantern around Pegasus's neck.

Hercules suddenly thinks of a way that might just work!

CHAPTER 8: MERCY FOR THE MONSTER

Prometheus stands before the demigod awaiting him to explain what he is planning to do. Hercules walks over to Pegasus. He unties the blue lantern from around his neck.

“I will need your assistance Prometheus.” He walks back to the column and hands the lantern containing the blue flame to the giant. “I need you to reach up to the golden head of the monument and secure the lantern to one of its faces.”

Prometheus obeys his request and hangs the lantern on the bull's horn, then binding it with rope. “What are you thinking might happen?”

“You need to move away. I need to stand here.” Hercules yells out, “Gods and goddesses of Olympus. Hear my cry. Curse me if you dare.”

Prometheus is stunned by Hercules challenge. For no one dare's the gods.

The golden head begins to slowly spin as Hercules grabs hold of the column it turns upon. The ground violently rumbles. It turns faster and faster as the flame twirls in to a blue blur. The angry voice of a god begins to speak. Suddenly, the voice goes silent. Hercules holds tight to the spinning column. Its racing momentum tries flinging his body away, but he holds on with all his strength. A cyclone of dust fills the void blocking his vision. The turning is too great for him to hold on any longer. He flies away and smashes on the ground. He tumbles over and over till he slows to a stop.

He sees he has been thrown some distance away from the dust cloud. A head rises above the dirty mist as flames scorch the army ahead of it. Hercules knows what he must do now.

He rushes toward the beast as a giant man's face cringes in his direction. It knows Hercules enters the dust to search him out. The slithering tale swipes at Hercules. He snatches its spiked tale and drags Haderus out of the dust cloud. He hears the army cheering as they can now see who grabs the monster's tail. Hercules slowly swings the beast round and around. The man's face screams out, "Mercy, mercy!" The lion's face roars, the dragon's growls, as the bull snorts in fear. Hercules yells out, "If I spare your life, will you promise never to return to this land again."

The man cries, "Yes, yes, we will never return if you let us live."

One last spin and Hercules flings the beast miles away to the ocean. He watches it soar across the plains before splashing far out in the Aegean sea. The army breaks ranks and rushes out to congratulate him for his amazing victory. The generals yell blessings to him for his courage in saving so many lives. The foot soldiers rush to thank him for protecting their families and sparing their Spartan city. Hercules dasp the blue lantern resting on the ground as he runs away from the approaching soldiers. One general tells his men, "I guess he really is a humble hero. All this praise must make him uneasy." They stare and marvel at Hercules until he shrinks out of sight. "Let us praise the gods and goddesses for this good fortune."

Hercules rushes over the rolling hills, through the forest, and across the grassy meadows leading to where he first met Viola. He returns to the wall near the water well, but sees no one in sight. The long journey should have tired him, but he is refreshed. He sits in the shade on the cool wall to relax. He sets the lantern on the wall next to him. The soothing rustle of summer's breeze turns the meadow into a wavy green sea. Birds sing as fluttering butterflies dance from orchid to orchid. His mind finally has a moment of peace. This is a much needed rest from the heavy weight of this world.

The distant song of the nightingale pleases his ears. Its enchanting melody hums closer and closer captivating his heart and mind. The

comforting serenity of this place lulls his eyes to close. In this quietness he hears soft footsteps brush across the grass. His mind alerts him to open his eyes and see. His delighted heart beckons him to blindly enjoy the symphony of the countryside. The soothing music of the nightingale continues humming in the distance.

A distant gentle woman's voice asks, "Are you thirsty stranger?"

He immediately realizes she has forgotten all about him.

"Might I bring you a ladle of cool spring water to quench your thirst on this hot summer day?"

Hercules smiles and closes his eye. "Might this pretty bird continue singing her song a moment more?" The humming melody resumes as he sits basking in her memorizing melody. The music draws near.

"Hear sir, I brought you a cool ladle of spring water."

A second later he is forced to open his eyes. She stands in front of him holding the dripping utensil out for him to accept.

He stares and smiles at her as if she were the answer to his prayers.

Her face fills with a strange look as he grabs the ladle from her hand. "Do I know you sir?" Before he can answer, she asks, "Is that what I think it is?"

"Viola, this is Chronus's blue flame."

She tilts her head and asks, "Have we met before?" Before he answers, she waves off his response. "How is this possible? The fire that burns with a blue flame is just a child's story." He holds the lantern up for her to inspect. She lightly touches the glass to feel it burns cold instead of hot. "That is amazing. It really does exist!"

Hercules stares at his secret love as his face forms an amusing smile. He watches her inspired face as she presses it closely near this mysterious blue glow

He allows her a moment to examine the strange substance. "Yes maiden, it really does exist."

Her curiosity changes toward him. She now wishes to investigate how he knew her name. "You called me Viola, but I never told you my name."

"Let me say I knew it had to be Viola. Your beauty could cause Greece to launch a thousand ships."

His intrusive overwhelming flattery causes her to giggle and blush. She feels oddly compelled to accept his strange but wonderful complement. He waits a minute for her to compose herself as her heart drifts back to earth. He gently caresses her hand.

“I need your help Viola. Might you keep this blue flame safely hidden until I return?”

She is amazed he would ask such an important task, and overwhelmed with honor he would trust in her so. “I do not even know your name.”

“Hercules. I have work to do. So will you watch this treasure for me?”

Somehow she feels obligated. She politely answers, “I do not know why you would trust a stranger with this wealth. But I would be honored Hercules. By chance, you are not related to Zeus?”

He swoops his face next to hers as he steals a kiss. He then rushes away yelling, “Mount Olympus! To Athens!”

Her eyes are entranced upon him as he disappears in the forest far away. Her hand covers the lips this god kissed. Joy fills her heart that he'd desire to kiss her.

Hercules reaches the outskirts of the city. He passes a farmer riding atop his ox drawn cart filled with fresh produce. He rushes by with a smile on his face bidding him, “Good day.” The man returns his salutation. He sees the street filled with pedestrians ahead. The chatter of their voices is music to his ears. Some turn to see him speeding by as they speak out, “Hercules.”

He runs with a joyous heart up to the acropolis. The city seems natural alive once more. He arrives at his destination. It is as he hoped. No column or monument exist where it did before. He asks a passing citizen, “What date might this be?”

The finely dressed lady confusingly responds, “Seven days pass high Summer.” She looks at him oddly as his smile thanks her for this welcome information. He now knows he has gotten back the two weeks of days that were filled with such disaster and despair.

He digests his thoughts as he rests at a table in the market. He reasons the effects of turning back time might have on the things that

have happened before. He asks himself *Is father still imprisoned? Does father's heart still hurt him?* His last question is hard to bear. *Is his love for me gone?*

His mind is interrupted by the proprietor. "May I get you something to eat?"

"May I have something to cool my thirst instead kind lady."

She bows before leaving to fetch him a drink. He ponders the horrible thought Prometheus still endures his eternal punishment. He sits alone in his lonesome revelation. *No matter what I achieve in this life, there will always be more for me to do.* She sets his vessel on the table before him. She waits for payment as he drowns his thirsty thoughts. Hercules tosses her a gold coin for her labor as he walks away.

Her very grateful heart forces her to cry. She yells out, "Thank you kind sir. May the gods always shower you with blessings!"

He cynically chuckles wishing that were true. A strange thought comes to him along his walk. His compassion is kindled by this riddle, how mercy has changed everything!

He waits for the moon to rise as he sits near the base of Mount Olympus. Twinkling stars appear as he whistles for his old friend. He is startled by Pegasus as he nudges Hercules from behind. He slides his hand along the fur of cheekbone asking him, "Where did you come from? You must have been near all this time." He pats him before leaping on his back. "Thanks old friend. We return to the Pool of True Reflection." Pegasus flaps his wide white wings as he gallops up, and up. Hercules sees the sparkling spring flowing down Mount Olympus. "Over there my friend." They fly down along the glistening stream, and down through the hidden entrance way.

Pegasus lands near the green meadow next to the shiny still pond. He dismounts as he warns his steed, "Stay here. You may eat the sweet grass, but do not drink from the water." Hercules does not wish to alert the gods of his presence, at least yet. He travels over the rolling countryside thinking how this place seems even more beautiful than before. He sees where he yanked the tree up on his prior mission. He moves to the location growing the sea of green moss. Hercules scrapes a handful from the velvet surface and places the moist moss in his bag.

He realizes he has one more thing he must do as he returns the sack inside his tunic. There is a small pitcher in a sack on Pegasus back.

He kneels down on the bank of the pond. He carefully scoops the pitcher full trying not to disturb the pool. He places the lid on tightly. His face returns to the peaceful pool. He stares down as he whispers, "Mother."

Over his reflection the smiling face of Alcmene appears. "Quickly my adoring son, tell me what you need. My time is short."

"Mother, I found the reason my father despises me so. His heart is ill."

"I know my son. There are things I am not allowed to discuss. Sometimes we hide secrets in riddles to conceal what must not be talked about. The festering sore is what makes him blind to your love."

"You must know he hides his heart from the gods."

"It is locked inside a golden box that can only be opened by you my son. This shows you how much your heavenly father really does love and trust you."

"You must also know Hera's sacrifice."

"I do my son. I do not agree with her ways, but she is a most honorable mother."

"My question is how do I remove the splinter in father's heart without returning to the island of Ishtar? I ask this because Hera holds the key to raising the island where father's heart is hid. Any attempt to converse with her will alert the gods and goddesses of her treason. I cannot do that mother."

"I understand my son. Your compassion far outweighs any of the gods." Alcmene's face turns to the side alerted to someone coming. "Hurry son. I have but a moment more."

"Is there a way to heal father's heart without having to touch it?"

"No my son. The splinter was placed by a god. It must stay in his heart till a god slides it out. Only two of you know the splinter even exist. Only you know the secret to unlocking his heart. I know what your heart asks. Return to Ishtar below the sea. There is one whom you showed mercy to that will assist you if you call him. I love you my son. Always remember my love goes with you."

Alcmene's face is replaced by Zeus. "What trickery do you play on me son? You use my private place to reflect with your departed mother?" His face fills with angry wrinkles. Father shouts, "I'll destroy this place before I let you use it again!"

Hercules rushes toward Pegasus. He leaps on his back as the ground rumbles. "Away Pegasus!" Pieces of the ceiling crash down as boulders splash the pond water up.. They zoom toward the opening at the mouth of this world as massive jagged rocks bites down. Hercules steers his steed sideways to pass through the gap between the jagged stone teeth. His wings brush their razor sharp edges, but they make it outside alive. Hercules turns his head back to see the earth swallow the remains of this magical place. "Sorry fella. You lost several feathers for your effort. Thank you my friend. Our next destination is the islands of Cyclades."

They land on the shoreline of the island as the sun prepares to rise. "Go my friend. Where I am going you cannot." Hercules removes the pitcher right before Pegasus flies off. He slides the sack from inside his tunic out. He removes the lid and crushes the moss over the pitcher with his rubbing hands. The fine green grains drops inside the pitcher. He replaces the lid, and then shakes the contents a dozen times. He searches for the empty vial in his tunic with one hand, as his other removes the pitcher's lid. Carefully he tilts the pitcher filling the vial. He replaces the lids on both containers. The vial he slides inside his pocket.

Off in the distance he sees a very large conic shell laying on the beach. He takes it to the sea and rinses it clean. He slides his hand inside his tunic and presses its clothe against the shell. He quickly rubs its surface faster and faster until he polishes this spot transparent. He returns to where the picture sits. Toward the east He yells out, "Haderus! Haderus!" He then waits as the sun fully rises.

Waves form on the distant sea which turn into a rushing boulder followed by a line of shifting humps. He tells himself *the beast approaches*. The rushing waves slow as the wave crest ceases revealing off the head of Haderus. It stands in the shallow water as the face of the lion roars at Hercules. The face spins around and is replaced with the human face.

“Why do you summon us?”

“I need your assistance in obtaining something very precious to me.”

“Where do you need go?”

“To the secret island below the sea.”

The face grows angry. “You mean the place where the gods and goddesses hide their treasure!”

Hercules humbly bows as he speaks, “I do.”

The creature is perplexed to see him honor them so. “Why do you bow before us? It was you that defeated us, not us you.”

“I wish to show you respect. You are a great foe. I bow in reverence to sincerely ask you for your help. Might you aid me in my quest?”

The beast grows proud stretching its long neck up and tilting its head back. “This is a strange feeling we have not felt before. Mankind was always filled with fear in our presence. Respect feels much better than fear.”

“What I ask is dangerous. If we are successful I will reward you for your effort.”

“How might you do this mighty son of Zeus?”

“I have a pitcher with a magic elixir that will cause all to look upon you to give you great respect.”

“That we may feel this always, we will help you. Now come to me so we may start our journey.”

Hercules rises and replies, “Thanks you great beast. Your deed will become a record in legends.” He swims out to Haderus as it turns away. He grabs the scales of its neck and holds tight. “Away, to the sea.”

The beast swims swiftly along the surface causing backwash to stream over head. Five leagues out Hercules dons his conic helmet waiting for Haderus to dive. Down, down, down the beast swims. Golden bronze rays light what's hidden below. Hercules pats the neck of the beast to steer it toward Colossus. It changes course as it wiggles down, down, down.

He leaps from its back and is propelled the rest of the way to the seafloor. Haderus squirms around, and then wiggles its way back toward the surface. Hercules looks up to see all the giants sleep. He thinks *no*

god must believe any mortal could find this place beneath the sea. So none look through the giant's eyes.

Hercules hurries to the base of the statues feet. He drizzles a square area from his vial on to the stone pediment. The water mist as the stone dissolves revealing the chamber inside. The amber glows ahead of him. It lights his path that he swims with great care. The current he makes causes the caldron to swing and empty out. The gems float down revealing the steps below. He cautiously makes his way pass the arsenal of the gods being careful not to brush against anything. The golden box now waits before him. He turns his head to remember where father's golden bow and quiver rest. He also memorizes the location where the Cyclopes helmet sits.

Hercules speaks, "Father." The massive cube dematerializes revealing his fathers ailing heart. Gently he grabs the pulsing muscle and brings it before him. He sees the infected area. Carefully he slides the slither out as Colossus's hand crashes down. It scrapes everything in its path as it tries to catch Hercules. The fingers curl closed as the giant retrieve it's hand. He knows he only has a few seconds before Colossus sees he has not caught the culprit yet. Hercules lunges for Zeus's bow as he tuck his father's heart securely in his tunic. A cloud of gems and gold coins swirl throughout the chamber. The bronze beast digs his fingers once more. Hercules manages to sling the bow and quiver over his shoulder as the scrapping hand churns him against his finger prison. They close as Hercules stretches to snatch the Cyclopes helmet on the chamber's floor. He tosses his conic helmet as Colossus pulls his hand up, up, and up. The giant holds his hand before his eyes as he opens his fist. Hercules stares at the whiteness of his eyes as his pupils shift side to side. Colossus twist his hand to empty the only thing he could see. The golden bow and quiver was not what he desires.

Hercules drifts down as the unsuspecting giant shoves its hand in the ground. Hercules swims upward toward the surface carrying his bow and quiver. He passes invisibly by the giant's face swimming up, up, and up while his lungs throb. He realizes he will never make the distance to the surface in time.

He sees the dark wiggling serpent descending over his head. The

light goes dim as his vision blurs. The last thing he remembers is tossing his helmet off.

Hercules wakes to the sound of rushing waves. "Oh my head." He looks up as the man's face looks at him.

"I see you survived your venture."

Hercules places his hand on his throbbing head. "Thank you for saving my life. I guess that makes us even."

"The only reason we came back is because of our promise."

He thinks *I never remember making Haderus promise to come back and get me.* He stares confusingly at the creature.

"We promised you we would never step on your land again. The pitcher rest on shore. We would have to break our promise if we were to take the pitcher with the magic elixir. This is why we came back to rescue you."

"You are an honest beast Haderus. You deserve my loyal appreciation."

The beast slows as the waves subside. "Now, how about your promise son of Zeus? Will you honor your word?"

Hercules dismounts the monster. He grabs the pitcher and returns to the beast. "As I promised, here is your reward." He hold the pitcher high as the beast lower its face of the dragon. Hercules pours the elixir in its mouth. It lifts its face way up, and tilts its head back to swallow. All the creatures faces lick their mouths as they enjoyed its taste. The man says, "Yum-mm, that was sweet."

Hercules moves away as Haderus begins to violently shake. He is not sure what would actually happen after it drunk the elixir, just that something would.

Haderus screams out, "You tricked us!" It thrust its neck backward in torment as anguished faces dive below the sea.

Hercules never thought this would happen. He shakes his head side to side in disbelief. He watches Haderus's remains submerge below the sea to its watery death. He feels sorrow as the water starts to peculate up. Out of the sea a bull rushes out. Behind him is the lion roaring. It he leaps from out of the water and runs away. The dragon breaks the surface and spreads its proud wings. Finally, a man swims toward shore.

Hercules smiles as each creature bows their head to thank the hero that freed them. They rush away. A muscular man rises from the shallow water and stands. Hercules laughs. He walks toward Hercules. "I thought your promised not to come on Greek soil again?"

"It was not I who made that promise. It was the lion. I am sure if you ask the lion, he will blame the bull." He smiles at Hercules.

"As I promised. I give you my respect. I will tell my people of your great feat. They too will honor you always in their legends and by your presence Haderus." He bows down before Haderus. The man tilts his head in respect, and then continues on his way.

Hercules whistles and calls for Pegasus. He watches his winged stallion break the clouds as he slings his golden bow and quiver on his shoulder. "Come my friend. We have another journey." They soar over the mainland of Greece toward the home of his beloved Viola.

Evening approaches as they land. Pegasus gallops to a stop in the soft sweet grass of the meadow. Hercules dismount while telling Pegasus, "I will return in the morning. Eat your fill my friend and drink from the cool spring until your thirst is quenched. Sleep well."

Father's warm heart beats next to his. He speaks softly towards the heavens. "I promise father to keep your heart safe. I am coming soon to return it to you." He walks through forest toward the lights illuminating from the quaint cottage. He is not sure if this is where Viola lives, but it is in the area he met her. He thinks *at least they should know where she does live*. He knocks on the front door and waits. He listens as footsteps approach.

"Who might it be at this hour?"

He hears Viola's voice. "It is I, Hercules."

She opens the door a little. She sees his smiling face as she smiles back. "May you please wait here a minute. I was preparing for bed when you knocked. I will go to my room and change. I will tell you when you can come in." She sees his head nod up and down to confirm her request. She disappears as he waits a moment. "You can come in now." Hercules sets his golden bow and quiver against the wall as he waits in a chair by the fire hearth. The comfort of this place relaxes him. His eyes grow weary as he continue to wait for Viola. Soon he is fast asleep.

She returns just to find his head tilted to its side with his eyelids shut. She covers him as he rest. Her mind suggest he must have had a long hard day. She returns to her bed for the remainder of the night. She rest securely knowing a god protects her house. Sweet dreams of her new friend entertain her thoughts in her mid summer's night dream.

Hercules nose smells something that warns him to awake. His eye slowly opens to see Viola placing food on a plate at the table. His other eye has been invited to open to savor the beauty of this maiden. She looks toward him and sees him waking.

Her sweet voice asks, "Good morning Hercules. I hope I did not wake you. I made some eggs and bacon. Might you like to try some?" She unintentionally stares at him as he stretches his huge muscular arms into the air.

"Thank you Viola. Yes, I'm hungry enough to eat a horse." He smiles as he joins her at the table. She thinks he might just be able to eat something that huge. He begins to eat the tasty morsels while telling her how good it taste. She smiles and nibbles on a slice of bacon.

"I pray you sleep well Hercules."

"Yes, I did. It is the first real sleep I've had in a long time."

"Were you able to complete your work?" She thinks maybe she is being too intrusive. "I'm sorry. What I mean is I hope your journey went well."

"Yes it did." He finishes eating as he watches her pretty face knowing she desires more. "Would you like to hear all about what I did?"

Her face comes all a glow. "If you do not mind telling me?"

"First, I wish to thank you for all your hospitality. This food was wonderful." His eyes stare into hers as he begins his adventure.

Her face fills with anxious delight as he fills her mind with his daring escapades. She rides the serpent with him descending through danger to the deep seafloor. She shares in his victory over the giants. Every word he speaks is ambrosia to her hungry heart and mind. Her eyes are enchanted by his handsome heroics, and her sweet heart is elated by his wise compassion. His story is truly fantastic. He finishes his recounting by wiping his mouth with his napkin. He never takes his eyes

off hers. He smiles to signify his story is at an end.

His amazing quest leaves her dumbfounded. The only thing her excited mouth can speak is, "Oh my." Those small words are pleasing to his ears.

"I have another mission. May I have the lantern Viola?"

"Yes. But you need to move away."

He is confused, but he obeys her request.

She rolls the carpet on the floor from where he was sitting. She grabs the metal ring attached to the floor. "I thought this would be the best place to hide your treasure." She lifts the trap door in the floor as the blue beams shower over her. She lifts the lantern out and then hands it to him.

"Thanks for keeping this safe Viola. Might I ask one more favor?"

"How may I help you?"

"I need to hide my bow and quiver for a short while."

"I'll hide them where I hid the lantern."

"I have something important to do. Then I'll return for my bow."

"I too have a mission."

"What might that be Viola?"

"I received word that my dear grandmother lay sick. I fear she may not live much longer." Sadness overtakes her as tears flow down her cheeks.

Her sadness becomes his sorrow. "Might you allow me to come with you and visit with Granny?"

A smile forms on her face as the tears begin to stop. He dries her eyes as she says, "That's strange you would call her that. That is my name for her. We must hurry because she lives far away."

"I know of a much quicker way. How do you feel about flying?"

Her heart knows what he says is true. But, her inquiring mind asks *how is this possible?*

He notices her face questioning this unbelievable feat. "If you are ready, I'll show you how?"

As they open the door to the cottage, Pegasus stands there to greet them. "May I introduce my old friend?" He has come to say hello to you." Hercules pats his jawbone.

Her eyes fill with amazement as she walks to greet this legendary creature. She brings her hand slowly toward Pegasus cheek. His wings start to spread startling Viola. She hesitates as Hercules says, "That is just his way of saying he trust you. Don't be afraid."

"He surely is a magnificent creature." She feels his pristine white fur with her warm soft hand. Pegasus tilts his head to allow her to pet more of his noble head. She smiles and tells Hercules, "Maybe he really does like me."

"I have never seen him bow his head to any man or god before. He senses something about you Viola. I believe he would trust you with his very life. Come now. We must go."

Hercules helps Viola mount. He leaps in front of her. "Are you ready? Hold on tight." The lantern swings in his hand as Pegasus crouches waiting for Hercules command. "Away my friend!" Pegasus leaps as his wings thrash at the air around them. He gallops up and up. Her trembling arms clench around his waist as her frightened face buries in his back. "Are you all right Viola?"

She yells against his back, "I'm fine. It's just I've never flown before."

He grins as he turns his face ahead. "Ride Pegasus! Fly like the wind!"

A short while later, Hercules tells Pegasus, "To the ground my friend."

She thinks this odd. She never told him where her Granny lives, but he knows exactly where to land.

Pegasus gallops to a trot as he lands near the home of stone. He stops by the path leading to the front door. Viola notices Granny's over grown flower garden. This alerts her Granny must be sicker than she imagined. She hurries to dismount.

Hercules senses her urgency. He leaps off and assist her down.

She frowns as she tells him, "I fear something terrible has happen to my grandmother." She scurries to the door. Hercules follows close behind. She raps her hand upon the door and then waits. No one comes to answer. She opens the door and says, "Granny, it's me, Viola. I've come to see how you are." She walks towards her bedroom, but Granny

does not acknowledge her. She finds out why.

Grandmother moans on top her bed. Her hair is a mess. She looks as if she has not been out of bed in many days. Viola sits on her bed. She bends over and kisses Granny's face. "It's me Granny." Grandmother's mind knows this friendly voice as her weak eyes fight to open. She tries to lift her hand and touch Viola's face, but her arm is too tired. Viola lays her head across Granny's chest and cries, "My dear Granny."

Hercules takes the blue flame from out of the lantern. Viola watches as he lay the flames on top of Granny's head.

Upset Viola asks, "What are you doing to her?"

"Trust me a moment more. This will not hurt her. It is suppose to heal her."

Desperate Viola is willing to wait a few moments. She stares as the flames burn brighter and brighter. Granny's eyes begin to slowly open. Viola gasp at the miracle happening before her eyes. Grandmother smiles at her. Her eyes notice the mysterious glow coming from her forehead. Her pupils search to see the source of the blue light. Granny's says, "Oh my." Viola sees the sign of life return to Granny's red cheeks as she lifts her face from her chest. Grandmother's smile widens as she states, "It really does exist."

Viola stands up as Hercules retrieves the flame. She notices something strange happen to her dear Granny. "You need to rise. You must see this Granny."

Viola attempts to help her up, but feisty grandmother says, "I can do this dear." She pushes granddaughter's hand away. Viola covers her mouth in disbelief to what is happening to Granny. She cannot talk, so she points her to the mirror.

Grandmother shows signs she is scared to look in the mirror. Maybe something awful is taking place. She notices her legs do not hurt as she walks over. She turns her hesitant face toward the mirror to see a stranger from many years ago. She cries in her hands as she speaks, "I look beautiful again." Viola wraps her loving arms around her as they share in this happy miracle.

Hercules make a, "A hum," noise to suggest to Viola this might be a

good time to introduce him.

“There is someone I wish you to meet. He is the reason for your youth and healing. Granny, this is Hercules.”

Grandmother turns around to thank him as her mind thinks *is this the son of Zeus?* Hercules is startled to see this very beautiful woman that looks as if she could be Viola's twin sister rather than Granny. He winks at her to let her know she is a delight to look at. She begins to cry all over. “I am so blessed that even the god's desire to look at me. I feel so young I could explode with joy.”

Hercules tells her, “I was just admiring where Viola got her beauty from.” He boyishly smiles as if he was caught stealing a tasty morsel before dinner. Viola feels strangely jealous.

Grandmother feels the tension mounting. “So, are you my little lady bug's boyfriend?”

The mood suddenly changes awkward as Viola feels the embarrassment of the imposing question.

He walks over to Granny and bends his arm out. “You know Granny. My heart is big enough to share with two girlfriends. Do you mind.” He playfully looks over at Viola. She just blushes.

Granny takes his offering by placing her arm through his. He bends out his other arm suggesting Viola do the same. She laughs as their hero leads them both toward the living area.

They spend a little while talking together. Grandmother talks about everything exciting that has occurred in her life. But none to match what has happened this day. Hercules informs Viola he must leave. Granny asks Viola, “Do you have to go? I am so pleased you came to visit.”

Viola tells him, “I must stay here a few days more. I have so much to help Granny with, and so much I need to share with her.”

“I will see you soon.” He stands near grandmother and kisses her cheek. She bows her honored head and smiles. He walks by Viola standing near the doorway. She is hurt he would not even bid her goodbye. He stops. “Oh Viola, I forgot something.” She walks toward him to find out what it might be. Granny stares as he says, “This.” He slides his hand along her cheek to steer her face toward his lips. She

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stands with closed eyes as he kisses her. Her closed eyes force her to stay in this enchantment a moment longer. He rushes away. "Mount Olympus!"

Granny blushes saying, "Oh my."

CHAPTER 9: HEART OF A GOD

Hercules flies high soaring through the puffy clouds. The golden glare of the Olympus temple roof shines to them the way. Pegasus lands at the steps leading up to the giant structure. "If you wish my friend, you may go graze in the Elysian fields. I may be a while." He watches him happily trot toward the heavenly grasses as he lay a cloth over the lantern. He turns to climb the temple steps to see Hermes walking down. "How is the messenger of the gods this fine day?"

Hermes smiles, "The gods got me hard at work. But, it is always good to see a friendly face. What bring you to the gates of Olympus?"

"I have somethings to give my father."

Hermes steps nearer. "Oh, I see." He notices Hercules is carrying something.

He stands before the giant. "Where do you go now?"

"Your father wishes me to deliver a message."

"What might that be?"

"It seems the god Alastor has been becoming very friendly with Aphrodite." He looks at Hercules as his cheeks stretch back suggesting something more is going on than he is allowed to tell.

"Is everything alright?"

"No. That is why I must tell him and her to distant themselves from each other."

"That seems awful to have to do."

“I agree. But that is what happens when the god of family feuds falls for the goddess of love and beauty. It seems things are getting much plainer. Families are getting along and beauty is becoming much too common.”

“I see Hermes. I guess that's what happens when you combine relationship with godly power.”

“Yes my friend, the earth goes berserk. I will see you later.” His feet begin flapping as Hercules ascends the steps. Hermes lifts and sails off toward another part of the heavens. Hercules reaches the massive temple doors and pushes them open.

He stands at the entrance way looking at Zeus waiting for the king to ask him to come forward. Father sits on his throne talking with the gods and goddesses standing around him. He sees his son respectfully waiting his turn to converse with him. Hercules stares at Zeus. Father does something unusual. He smiles at his son.

“I am ordering you Morpheus, god of dreams, and you Erebus, god of darkness, to work out your problems together. Dreams are for sleeping. Sleeping is a night. This should not be so hard to remedy. So fix it you two. As to the rest of you goddesses and gods, my court is in recess the rest of this day.”

All the gods and goddesses walk away with their competing conversations. Zeus stares at Hercules while waiting for the room to clear. “Come forward my son.”

Hercules carries the covered lantern as he approaches the king. He notices Ares peeking around the corner in the great hall leading to where the gods reside. This alerts Hercules to be careful with his conversation on what he need reveal to his father.

Zeus senses something is not right, for his heart beats against his son's heart. Stemly he commands, “Tell me why you have come here!” He seems very angry at Hercules. This is a great change from moments earlier when he smiled at him. Before Hercules can respond, Zeus yells at him, “You must come with me! This is not a request, but an order!”

Hercules stops where he is. He notices Ares walking away as father approaches. Zeus continues on pass his son expecting him to follow.

“Come walk with me Hercules!” Zeus exits the temple of the gods

as he waves his hand in front. A sparkling mist suddenly appears that Zeus walks in to. Hercules follows behind father as the vapor portal disappears.

A rainbow of colors glisten all around them as Zeus stops. Hercules comes before his angry father waiting for punishment for something he is not even aware he did. He looks up at Zeus who begins to smile. "I'm sorry for scolding you. I did so for a reason. I know what you did at Ishtar."

"Here father, I return your heart." Hercules sets the covered lantern down and takes father's heart from inside his tunic. He lifts it high before father.

"May I ask why you retrieved my heart my son?"

He looks around and sees nothing or no one, but is cautious to continue on.

"You may speak freely here. No god is able to hear or see into this place. That is why I brought you here. Your heart was telling me you have something very important, but very dangerous to tell me."

"Please take your heart great king of the gods. Then I will speak."

Hercules carefully slides father's heart onto his large open hands. "Please inspect it closely and you will see what I am about to explain."

Zeus lifts his heart before his eyes and notices a scar. "This mark on my heart is what you wish me to see?"

"Yes father. I had to save your heart because you were going to die."

Zeus is bewildered. "Tell me what you mean." He continues to inspect his heart as his son continues.

"At the time you were preparing to hide your heart in the golden box, one of the gods slide a poison slither pricking your heart. When I recovered your heart it festered with decease. So I plucked it out. Now it has healed leaving but a tiny scar."

Zeus remembers the moment his heart alerted him it was being taken. He felt a sharp pain, and then a great relief. The pain must have come when the splinter was plucked, and the relief came when his heart began to heal. "Thank you my son for protecting me." He places his heart to his chest. It glows as it vanishes into his chest. "How can I

ever repay you? I have been cruel to you as long as I can remember. You faced more danger than you ever faced, yet you risked your life to save your angry father. What courage you possess.” His remorse forces him to bow his head in shame. “Do you know what god or goddess did this act of high treason?”

“I do. It was Ares.”

Zeus cannot believe his other son could do such a thing. “How could you know such a thing unless you were there? Or, you know someone that witnessed the act.”

“Someone did witness the very act. But I do not wish to reveal it now. I will only speak their name at the appropriate time. This is not that time.”

Father meditates on all he has learned. He has more questions that still need to be resolved. “How is it possible Ares could have done this? I saw or heard no one.”

“He followed you in the secret chamber.”

“No one knew of its existence.”

“Think father. Do you remember a sound that caused you to take your eyes from your heart?”

He thinks back to that time. “Now I think of it I do remember something had fallen.”

“The sound that drew your eyes was intentional. That is when the splinter pierced your heart. It was so small it did not cause pain. It was designed to give you a slow death over time.”

Zeus lays his hand across his forehead while sliding his face side to side. “This is unbelievable. This is causing my head and heart double trouble. Now tell me how he could have gone unseen.”

“Great king. He wore the Cyclopes helmet. It rendered him invisible.”

All this revealing information is taking a toll on Zeus. It seems too much a load to carry all at once. He loves and respects Ares. His blurry mind dwells in a foggy quandary filled with mixed emotions. Part of him does not want to believe Hercules to protect his relationship and the honor of his other son. His heart knows Hercules speaks the truth. But, Zeus still needs a little more proof before he convicts Ares. “How is it you

know these things?"

"The witness to the act secretly followed behind you. There were signs someone was following you, although the viewer knew not where you were going. When you looked away, they saw a spark enter your heart. That god or goddess waited for you to leave as they remain hid. They reported seeing the Cyclopes Helmet materialize atop the rack of godly weapons. That is when the perpetrator Ares was revealed,"

Perplexed Zeus demands, "Tell me how you could possibly know all of this? What trickery of treason do you support in this malicious matter?"

Hercules bows his head knowing what he is about to say is surely fantastic. "I was in your court when the witness gave their testimony. You had a hard time believing it then. I know how hard it must be now."

Zeus fills with righteous anger as he prepares to speak. He raises his lightning bolt above his head and prepares to thrust it in Hercules. "You bring stiff charges against a god. Although I love you and your brother, I am king of the gods. My duty to render justice is my supreme purpose. You force me to do this. I give you but one chance to show proof you could have seen this all happen. Now!"

"This was to be my present to you father. But, what I now give you is my evidence." He lifts the veil from the lantern, and then hold it up for Zeus to see.

Father is immediately captivated by the blue flames. He drops his bolt inside the cloud below as he takes the flickering present. "Is this what I think it is my son?"

"It is from Chronus, the god of time."

Zeus knows of its power. He takes the flame out from the lantern, and places in the air before him. His hand gently twirls the blue flames. As it spins he is able to see back in time. He views and hears Hera nervously recount that day he hid his heart. She stands all alone before him and the gods and goddesses. He learns how much a fool he has been. How much she has sacrificed. How much she really loves him and her son Hercules. He dares to twirl the flames further back in time. This vision proves all that Hera and Hercules spoke. Zeus's eyes fill with tears and his healed heart breaks for what he must do now.

“I truly am sorry father for bringing this bad news.”

Zeus grabs Hercules in his hand and raises him up to his face. “This was not your doing. I now know how much you really love me my son. How you risked everything to save me. A father, whether mortal or eternal, could never have a better child. It is I that am truly sorrow for all the time I wasted believing you were the source of my pain. I promise to change now my dear son.”

Hercules proud heart pounds inside him forcing up joyful tears. He speaks, “I pray I always honor you father.”

“My love for you will never again be conditional.”

“What must we do now?”

“We keep this a secret till I figure a plan on what to do. It is not just your brother who betrayed me. There were other conniving gods and goddesses that schemed with him. I must find a way to learn whom they all are before I deal with their punishment. For now, this must be between just you and me. Not even Hera can know. Any one they think might have knowledge of their wicked intention would be in great danger.”

Hercules agrees by the nod of his head. “Yes father.”

“So you agree.”

“Father there is one request.”

“Speak my loyal son. But hurry. We have been gone too long. The gods will grow suspicious.”

“I have a request. Might you consider releasing Prometheus from his torment?”

“He betrayed me. Why would you ask such a thing?”

“He helped me free you from capture. He gave up his freedom to help me turn back time which sent him back to his captivity.”

“I will consider this when this is all finished. For now, you must go. I will send you a message when the time is right.”

Both father and son return to the temple. Once again, Hercules notices Ares probing eyes upon him. Hercules is quick to depart. He bids the king farewell and then descend Mount Olympus.

He climbs down the jagged cliff face as he reaches the base of the mountain. He hears a section of the face cracking above him. He stares

above knowing he has no way to avoid anything that might fall down. He looks down to see people in the village below. A massive boulder the size of a building cracks loose. He knows he has only seconds to do something. He lifts his arms up and yells, "Mount Olympus!" The boulder lands right on him. His arms strain as he pushes the monolith upward. He cannot loose the stone or it will roll and crush the villagers. He carries the giant rock a mile through the village, and then past it. All the townsfolk grow still as they marvel at this feat, and the demigod that carries the large boulder.

He hears the towns people thankful praises him as walks out of their village. A line of children follow behind as he exits the town. A young boy asks, "What are you going to do with that. He sees a small stream outside of town and figures to put the stone to good use.

"I'm going to do this." He tosses the boulder toward the stream's ravine. The children are startled by the rushing wind the boulder makes, and frightened by the loud crashing and shaking as it meets the earth. He watches the rolling rock settle in place. The blocked stream quickly begins to fill the ravine. "Now your village will have plenty of water to draw from." He turns and lifts a small girl. He smiles at her saying, "And you will have a cool place to swim."

The excited children can only say, "Wow."

He waves to the children as he walks on. He begins to think about the incident. That boulder seemed to be no accident or related to any force of nature. It was if it were pried loose. Only a god could do that. He believes now danger follows him. He must take every caution. Another thought comes to him. Viola might be in danger if the gods are looking down.

Hercules races across the land as fast as he can. The distance he must travel does not warrant calling his winged friend. As he arrives through the forest around her cottage he sees her front door is open and some of her belongs strewed across the ground. He wants to run and check on her safety, but his mind warns him its best to observe from his obscure position to see what evil lurks here.

From around the back of her house walks a griffin. Its eagles head searches for anything that might approach the cottage. Its lion's paw

digs at a log to sharpen its daws. Hercules carefully moves through the trees to find another way into the cottage.

He finds an open window in back of the cottage. He cautiously sneaks inside to find the back of the griffin standing at the front cottage door. The home has been torn apart as if someone was looking for something. There is no sign Viola is still in her cottage, just overturned furniture mixed in with pieces of broken pottery. He sneaks to the room with the hidden chamber. The carpet is the only thing still in its place. One eye is dedicated to the griffin and one to retrieving his bow and quiver. The door squeaks as he lifts the door. The griffin turns and sees him snatching the bow. He rushes toward Hercules as he loads the bow with a golden arrow. The griffin realizes it has lost the race as Hercules aims it toward its head. The bird beast stares but does not move.

“I give you one chance. Where did you take her?”

The griffin tilts its head.

“Here is what we are going to do.” He keeps aim at its head. “Turn slowly and move outside.” The griffin understands and obeys. Hercules carefully mounts the beast. “Now, you're going to take me to where she is. Remember, this arrow is aimed at your head.” The beast allows him on its back. “Away now.” It lunges upward as Hercules holds his drawn bow. They fly for hours in and out of clouds.

The beast dives toward earth. Hercules is able to see where this place is. He recognizes the phrygia coastline. This must be the isthmus Mysia. The griffin lands in a field near the base of the mountain. Hercules sits on the griffin wisely waiting for the king of the Doliones people to come welcome him.

An army of sword carrying centaurs come out of the forest followed by a hundred minotaur. Hercules dismounts the bird beast and faces his approaching enemy with his bow drawn. The griffin sneaks off as Hercules prepares for battle. All the creatures cirde about him. Everything grows quiet.

The trees in the forest snap like twigs as he watches their tops bend. A silver chariot exits the treeline driven be the king. A path of broken debris follows behind him. The king yells, “I see you got my message! I am glad you found your way!” The army of centaurs part to

grant the king access.

Hercules fixes his aim on the king. He tells him, "If you be a wise king Cyzicus, you will let Viola go."

The king smiles as he lifts his hand. "Bring her forth!"

A dozen tall trees smash on the ground as five giants draw along the bumping cart. He sees her bouncing as she clutches to the metal bars of her cage.

"I think it would be more wise of you to let down your bow. I assume you see my six armed friends?"

One Gegenees giant raises his six clubs high over the cart, ready to smash it to pieces.

"I think my soldier might beat your arrow aimed at me. Do you want to see?"

Hercules turns his gaze toward frightened Viola. She looks at him and knows they will kill him if he drops his bow. "Don't do it. There's nothing you can do to save me." One of the giants shakes her cage hard enough to knock her down.

Their numbers are too great for him to try and save Viola before the Gegenees kill her. The king makes him an offer.

"I am a sporting man. Two of the goddesses paid me a great sum to destroy you. I had to promise not to reveal their names. So I will not tell you Nemesis, the goddess of vengeance, and Enyo, the goddess of war put me up to this." He smiles cynically at Hercules. "I never much cared for their ways, so I will give you one chance. Do you accept?"

Hercules knows whatever the king is going to propose will be next to impossible. He looks at Viola as he lays his bow on the ground.

Viola sees what he is doing and yells out, "Quickly, pick up the bow and save yourself Hercules! There is no way to save me!"

Her words are not obeyed. Hercules submits and says, "Do as you wish Cyzicus."

"Good then." The king signals the minotaur to bind Hercules as the centaur forms two walls by opposing ranks leading back up the mountain. A giant grabs the end of the chain that's bound around his prisoner. He begins dragging his captive through the wall of centaur as the minotaur marches behind. King Cyzicus circles his chariot around as

he orders, "Back to the fortress!" They take the rugged path the Gegeness made. Hercules watches the bouncing cart just ahead watching Viola cry. She helplessly stares at his bouncing body slam and drag over fallen trees.

Two giants hold the fortress gates open for the passing procession. The centaur do not enter. They split ranks and surround the fortress walls.

Hercules sees Viola's cart come to a stop. The giant continues dragging his prisoner up the steps as the King yells down, "Welcome Hercules to my court." The doors close as he sees the last of Viola cringe down in her dusty prison.

The king sits at his throne as Hercules is shoved before him. He takes a moment before he gloats. "So this is the mighty Hercules? The conqueror of Colossus and master of monsters." He laughs at his anguish. "I see no demigod before me. You are just a bruised and battered man."

Two giants lay a thick metal yoke upon his shoulders and lash it to his arms. Its weight is so heavy it forces Hercules to his knees.

"It is nice you bow before me. But, your reverence is not what I require. I give you a challenge. My Gegeness giants are near to completing a project I assigned them a full year ago. If you accept my offer, I will let you and your maiden go free. Do you accept?"

Hercules has no idea what the challenge contains. But the chance to save Viola is all he needs. "Do you promise King of Mysia to honor your bargain?"

"My word is my bond. "

"Then I agree."

"You do not even know what I ask of you, yet you accept. You are a bigger fool than the goddesses that bargained with me for your life. I like that." The king walks toward the purple veil covering the wall behind his throne. "Here is what I do require." He slides the veil open revealing a window to his world. The king waves for Hercules to come join him. Two giants push him in the direction of the king. He stands before him as the king explains what he wants done. "Between those two peaks is a valley. That valley separates my kingdom. As you can see,

my army and the Gegenuss build me a bridge that nears completion. Do you understand?"

Hercules says, "What is it you require of me?"

The king points with his hand. My giants have started work on a tunnel on top the right peak of that mountain. I need you to finish the tunnel. If you can complete it before my army finishes the bridge, I will set you free."

"How long must the tunnel be?"

"Three miles of the hardest rock this side of Mount Olympus. Even my giants wear weary from their constant pounding."

"Let me free of my yoke and I will complete your task."

"Did you think it would be that easy. No, you will wear your heavy yoke to keep you from trickery." The king watches the giants slowly slide their heads side to side in disbelief. They know how impossible the rock is to break with all their arms and strength. "I give you one last chance to rescind your agreement. I will even let you go free, but the woman will remain my slave. What say you?"

"I have one question before I answer. Why do you bother to even make this offer?"

"I could kill you and satisfy the goddesses. But, that would probably cause me to loose a good portion of my army. I do not believe you would die without a fight, even if I tried to threaten you with your maiden's life. For, you know your death would leave her with a life filled with torment." He looks at Hercules as his chains rattle on his yoke. His defeated head lowers to acknowledge the king is right. "I figure with this challenge everyone wins. I have the mighty Hercules working for me. If you die from the mountain caving in upon you, I win. I do not lose any of my army. The goddesses will also be happy, and I will have filled their demand. Plus, at least some of my tunnel will be finished. If the bridge is finished first at least some of my tunnel will be built. You loose your life, I loose some of my army, but at least I'll be better off than I would be. By the very slimmest of chances you are successful, I will have my tunnel finished. You will have your maiden back. I will have a trade route for transporting goods throughout all my kingdom." The king smiles.

“You are a very wise king. It seems you thought of everything.”

“Thank you Hercules. Let my wisdom serve as warning against any plans to decisive me.”

Hercules has no options but to agree to the king's terms. “I accept you challenge.”

The king's giants and army follow behind Hercules as he makes his way to the mountain peak. The Gegenuss usher him toward the tunnel as the army descends to the bridge below. He stands before one of the giants pounding the rock with his six arms. Sparks fly in all directions, but his arms have barely made a dent in the cave. The tired Gegenuss sees his replacement. He moves away toward the other giants as Hercules is forced in the tunnel's entrance. The largest of the giants grunts at Hercules as three of his arms point at the rock. It swings his arm to signify to Hercules to start working. The giant picks up all the hammers left on the ground and carries them away with him.

Two of the Gegenuss stay behind and guard Hercules as the other four go to assist the bridge builders. The guards laugh at him knowing he has no tools to even break the impossible rock with. They wait to see how he is going to complete his task.

Hercules turns side ways and begins rocking his heavy yoke back and forth. After he is able to swing it far enough, he plows the end of his yoke into the mountain. Sparks fly as he continues to hammer at the rock-face. Only a small amount of rock falls down with each of his blows. The guards seem amazed he is able to loose that amount. They know how hard the rock is.

He stares at the rock as he rest a moment. He think he's found why the rock is so hard to split. He notices the sparkle of veins filled with Adamantine running through this mountain. Hercules smiles as he thinks *the king is not so smart. If he only knew the value of this unbreakable metal that is only suppose to exist atop Mount Olympus.* He also knows this just made his task virtually impossible. Only Adamantine can cut through Adamantine. He continues to swing and pound with little success as he plans a way to meet his challenge.

The night approaches along with the cold. One giant begins a fire to light the dark tunnel. Hercules swings his tired arms attached to his

worn hot yoke. The guards begin to yawn as Hercules notices the army has made bed for the night. As soon as the guards fall asleep he begins to implement his plan. Hercules kicks the fire inside his cave up against the rock. He pounds the rock face with his yoke that sucks the fire inward. The swinging yoke acts like bellows stoking the fire hotter and hotter. The rock face glows red, then orange, and finally white. Huge chunks fall off the rock face. He looks toward the giants to find they remain fast asleep. He kicks the fire further inside as he removes the fallen debris with the end of his yoke. He keeps repeating the process till he is deep inside the mountain. By morning he's nearly through the other side. The giants wake to see mounds and mounds of rock stacked against the mountain. They marvel at this feat and realize he just might win the bet. The four giants return to work on the bridge hurrying the army back to work. Two giants guard the entrance of the cave.

The pounding stops as Hercules draws toward the entrance. He sees the two guards warning him to return to work.

"I need a short rest and a fresh breath of air."

They allow him to poke his head and yoke outside, but they are careful to watch his every move.

"It looks like I am going to win my bargain with King Cyzicus. I have just a little more before I breakthrough Bear Mountain. I wonder how that will make him feel knowing that I won."

The giants look at one another. Fear forms on their faces as they think about what that will mean to them.

Hercules mentions, "If you were to go help the others I would not tell." He looks at their faces. They seem anxious to go, but they know they cannot leave Hercules alone. "Do not worry. Why would I try and run away. I have this heavy metal yoke on me. Why would I do that when I am so close to victory?" They look back and forth several times at the bridge and then back at Hercules. "I am going back to work. I should be done shortly." He walks deep inside the tunnel and stops. He turns his head back toward the light. Both giants have taken his suggestion. He realizes everyone in the king's army is working on the bridge. Rather than winning his challenge with the king, he decides the king is not a man that would honor his promise. Hercules takes another

course of action.

Midway of the tunnel Hercules lifts his yoke up to the ceiling. He shouts out, "Mount Olympus!" His voice echos out the cave and throughout all the valley.

The two Gengenuss immediately look at each other. They begin to think it might not have been such a good idea to leave Hercules alone. They watch as the piles of rock debris begin rolling down at them.

Hercules strains everyone of his muscles pushing upward. He watches as cracks run on each side of the tunnel. His arms pulsate as rock fragments shoot out. The mouth of the tunnels collapses. That part of the mountain settles in the void where the tunnel was. He feels the peak of the mountain tilting down in the direction of the bridge. He drops one side of his yoke and buries it in the floor. The other end he digs into the rock ceiling. The entire peaks slides as he guides it with heavy metal yoke. The weight of the peak snaps his yoke in two. A bright cloud covers him while he listen the to the crashing peak. He stands in the daylight as the dust settles around him. The peak now rest where the king's army worked. He also sees there is no more need of a bridge. The peak of the mountain stretches from mountain to mountain. He hurries and undoes what is left of his yoke.

A cloud of dust covers the valley. This gives him a chance to sneak up to the fortress of King Cyzicus. The blaring crashing sound is sure to have alerted the king something is going on, but the cloud of debris should be concealing has what really happened. This may give Hercules essential time he needs to attempt a rescue of Viola before the king reacts.

A dozen centaurs guard the fortress walls. He recognizes one that is closes to him. Hercules whispers, "Nessus, over here." He crouches down behind a bush and waits. The curious centaur cautiously proceeds to investigate. It stops short of where Hercules is hiding. Once again he whispers, "Over here Nessus." The horse sense in Nessus causes him turn and prepare to flee, but his human consdiousness forces him to investigate. He stands near the bush looking to see who called his name. Hercules slowly maneuvers his left hand up to grab Nessus's neck as his right hand prepares to muzzle the centaur's mouth.

As Nessus looks around, Hercules grabs him and immediately stops him from calling for help. He forces the kicking centaur to the ground as he looks to see if the commotion alerted the other guards. None of the centaur seem to notice what has happened.

Hercules whispers to Nessus, "If you do what I ask, no harm will come to you." Nessus settles his jabbing hooves. Hercules whispers his demands in the centaur's ear. Nessus slowly stands next to the bush with Hercules concealed hand around Nessus's throat. Hercules whispers, "Now."

Nessus screams out, "The bridge has fallen! The mountain has given way!" All but one centaur races near to Nessus to learn what his is yelling about. They see the dust settling where the location of the bridge was.

One centaurs orders the others, "Hurry, go help them! I will go inform the king what has happened!" All the centaur but one gallop off. The leader trots toward the gates of the fortress.

Hercules leaps on Nessus and tells him, "Now." Both of them gallop through the open gate. Hercules sees Viola in the unprotected cage. He leaps off. "I let you live Nessus. Now flee this mountain fortress and never return." The scared centaur races out the gate. Hercules rushes to the cage imprisoning Viola.

He grabs two of the metal bars and pulls them apart. Viola's amazed face asks, "How is this?"

"I will explain later." The bars bend enough for Viola to escape. They rush outside the fortress gate as he whistles for Pegasus. "I still have something I must do." His white winged friend soars down toward earth. Hercules thinks of a place she might be safe until he can meet up with her. He lifts her up and places her on Pegasus's back. "My friend. Take Viola to the Elysian fields. Watch over her till I come." He tells her, "This is the last place the probing eyes of the gods and goddesses will expect to find you. Now off Pegasus." He watches as they soar up to the heavens. *Now, to retrieve my golden bow and quiver.*

He thrust open the doors to the chamber of the king. Cyzicus stands with his back facing toward Hercules. He stares out his window seeing all the destruction. "Are you satisfied that you destroyed my

entire army and Gegenees?”

“You brought this upon yourself Cyzicus when you sided with the goddesses against me. Your biggest mistake was taking Viola captive. I had to destroy them all to protect her.”

The king continues to gaze out his window reflecting on what Hercules spoke. He tilts his head down and slides it side to side in unbelief to all that has happened. “You have ruined my kingdom. Not only have you punished me, but all the Doliones people below.”

“Yes, your wealth has been righteously ripped away from you. Blame your greed and pride for that. But, I have one last proposition for you. If you agree, you will be more wealthy than you were.”

The king lifts his head and turns his face to his side. “I am listening. Speak your bargain.”

“First. You must return my bow and quiver. I will then tell you a special secret.”

Cyzicus calls for his servant. “Bring me Hercules golden bow and quiver.” The minotaur returns carrying the requested items. “Give them to Hercules.”

“I thank you.” He slings them over his shoulder. “Tell the goddesses when they inquire I was buried in the mishap along with your army. This will protect you from their vengeance for at least a while. This should give me time enough to deal with them.”

Cyzicus nods his head in agreement. “How about the wealth you promised?”

“If you would have spent time where your giants worked you would have noticed the mountain peak is filled with veins of treasure.”

“Do you mean there is gold or silver running through the mountain?”

“No. something more valuable.”

The king turns toward Hercules. His face fills with confusion. “What is more precious than gold? Is it gems?”

“No. It is the unbreakable metal of the gods.”

The king begins to smile a very large smile. “Do you mean Adamantine?”

“Yes. Not only will you have wealth, but a way to control the

pantheon dwelling on Mount Olympus.”

Cyzicus rubs his hands together and laughs. “I will be the most powerful king on earth.”

“I would keep this fortune quiet until you have harvested all its ore. Then you will be able to bargain with the very gods. They will never accept man having this treasure. Use this wisely King Cyzicus. This new found treasure might be your greatest blessing, or your undoing. Decide wisely when dealing with the gods.” He stares at the king a moment as his countenance changes. He turns toward the window to his world and looks out it with a new perspective. It seems he is learning what it truly means to be a wise king.

“I will try and be loyal and just with my subjects. I will truly seek to be an honorable king.” Cyzicus turns back towards Hercules to tell him thank you for this blessing. He only hears the words ring out, “Mount Olympus!” It echos throughout his chamber.

Hercules reaches the shore of Mysia. He swims the ocean between the isthmus and the mainland of Phrygia. His mind ponders all that has happened as he journeys across the plains of Calydon. He wonders if his father Zeus has discovered the treachery Nemesis and Enyo had devised against his son. He determines their motive had to be entangled with Ares plot to overthrow King Zeus. Hercules stumbles into a pit he did not see. As he climbs out he is able to determine it is an immense footprint pressed in the earth. As he enters the eastern forest of Calydon his senses go on heighten alert. This is the land where cyclopes dwell.

The forest ahead has been thrashed. All the trees have been broken to splinters. He hurdles over the fallen rubble in his endeavor to speed through unnoticed . He finally sees the end of the forest. It ends where the land of Aetolia begins. Before he steps out of the Calydonian Forest he's challenged by several cyclopes. He has no way to escape as two block him to the rear.

Hercules bravely draws near the two cydopes stopping him from entering Aetolis.

“Why do you trespass on our land tiny man?”

“I am in a hurry to get to Macedonia. The land to the north”

“Do you travel to where the Greek gods live?”

“That is my intention. Why do you stop me?”

“The only reason we have not torn you apart is you have courage enough to come to me.”

“What must I do to pass by you?” Hercules watches as the two secretly converse.

“We will let you by, but we require a fee.”

“What might you charge me to pass?” The one-eyed giants again whisper. As they finish they laugh.

“Your price is one bore.”

“That seems to be a reasonable offer.”

The cyclops points off in the distance. “Yes it is. We want that bore.”

Hercules looks to where the cyclops points. He sees what is no ordinary bore. He watches it rut the ground and smash the trees to splinters. He knows why the Calydonian Forest is thrashed. That monster is nearly as high as the cyclopes. “If I bring him to you then you will let me pass?”

“If you can, we most certainly will. We have not been able to get close enough to it to capture or kill the beast. So you think you can subdue the bore sent by the goddess of the hunt, Artemis? Three days and nights it has roamed where it wants.”

“If I am successful, will you give your word you will let me pass?”

“Of course tiny foolish man.”

“May I ask one favor of you?”

The reluctant giant asks, “What might that be?”

“May I borrow your club?”

All the cyclopes laugh. One replies, “If you can carry my club you may use it.” The giant leans the handle of his club down in front of Hercules. “Here.”

He leans the handle over his shoulder and levers the club upon his shoulder. All the cyclopes stare with their astonished eyes. One scratches his head and asks, “How is he able to do that?”

Hercules sneaks through the tall grass that the Calydonian bore is eating. He turns his head back to see what the cyclopes are up to. They

seem to be trying to hide among the trees in case the bore turns upon them. Hercules continues the rest of the distance crawling on his hands and knees. The bore feast unaware he is just feet away. His massive tusks bob up and down helping to hide Hercules from its sight. Quietly he rise, and quickly he swings. The club cracks the head of the bore knocking him to sleep. Hercules drags the beast by its tusk back toward the giants. The four giants stand together amazed that this tiny human could do what they could not.

“Here is your payment, and here is your club. Now I bid you let me pass.”

Their leader orders the other three to hurry and bind the beast.

“What is your name so I may tell my children of your feat?”

“Once I do, you will let me pass?”

“Most certainly.”

“I am Hercules.”

“The son of Zeus?”

“Yes. Now please let me pass.”

The angry cyclops yells, “You were with the human Jason whom blinded my uncle Polyphemus! I will smash you instead.” He propels his fist down towards Hercules.

The mighty son of Zeus catches his fist with his outstretched arms. The giant leans all his weight on his arm in his attempt to crush Hercules. He hold the fist up with one arm as he retrieves a golden arrow from his quiver. He jabs it upward in his palm. The cyclops hastily retrieves his hand in pain. As it attempts to grabs the arrow with his other hand, Hercules snatches its thumb. He wrestles it back against his gargantuan wrist, and then twist his digit in to a severe position of pain.

The cyclops screams out, “You may pass! You may Pass!”

Hercules hurries by the agonizing monster and disappears in the Aetolia forest. By the end of the day he leaves Thessaly behind as he approaches the home of the gods. He climbs toward the summit of Mount Olympus hoping the gods and goddesses believed King Cyzicus story of his death. As he near the temple he sees the misty waterfall where the clouds on earth are made. Hercules safely follows the source of the fall up the river of Okeanos that winds through the green plush

meadows of the Elysian fields.

A small cloud of colorful butterflies flutters over the pair. Pegasus sips from the still pond as Hercules sees Viola dipping her feet in the cool waters. A peace envelopes his spirit to see they arrived safely. Hercules bends and picks a handful of flowers before greeting the unsuspecting couple. He stands just behind watching Viola stare at the slowly flapping wings of a beautiful butterfly perched on her finger.

He gently startles her with his comment. "Butterflies sense innocence and those pure of heart." She smiles as she turns her head toward him. He offers his bouquet of colorful flowers while saying, "They are only attracted to true beauty that lay within one's heart. At least that is what my mother told me."

She leaps to her feet and hugs her hero. "I was worried about your safety."

Hercules swings his arm away to keep her from crushing his gift. He embraces her. "I see my friend Pegasus has taken good care of you."

His steed presses his head against them and nudges his way into their group hug. His licking tongue of affection forces an abrupt end to the endearing moment. Both Viola and Hercules laugh as they pat their protector. Once again he offers Viola his gift. This time she notices just how pretty her flowers are.

"They're beautiful Hercules. Thank you." She leans up and sneaks a kiss.

His humble side causes him to blush, but his heroic side forces him to ask, "Should I pick more flowers?" He puckers his lips and smiles.

She grabs around his neck as her face draws near to his. "You earned this one." She kisses him longer and slower this time.

They spend time sitting together under the shade of the willow as Hercules tries explaining what has happened, and what he plans to do. Viola runs her soothing fingers through his wavy hair as his head lay upon her lap. He tells her, "You're safe her a while longer. The unsuspecting gods must have believed what King Cyzicus told the goddesses, that I died." The mere thought of his death forces Viola's eyes to tear. In this moment her sadness causes him to reflect on his own mortality that he so often recklessly abandons. "I will try and be

more cautious with my actions in the face of mortal danger." Her tears stop as she kisses him once more.

Time grows short. Hercules prepares himself for what he must do next. "I must go now. Please remain her."

"Why must you go?"

"It seems the gods and goddesses plot against my father and suspect I know of their treason.

This is the last place the gods will look to. This side of the Elysian fields is reserved for the gods pleasure. Their probing eyes search among the living on earth. Others seek Hades council in this matter. Only when he gives them permission can they search the underworld. For that is where they suppose I am. That will take some time for the gods to find I am not really dead. This is why I must leave. To find a way to reveal all the gods and goddesses that plotted against the king. And assist my father in imprisoning them before they attempt to overthrow him. This is the safest place for you right now."

Viola embraces him. "I know you must go. Take care for I know the gods are crafty." She kisses him one last time. "Now go do what you must."

Hercules tells Pegasus, "For now, remain here and watch over Viola. I will call you when you're needed my old friend."

As he nears the end of the river Okeanos he sees Hermes approaching.

"I have news from your father." He holds a golden scroll in his outstretched hand.

Hercules retrieves the scroll as Hermes prepares to turn away. "I have something to tell you before you leave."

"Do you have a message you wish me to give your father?"

"Not at this time. I do wish you to know I thank you for being a good friend to me."

Hermes smiles. "I too think fondly of you. I must go now. You're not the only one I have news for."

After Hermes flies off, Hercules view the scroll:

"My son; I have found many perpetrators involved with Ares plot. I have word from gods who remain loyal that others form a secret

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alliance. They hear whispers the king knows about their deception. They plan to act soon to steal my throne. There is great unrest developing between the gods. We must act now. I too have crafted a plan. This will require your assistance. When the moon is high, come to me at the Pool of True Reflection.”

The scroll dissolves into twinkling golden dust that drifts away.

CHAPTER 10: ZEUS'S PLAN

Hercules descends the mountain and follows the spring that leads to where the earth swallowed the pool beneath the world. The moon draws nigh overhead as he enters the restored chamber. He ventures across the rolling greenery as he sees where father waits.

“My son. Come near. I made this place of peace so I may relax amongst my thoughts without interference from any of the gods.” Zeus stares down in the still pond and smiles. “Yes, your son comes to me.”

Hercules soon sees whom father is speaking with inside the pool. His mother cries with joy.

“I knew in my heart one day you and your father would make amends. I am so overjoyed my dear boy.”

Zeus pulls Hercules close to his side with his affectionate arm. “This is my true son who I am not deserving of. He now fights alongside me for the power of my throne. I could never be more proud a father than I am now.”

Hercules smiles at his mother as his new pride raises him to the height of father. He looks up to Zeus's face to return his smile of appreciation. He looks down once more and says, “Mother...”.

Father interrupts him. “While she is still your mother, I have exalted her to the goddess of all goodness. When this is over, she will reign from Mount Olympus. Please address your mother accordingly.”

He sees mother acknowledge father affirmation by nodding her

face up and down. "I am so happy for you Goddess Alcmene." He bows in respect to her new title. "Please forgive me for my ignorance. How I wait to be in your presence and embrace you once more."

"I too am very proud of you my son. Listen to your father. Take care to what you must do. I will see you then.." Her reflection drifts away beneath the still water of the pool.

"It is just you and me now son. No one may see in this place except by the pool. Come walk with me so we may talk." They stroll through a flowery meadow as they leave the pond behind.

"Father. Will not my natural mother cause strife with Hera?"

"Who do you think suggested my action?" They smile at each other. "She knows now she does not compete with Alcmene. Hera sees your mother's heart is pure. Now, let us discuss matters at hand."

Father and son negotiate each of their roles in what they must do. Hercules learns how father will determine those loyal and trustworthy and incorporate them against those who would destroy the order between gods and kingdom. He sets a trap that is more deceitful than their prideful imaginations.

Hercules's first instruction is to free Prometheus from his torment. Father warns his son, beware, for he complete this task alone. Father cannot give his approval without alerting the gods.

Hercules summons his steed as he wait at the mouth of the underground chamber. Both soar above the world that's painted with the brush of the moon. He uses the remaining darkness of the night to fly inside the hidden valley atop the Caucasus Mountains. Pegasus lands near the column table that binds the resting Prometheus. The moon dips below the horizon as the first blue rays of day push the stars up in the sky. He climbs down from Pegasus as he looks for the lock that binds the chains. The light turns orange but he still cannot see where the lock is located.

Distant screeching echos through the valley. Prometheus's chains rattle alerting Hercules he awakes. He sees the eagles swooping down as Prometheus prepares himself for the pain. The slack metal stretches taunt snapping every heavy metal link in place.

Hercules knows time has run out. He squats down and leaps up

upon the startled Prometheus. A striking eagle attacks with its massive projecting talons. He bends to avoid its slicing swords. The beast misses him. It rises and begins to circle round as it prepares for another assault. He grabs an arrow and shoots the eagle through just as another swoops to kill him. He leaps up while it thrusts its razor beak trying to snatch him from the air. Hercules is too fast for the creature. He grabs the beast neck and breaks it with a sudden twist. One last eagle dives in fury. He pounds it with a mighty blow of his fist. The creature crashes into the adjacent cliff and falls dead upon the ground. Hercules turns toward the uplifted head of Prometheus.

“Good morning. Might you know where the lock is?”

“Thank you Hercules. It lay near my feet.”

Hercules climbs down the stone table and finds the lock. “My father Zeus has one condition in commuting your sentence. It's that you help me perform one thing. Do you agree?”

“Let me have a second to think about it. Should I stay here and have my liver torn from me everyday for eternity, or be free once again? I think I'll choose the later.”

Hercules uses the key that Zeus used to confine him. The chains drop to the ground as Prometheus lifts himself off the stone. Hercules tells him, “We must hurry and leave this place. I will explain what we are doing and where we are going on the way to our destination.” Hercules leaps upon Pegasus. “Away Pegasus!” Prometheus dashes away from his hilltop prison while rubbing his shackle free wrist.

He smiles while thinking *free at last. It so good to be free.*

Both demigod and son of a Titan return to the mainland of Greece. Hercules briefs Prometheus on what father has planned to snare the wicked gods and goddesses. They travel to Thrace to enact their part of what Zeus has planned.

Zeus sits upon his throne. He watches Hermes approach him. “Have you delivered all my correspondence?”

“Yes my king. And I followed your instructions just as you requested.”

“Very good my loyal and faithful messenger. You must need a rest after all I have asked. You are dismissed.”

Hermes bows before leaving the throne chamber.

Hera enters the empty king's chamber. Zeus waves to her to come closer.

She smiles and says, "My king and husband. Have you finished your work?"

He smiles while nodding his head up and then down. His eyes search the chamber to see if any hiding ears listen. He whispers, "Tomorrow we find out all those whom remain loyal to the king." He nods his head once more slowly up and then down.

Hera bows to acknowledge his revelation. She turns and leaves the chamber.

Zeus ponders the message Hermes delivered to most all the gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus.

"This is to inform you alone of a secret King Zeus keeps. The gods whisper he has formed a weapon more powerful than his lightening scepter. I have heard who ever wields it will possess the combined strength of all the gods and goddesses. I urge you to join me in helping vanquish this tyrant. You and I alone will be able to rule all Olympus together. I do not tell you my name in fear what might happen if the king or his loyal subjects get wind of my intent. If you wish to continue this endeavor, join me at the temple in Thrace when the sun is high overhead tomorrow. We must act now!"

Pegasus gallops to a landing at the mountain base in Thrace. Hercules dismounts as he watches the long legs of his tall friend slow to a pace. He adjust his quiver as he awaits for Prometheus to arrive. His eyes search for the hidden entrance that leads to the belly in the earth.

"My legs are not what they use to be. They exercise to a magnitude they have not for many year. Please forgive me." Prometheus slows his breathing as he bends over to relax and catch his breath.

Hercules waits a moment for Prometheus to recover from his long run. "We must hurry. The sun sets and we have little time to find the gates."

Prometheus gains his strength and stands tall. He notices something over near the mountain. "Look there." He points towards a shimmering light. "I believe Helios lights our way."

Hercules sees the shimmer of the sun reflecting off something. "We will thank the god of the sun later. We must hurry before Helios withdraws his favor." Hercules tells Pegasus, "Away my friend." Both rush in the direction of the fading sparkle.

The last of the sun's light disappears as they draw near to the massive metal gates. Hercules grabs where the gates join. He sees the arms of Prometheus tower overhead. Both pull at the locked gate in their attempt to break it open. The lock snaps and the gate nudges open. Hercules looks up just to see Prometheus smiling face stare down. They quietly move down the corridor toward a light far beneath the world.

They reach the source of the light that opens into a vast world beneath the world. They marvel at all they see. They find there are mountains, forest, fields, and even an ocean in this land. Hercules points to where they must journey. It is the city of the giants.

Prometheus says, "I feel like an ant." They walk through a field with corn stalks a thousand feet tall. They pass by wheat so tall that it cracks like a tree in a storm as their shafts blow in the breeze. They see a giant at the end of the row working his field.

Hercules calls up to him, but the giant does not hear him. He tries again, but his voice goes unanswered. He decides another tactic to get his attention. He grabs an arrow and pricks him in his toe. The giant leans down to grab his foot. Prometheus waves his arms trying to attract the giant as Hercules yells once more.

"What is this?" The giant sees the tiny men. He decides whether he should crush them with his foot, or try and see what they want. His curiosity gets the best of him. He cups his hand over the men and scoops them up, and then brings them before his eyes. "What do we have here?"

"I am the son of Zeus. I come to inquire the whereabouts of Porphyrion and Alkyoneus. Might you know where to find them?"

"Why does the son of Zeus desire these men?"

"I come to strike a bargain with them with the authority of my father."

The giant thinks a moment. *What could the king of Mount Olympus*

offer that I may desire?

Hercules sees he may need more substance to help him pry open his lips. "Zeus offers those giants immortality if they help him."

"What do I need with that? I already have it."

Hercules now realizes he speaks with one of the two he is attempting to contact. "Yes, you do. But, your immortality ends at the border of Thrace. My father offers to extend this power to travel anywhere they wish. Do you think that might interest them?" The giant lifts his other hand to his chin and rubs it. He knows he is contemplating this offer. "Do you think they might like to see all Greece? They could even visit Mount Olympus." The giant begins to smile. "They could finally live atop the earth in the sunlight." It seems that has loosen his lips.

"I am Porphyron. What is it your father requires of me?"

Hercules explains what he must do and when this is required. He tells him he will need to enlist Alkyoneus for this plan to work. The giant promises his friend will help complete their task. They finish with all the details of the plan. "We spring the trap as the sun reaches its highest point tomorrow."

Porphyron carries the men to the entrance. "I go and ready what I will need. Till tomorrow then."

The two journey back to the world above. They reach the gates to see the stars still twinkle in the darkness. They lay and rest in what remains of the cool of the night knowing they will need their strength for what lay ahead of them.

The sunrise warms Hercules, warning him to get up. He stretches out the sleepiness as the morning sun shines off the roof of the temple. "Prometheus. You must awake. It is time to go."

"I was having such a nice dream." He stretches his arms where he lay as his eyes adjust to the light. "Just one second more."

Both journey toward the pristine white Thrace temple that shines like the sun. The heat of summer's day bakes them as they take their last step onto the temple's portico to enjoy its cool shade. Hercules looks up to see the sun is nearing its highest point in the day. "Are you ready Prometheus to fill your part? I am going to fill mine." He whistles

for Pegasus. "May my father be with us." He rushes back in the sunlight to mount Pegasus. "Away!"

Prometheus watches them ascend to the clouds to wait for Zeus's order. He retreats to the inner chamber to prepare for the gods and goddesses. It is not long before the first of them arrive.

"Nemesis. It's been a good while since we last laid eyes on each other." Prometheus sits in his throne as he stares at the approaching goddess.

She passes by the outer columns into the darker inner chamber. His voice sounded very familiar, but she was sure it could not be who she was thinking it might be. "Prometheus? Is that really you?"

"Yes. Come closer so we may talk." He waits to speak until she comes in front of him.

She asks, "How is it possible you are here?" She feels this may be a trick. She looks around the room to see if any god may be hiding.

"You can rest assured, no one is here but you and I. Now I can spend valuable time explaining how I escaped, or I can tell you how we can steal the throne from Zeus. Which do you prefer?" His words have captured her attention. It also seems he is the perfect candidate to persuade her. For he is no god at all, and he has reason to hate Zeus.

"What must we do to obtain this new power that will allow us to rule all Mount Olympus?"

He smiles as he stands. "Follow me to the security and privacy of one of the chamber's inner rooms. There we will be free to discuss such matters." She follows him inside a room with a door. He closes it as he asks, "Did you talk about this with anyone since I sent your message?" He stares at her face.

"No. I've kept this a secret. Why would I want to share this power with any one?"

He looks at her with raised eyebrows.

She changes her statement by saying, "That is, but with anyone but you."

"Good then. Let us talk." He informs her of his plan that will require her assistance. After she agrees he tells her, "Wait here. I go to get Zeus new weapon. I will return shortly." He closes the door just as Typhon

strolls between the colonnade. He quickly walks to greet him and repeat the same procedure. He leaves him in another room as another goddess arrives. Over and over Prometheus tells each and every god or goddess the exact same message. Over and over he leaves them as he goes to retrieve the new weapon of Zeus.

Ares stands at the entrance to the temple in the high noon sun. He wears his sword and carries his spear that glistens in the sunlight.

Prometheus bids him to come in from the heat as he sits in the temple throne. Ares stands fast looking over the temple. Prometheus senses Ares cunning ability to detect traps may be at play. He hurries to think of something that will lure him in the temple. For, he sees it is now time to spring the trap.

"I think you do not trust me Ares! If you come near I will show you the ultimate power Zeus intends to use."

Ares yells, "You come out here!"

"I cannot show you what I possess. This must remain a secret from all the other gods."

Enyo comes out of her room. Prometheus feels his plan falling apart.

"Is that Ares I hear?" The goddess of war walks toward the throne as she stares outside. "That is you." She stops and stares at him. What Prometheus thought his undoing has turned in his favor.

Ares finally decides to enter. He steps just inside the shade and stops. "I thought only I received this message. Why are you here also?"

Before Enyo can speak, Prometheus says, "I found a flaw in my plan. It required one addition to perform all that is required." He tries to remain calm in his deaver deception. Enyo helps to relieve him of his nervousness.

She tells Ares. "Come close so I may see you." She seductively smiles at him to his undoing.

He walks toward the throne staring at Enyo. He smiles and warmly stares at her. "I guess I can trust this plan if you are involved." Ares grabs her hands.

Prometheus stands. "I hid this weapon outside. I go to retrieve it. I will return in but one moment." He calmly walks pass the flirting Enyo

who holds Ares captive with her beauty. He walks out the front of the temple. He turns to the left out of their sight. He waves toward the sky as he screams inside himself *Now! You must spring the trap Now!* He hears clamoring voices in the temple. He knows the other gods and goddesses figure out what is really going on.

The ground rumbles all around. Prometheus runs as fast as he can away from the temple grounds. The shaking becomes too powerful. He falls to the ground as he looks to the sky.

“Mount Olympus!” Hercules dives down as the ground all around rises up. He reaches his hand toward Prometheus. “Quickly. Grab hold of my hand.” Prometheus snatches it as Pegasus strains to gallop upward. “Come on Pegasus. You can do it.” Pegasus flaps his wings with the whooshing force of a hurricane. He slowly rises, but more importantly, he carries them quickly away from the temple.

The ground opens up causing rocks, dirt, and dust to fly off in all directions. Hercules looks back to see the gods and goddesses staggering out the front portico. Prophyron rises through the ground up to his waist. In his hand he holds something. Alkyoneus rises on the other side of the temple. Prophyron swings the net round and round over his head and yells to Alkyoneus, “Catch!” The net soars overhead. Alkyoneus grabs his end of the net and spreads his arms out.

Hercules yells to Pegasus, “Give your all my friend or we will be caught in the net. Pegasus, huffs and lets out, “Heee.” The net lowers in front of them as Pegasus dives under it. He glides just past the edge of it right before it is stretched tight over the ground. He crashes in exhaustion as all three roll on the ground.

Distant screams and threats are heard beneath the net. They grow submissive and quiet as they look upward. Bolts of lightening thunder down toward the perimeter of the net. Hercules sees his father securely fastening the net to the earth. Those trapped are shocked by each of his hundred bolts of lightening. They try and move back to the safety in the sanctuary as the net becomes electrified.

Zeus descends in his fiery golden chariot to the earth. He flies like a burning meteor across the sky. Hercules waves toward his father as Zeus pulls back on the reins controlling his four white stallions. He lands

next to Hercules causing dust to fly all around and the ground to shake. He loses sight of his father in the wafting dark cloud. From above a hand moves down toward him. He hears Zeus's voice, "This is my son in whom I am well pleased." Hercules grabs hold of his father's honored hand and is hoisted up to the bright clearing above. He stands on his father's shoulder as he speaks these words.

"To the giants that helped me imprison these traitors I grant you immortal power to travel the world." He raises his scepter high. Lightning from all directions strikes his scepter. Zeus pitches the bolts toward Prophyron. Lightning crashes over the giant. Zeus turns his scepter and thrusts bolts upon Alkyoneus. He too is covered with a spiderweb of bright blue electricity.

"I have fulfilled my end of the bargain." He watches as the giants as tall as mountains smile. He asks them, "Where will you go explore now?"

Prophyron tells Zeus, "Our home is below. We go nowhere."

Confused Zeus wonders why they would risk danger with the gods if they had no intention of using their new gift. "May I ask why you do not freely journey?"

"It was not that we wished to leave here. It was just for the power to do so."

Zeus smiles. He bows his head. "Thank you for your service."

Both giants bow before they descend back below the earth.

Those gods and goddesses still loyal to the king come down from Mount Olympus. Each stands around the perimeter of the tacked net looking at the trapped traitors. One god asks Zeus, "What shall we do with them?"

Zeus invites Prometheus to join him and his son on his giant chariot. He yells out, "Guard them closely until I return." Zeus snaps his reins sending his chariot in motion. "Mount Olympus! Away!"

The four horses gallop up and up. They breakthrough the clouds leaving the earth behind.

Zeus lands his chariot near the temple of the gods. "Prometheus. Would you be so kind as to go fetch the chest behind my throne?" Father looks at his son as Prometheus obeys the king's request. "I see your face is filled with wonder. Praise my good son. You will see what I have

planned." Prometheus lays the chest on the chariot. "I have given great thought to their punishment." As Prometheus prepares to step on the chariot, Zeus asks, "Might you wait here and guard the temple? I give you permission to sit on my throne." Prometheus is overwhelmed with honor.

"Yes my king. May your journey be safe and your justice swift." He bows to the king as Zeus yells out, "Away my steeds!"

Hercules sees the fear on the trapped gods faces as the goddesses plead, "Mercy great King Zeus. Mercy I beg." Father lands where the net ends as his steeds gallop to a stop. Zeus dismounts his cart as he waves to several of the gods to come assist him. Zeus loosens two latches on the chest and lifts the lid.. A bright purple halo shines from inside the chest. The interior is lined with glowing vials. Zeus stands and proclaims his verdict.

"I have given much thought to what I am about to do. I cannot destroy a god. How might the people believe in us if we go around killing each other. If I have learned anything as king, mercy changes everything." He looks at Hercules and smiles. His son bows his head in appreciation. The trapped are relieved as a choir of murmuring voices sing out thankful praises to the king. "What I will do is take your power." All the gods and goddesses moan at his extreme proclamation. A god's unique power is more valuable than even their very life. Great fear envelopes everyone except Zeus and Hercules. For everyone knows this is a just punishment, but is a terrible and harsh decree. The murmuring settles as Zeus prepares to speak. "I am not a ruthless king as you might think. I will give you condemned of treason a choice and a chance. What hope would man have if the gods and goddesses were so cruel to each other." Some of the trapped embrace another on the portico, as the others reverently listen to what the king has to offer. "If you decide to relinquish your power, that will commute your sentence. You will walk freely upon the earth as humans do. If you are willing to relinquish your power, I will give you a chance to pay your debt and regain your power. You must make your choice." Zeus sticks his scepter into the net and raises it up from the ground. Slowly the trapped gods and goddesses walk toward their judge. The first in line is Erebus, the god of darkness.

His shamed head bows before the king. "Since you were the first, my compassion will be the greatest. What do you choose?"

"I select your punishment and a chance to earn back my power."

"You have spoken wisely." The king holds a vial near Erebus. He lifts the lid. The sound of rushing wind sucks a dark halo from Erebus's body. He shrinks to the size of a mere mortal man."

"Now your power is taken. Now I sentence you to perform a task." Zeus has no joy in what he must do. "I sentence you to sow a field of wheat like the humans do. When your crop is ready, offer a portion to the gods and I will restore your power."

Erebus seems to be relieved. His punishment is not as horrible as he imagined.

"You will plow your field only by the light of night, and you will sow your seed in the wind."

Erebus now realizes this will be a challenging task. How can one see where to plant if he does it by night? And how will one know if his seed is tossed on his field if there be a constant wind?"

"Now go and perform your feat. May you learn what it means to be dedicated, much as mankind suffers."

Next in line is the goddesses Aphrodite. "Out of all the gods, you are the last goddess I would have ever thought could possibly cast your lot in with this evil." He watches her tremble in fear and embarrassment. Zeus grabs the next vial. He holds it near her. He removes the lid. The sucking force of a hurricane begins pulling at her golden halo. Zeus caps the bottle as she shrinks to the size of a human woman. "What is your choice? To walk as mankind upon the earth, or pay your debt and have your power restored?" He waits as she ponders her alternative.

"I choose to pay my penalty. May your justice not exceed the burden I am able to carry wise king."

"I turn your beauty as plain as a blank tablet. I also take your lovely voice away. You will walk among mankind as a human woman does. You will feel hunger, thirst, pain, and suffering. When you have become a benefit to mankind and learn what true beauty is, I will restore your power and your beauty."

"This seems unfair my king. Why must you take even my power to speak away? Do not even the people have the ability to speak?"

"I ask you a question as your answer. Are there some that do not have the power to speak? Yet, do not they live in their humanity and still praise the gods?"

"Your judgment seems impossibly cru..."

"Silence! I ask no more of you than you should bear. Do you change your mind?"

She suddenly realizes how just a punishment this really is. "No my lord. I accept your punishment."

He instantly administers his sentence. Her face becomes wrinkled and worried. Her body shows the weariness of a hard life of work. She caresses her throat as she feels her power to speak being taken.

"Go now and walk amongst the humans, and may you be all the better for it." She turns away as her tattered garment blows in the wind. "May you learn humility as you toil, much as mankind suffers."

The line of culprits dwindle to an end. All those that betrayed Zeus now have their power stored away. Each has been given a sentence that is no greater than their treachery. Each is given a chance at redemption containing a price no greater than what mankind is expected to bear. The last in the line is Ares.

Zeus speaks. "It pains me my son that you would have led this revolt. What have I done to cause you to act so?" Anguish fills Zeus's heart. "What do you say for yourself?"

Ares stands in defiance. He says nothing.

"I am your father above all else. It does not bring me joy but great pain to punish you. Please, I beg of you, tell me what I have done to make you hate me so!"

Ares hurries to draw his sword. "It is because of your love for him I learn to hate you so!"

Zeus restrains Ares arm as the other gods come and force his weapon away. They hold him at bay as Zeus draws the vial near to Ares. He removes the lid and sucks his blackened halo out of his body. Ares shrinks to the size of his brother Hercules.

"Because you have done this thing I will make your choice." Ares

has no more options but to look at his father and accept his punishment like a man. Zeus's eyes turn red and glisten with tears. "You will walk the earth as humans do. You will gain your strength as you plow with your ox. You will have no more power to war than a man does. Your back will break with the burdens of everyday life, and your heart will be filled with the pleasure and reward a hard days work brings." Zeus looks down gravely at Ares.

Ares angrily yells, "Have you finished father!"

Zeus thinks a moment. "No. there is more. I will show you leniency that I have not shown the others."

The anger on Ares face turns somber. He waits to hear what benefit his father will give him.

"I give you a beautiful loving wife to satisfy your heart and desires. May she help you with the caress in life and be a shoulder for you to lean on. I also give you two sons to help you with your strife. May you learn the joy of seeing their eyes open at birth and know you are responsible for their very existence. I fill your heart with love for your future wife and your two sons yet to be born."

"Are you finished father!" Ares finally realizes his father's love for him. He knows his punishment is not nearly as terrible as it should be.

"No. As your two sons grow, one will learn to love you and the other will grow to hate you."

"Why do you plague me with such a curse?"

"Even though you love each son equally, one will become jealous of your affection for the other. When your heart hurts for not knowing what to do, your father will know of it. When you finally realize the devastation a broken heart brings, I will hear your prayers. When you finally understand the pain I feel now and repent of it, I will save you. Then, I will raise you my very self up to Mount Olympus and give you my very throne. For then, you will be a great and wise ruler." Zeus cries as he tell Ares his parting words. "Now go and walk amongst the humans and live your life. May you feel both love and rejection in your heart, and suffer no more than mankind suffers."

Morpheus, the god of dreams asks, "Do you wish we place the chest on your chariot?"

Zeus waves the back of his hand to suggest he wait. He watches his human size son walk off in to the world and worries what might become of him. He resembles the small child he once was. Zeus knows what he has done is the best he can do for his small son. But this notion does not sooth his heart. He stares at him until he disappears amongst the crowd of people in the distant village. He whispers, "My heart truly goes with you my boy."

"Yes. load the chest on my chariot and secure it properly. For it contains the power to shake Mount Olympus from its very foundation." He looks down at his other son. He smiles as he says, "Thank you for standing with me through all the pain I've caused you and lifting me up when I fell. You truly are a treasure my good son."

Hercules stands and watches as his father Zeus departs for the heavens. He turns toward his dear friend Pegasus. "My loyal Pegasus. You truly are my treasure." He swipes his steed's face before he mounts. "To Mount Olympus. Away!"

CHAPTER 11: RETURN TO OLYMPUS

The temple of Mount Olympus is quiet. The normal activities have been suspended as the loyal gods and goddesses spend their time reflecting on their purpose and power. They mourn the tragic loss of some many that have called Mount Olympus home for so long. They bear a loneliness reserved for gods. For whom can they pray to when their heart hurts so?

Hercules enters the temple chamber and immediately notices all the empty thrones. The gods and goddesses seated stare down on earth with earnest face's. They look upon the lives of those that have fallen so far watching them bear so much. They wear their piety mask of pity in this tragic Greek performance.

Hercules searches the long empty temple hallways for his father. He sees Hermes turn in this hall from another, and begins walking toward Hercules.

He asks, "Hermes, do you know where my father might be?"

"Yes. I just came from visiting him. He is in the temple tower securing the vials holding their powers."

"Thank you Hermes." He prepares to walk away as Hermes speaks.

"I do not think this to be a good time to visit the king. He is saddened for what he is doing. I believe he wishes to be alone at this time."

Hercules nods his sincere face up and down to declare his agreement of Hermes comment. In his heart he knows this is the best time to visit his father. He respectfully waits for Hermes to stride away before proceeding to father. He climbs the tall swirling staircase up to the top of the tower. One of the two giant statues that guard each side of the entrance way speaks.

A godly face appears on the stone statue's face. He leans his spear toward Hercules. "State your purpose!"

"I've come to visit with my father King Zeus. May I pass?"

The guardian draws his spear tight against his stone body as the thick golden door slowly swings open. Hercules walks inside the entrance to find father sitting in his chair with a dark glow covering his gloomy face. He sits and just stares through the glass at the shelves of pulsing purple vials.

"My son. I wish you not to see me like this. But since you have, please come near."

Hercules stands alongside his father sharing the same hypnotizing rhythmic light.

"This is what it means to be king." He pauses a moment. "To render justice against those you care about and even love is the hardest thing I'll ever do."

Hercules bows his head and folds his hands together. "Yes father. I share this burden with you. There is no joy in rendering punishment." As he looks he notices each vial is showing the current life that the vial holds.

"I hold their essence under my power. Each beat of their heart pulses with each purple burst. Yes my son, there is no joy in this at all. It is just something that needed to be."

He notices Aphrodite's vial. Hercules sees her begging from strangers for something to eat. He knows this is the first time she has ever experienced the pain of hunger. Her worried face worn with wrinkles cries in her humbled hands hoping these with so little of their own will have compassion on her.

His eyes jump from vial to vial witnessing the meager lives of those that have fallen. None is so painful as watching the last container on the shelf. Both god and son gaze at Ares. He hold the bouncing plow in the heat of the summer sun. He wears a crown of sweat wiped by blistered hands that are dried on his dirty tattered attire. His face is filled with the days worry. Father places his finger on the vial and gently spins it forward in time. He sees a moment in time to come a glimmer of hope play atop the container's surface. Ares face fills with a smile. He stares off in the distance to gaze upon his beautiful pregnant wife. Her hand holds the arm of a small boy.

Zeus smiles and whispers, "My grandson." He holds the vial in this moment. His heart connects with a joyous memory when he walked hand in hand with is son. Through this joy and this pain, his heart tells him *love will make everything alright*.

Zeus walks with Hercules along the bank of the Okeanos river. No words are spoken that their ears can hear. It is just sharing this time together between a father and his son. Zeus smiles and says, "It seems we have visitors approaching." His elevated stature allows him to see what Hercules cannot yet.

His eyes strain to see whom it is walking towards him. He is able to see Hera's smiling face first. Hercules smiles too. A smaller person walks with her. He yells out, "Is that you mother?" His excited heart forces him to walk faster toward them. "It is you!." He rushes to embrace her.

Hera and Zeus look down and enjoy the warmth of the moment.

"Mother, oh mother." He is perplexed by something as he continue to hug Alcmene. "I thought all goddesses where equal in height. How is it you remain the height of a mortal?"

Alcmene replies, "It was my one request that I remain my mortal size."

This still confuses Hercules. "Why mother?"

“So I could always embrace my son.” She giggles and she feels him bounce from his inability to control his outward emotion. She soothingly rubs his back as his bobbing body ceases trembling. “My dear sweet son.”

Hercules looks up at Hera. “Thank you second mother for helping with the impossible and to understand what I did not.” She says nothing. She winks and nods her smiling face to declare her acceptance of his sincere compassion. He holds Alcmena at arms length. “Would you mind following me mothers and father? There is someone I would like you to meet.”

All four stroll across the green field of Elysium. They see the distant mortal facing away as she leans over to smell the flowers. Several butterflies land on her hair and hands.

Hera tells the unaware woman, “You do know they are drawn only to those with innocent hearts.”

Viola turns toward the voice as she prepares to speak. She sees the King and Queen of the gods and immediately bows her head and gaze to the ground. She is too nervous to speak.

Hercules comes to her aide and gently caresses her arm with his hand. “Viola, there are some gods and goddesses I wish you to meet.” He slowly tugs her arm up as her eyes are slow to rise.

The only thing her anxious mind can think to say is, “Oh my.”

“Mothers, this is my good friend Viola.” He proudly stands by her side propping her weakened body up.

Hera sees her beauty and says, “For surely the goddesses have blessed you.”

Alcmena comes alongside Viola. She places her finger under her chin and gently lifts her face. “My dear. Do not be afraid. I am Alcmena, Hercules mother.” Viola's eyes lift up to gaze at her face pass her golden halo. Both smiles at each other.

Zeus says, “Does not the king get a proper introduction?”

Hercules says, “Sorry father. This is my girl friend, I mean my friend that is a girl, I mean...”

Zeus helps his stuttering son. “What you are trying to say is this lovely young lady is your really good friend. Is this right son?”

Embarrassed smiling Hercules replies, “Yes father. That is what I am trying to say. Thank you.”

Viola's affection for him far outweighs her current fear and anxiety. She lift his chin and kisses him.

Father Zeus says, “Aha.”

Both mothers see how much Viola really cares for their son, and sense just how much their son secretly loves her. Viola's cheeks blush as red as roses as her head tilts respectfully downward.

Zeus tells Viola, “If there were ever a human woman to bear me grandchildren, you surely would be her.” He smiles and waits to see how everyone responds to his wonderful compliment.

Hercules can only say, “Father!”

Zeus is perplexed as both mothers apologize to Viola for his unthoughtful comment. “Why? What did I say?”

Hermes approaches. “I have a message.”

Zeus says, “What is it?”

“I am sorry King Zeus. This message is for your son.”

Zeus is slightly embarrassed assuming this message is for him.

“Well, go ahead then. Tell my son what is so important.”

“Thank you my king.” He turns toward Hercules as states, “It seems you are needed on earth.” Hermes opens his scroll and views its message. “There is a creature called Chimera terrorizing a kingdom. 'We urgently request your assistance in this matter. Might you consider helping us Hercules.' Signed 'Bla bla bla'.”

Hercules asks Viola, “Might you mind waiting here a little longer?”

She swoops another kiss. “I'll wait for you. Go help those who need you.”

He hurries and hugs each mother and pecks them with his kiss. He gazes up at father. He bows before him as he says, “I must go father.”

Zeus senses the urgency of this situation. “Go with my blessings. Now hurry away.”

Hercules whistles for Pegasus. He trots across the rolling hills. He leaps upon his trusty steed and yells out, “Mount Olympus! To the earth. Away!”

Everyone present watches as the pair departs. Pegasus gallops up

and up while flapping his beautiful enormous wings.

Hera says, "This sure is a thing of beauty." She watches as they soar down toward earth.

Alcmene lays her arm over Viola's shoulder as they watch him disappear. Both whisper the say exact words. "Be safe." Their concern for Hercules assures Alcmene her son has made a wise choice. She now knows how fine a wife Viola will be-one day.

Zeus whispers, "I go with you my son." He thinks about how special this moment is. His mind reminds him of the harshness life can hold. But in his heart it whispers *and all the world is right!*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am a veteran of the U.S. Army that has traveled around the world. My life experience helps me portray the adventurous side of my life found in my writings. I am originally from southern New Jersey, but now reside in the Mojave desert valley of California. This place offers solitude. It is a little bit of hell wrapped in heaven. Each of these experiences in my life are incorporated in my stories. Most important is my relationship with Christ Almighty. I only started writing recently and found a love I never knew. Hope my readers continue to like the stories of my life.

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