

Chapter 21: The drive isn't that long but I was so ready to go back. Actually, scratch that. I was super anxious. I could stop thinking about the words that the voice had said in the clearing. My playlist had defiantly changed since last time. It was on shuffle for most of the car ride. I saw us crest the hill right before camp. We were all silent in respect for grandpa. My mom's dad. He had died protecting her from a hellhound and getting her to camp. Dad laid a hand on mom's shoulder. Im ok. She says. I wish i knew you grandpa. I think as we drive past. Dad parks the car and we all get out. I pop open the truck and grab my bag. Me and Grey waved goodbye to our parents and descended down the hill to camp. I tried to have a positive outlook about this summer but it was hard when every time i looked around i saw Nerth. I walked in and set my stuff down in my cabin room. I took a deep breath and enjoyed the feel of being home. I sat down on my bunk and looked out the window. The camp was gorgeous as always. Why did I feel so guilty about enjoying the view? I sighed and got out of my hiding place. I stretched and started towards the stables. Glory always made me feel better. She was a pure white mare with golden brown coloring at the tips of her wings. She was fast and strong. And smart too. Technically, she should have been given to one of the higher campers but i had rescued her when i was very little. Maybe 7. Every since we've been best friends. She whinnied a welcome as i walked up. Hey girl, miss me? I ask her. She neighed and nuzzled me. I chuckled and rubbed her neck. I missed you too. I tell her. She lifted her wings a little as if to say 'let me out of this cage!' Ok ok! Let me grab your saddle. I tell her and grab her silver saddle and strap it on. She was a little impatient but nothing an apple couldn't change. I brushed her down and climbed on. We trotted out to the field and I smiled. Ready to fly? I ask her and she goes. I feel my stomach turn as we become weightless. The wind whips my side braid back and my tiny pieces of hair out of my face. I laughed and she neighed. What do you want to do girl? I ask her. She whinnies and puts on a burst of speed that throws me back in the saddle. Wohoo! I yelled above the wind and we did a few flips and headed toward the lake. She dipped down and her wings skimmed the water, leaving a glistening trail in the water. I lowered my hand and felt the cold water run through my hand. We pulled up and flew past the lake towards the battle arena. Past that was the Pegasus racing course. It was built when the sport became popular. Actually my mom headed the sport. She and her horse, Silverwing, won all the races. She still had her trophies and medals. I was good too. I try not to brag but i was close to her record. Ready to live up to your name Glory? I asked her with a smile. She snorted and put on some speed. I looked at the bottom timer. It was put there for time trials. I looked at the ring ahead of us. Ok girl, get ready. I tell her and get low in my saddle. I see the ring and the tiny monitor that started the clock. And, go! I yell as we bullet through the first hoop. I see the thing switch on. We had to beat the course in 21 seconds. It spanned many miles plus you had to go through all the hoops or your disqualified. We passed the second hoop. I realized we were a few milliseconds behind. Come on girl we need to go faster. I tell her and she flaps her wings harder. We passed through the next hoops as fast as we could. I can tell she was trying but i could also feel her labored breathing at the strain. 5 hoops left. I tell her. All downhill except for 2 at the end which required us to flip and come down hard. She rocketed down so hard i thought i was gonna fall off. She passed through 3 hoops and then folded out her wings to catch the updraft and flip up. Weightless took over and I felt her struggle against the wind as she turned and dove. I held on as tight as i could. She came rocketing out of the loop and shot for the end thing. She passed through and u whooped for joy. I checked the clock and my eyes went big. 19.56 seconds. We did it!!!!!! I yelled and Glory neighed in celebration. I laid on her neck and rubbed her. Thank you girl. That was some amazing flying. I tell her. Then I noticed her weary flaps and she panted breathing and she was shaking slightly. Let's head down and take a break. You deserve it. I tell her and she nods and glides down. I slide off and i was shaking too. Manly from adrenaline and excitement. I helped her sit down and she relaxed a bit. I looked at the clock and realized it had shut off. But wait. How was i supposed to prove i

beat the record??? Dang it! I yell. Glory whinnies weakly and i rub her muzzle. It's ok girl. We did it once we can do it again right? I tell her. I knew we wouldn't be able to for a bit after the toll it had taken on her. Hey! That was some nice flying. And you beat the record! Someone said behind me. I whipped around and saw a boy about my age with brown shorter brown hair, almost like Jason Grace's (who was very cool but RIP), and was taller than me by a good 5 inches. He had a shy smile and his bright blueish gray eyes shone in the morning light. T-thanks. I tell him. You saw the race? I ask him. Yep, i cant believe you crushed the record. I heard the person who set it was a legend at riding. He says. I realize his Pegesus was fidgeting. He put a arm around the underside of its muzzle and it nuzzled him. I had to admit, he was super cute. His eyes sparkled when he laughed and his smile shone in the sunlight. Glory whinnied and stood up. Thats quite the Pegasus you have there. He says. Thanks, her name is Glory. I tell him. A fitting name. He says and fidgets himself. I could tell he was really nervous. Why though? Who are you? I ask him. He groans slightly. Sorry i forgot to introduce myself. I'm Benjamin. Benjamin Darwin, Son of Ares. But everyone just calls me Ben. He says. Nice to meet you Ben. Im Audrey. Audrey Baxter. Im a granddaughter of Athena and Apollo. I say and cringe at how weird it sounded. Nice to meet you. Didn't you lead one of the battalions in the Battle? He asks. I was thrown off guard that he didnt ask about my mom first. Or my brother. Uh yea i did. The west one. I told him. Really?! I was in that one. He says. I also noticed he rarely met my eyes. Thats cool. I tell him. Yea, you were super brave charging injured like that. He says. I feel my cheeks flush with embarrassment. Thanks, anybody would've done it in my position. I say and ask myself the question why am I not taking glory when he was giving it to me. Maybe, not me though. He says. Really? I ask him. I thought you were an Ares kid. I tell him and regret saying it. Yea, I'm not the normal Ares kid. He says and strokes his Pegesus's mane. We need a subject change. Like now. I think. What's your Pegesus's name? I ask him. He looked at his black stallion. Vulcan. He says. Vulcan whinnied and Ben rubbed his neck and smiled. A fitting name. I tell him. He chuckles. We sat in awkward silence for a moment. Want to head back to camp? We have a record to share with everyone. He says and meets my eyes for the first time. Wow, they were amazing. Stop it Audrey, get it together. I tell myself. Sure. I say and I help Glory up. She was still tired but was not shaking. Good girl. I say and we walk back. We reached a part of the woods where he stopped. He fingered his sword which was at his hilt. What's wrong? I ask him and start to go on high alert. Something feels... off. He says quietly. We stand there in complete silence. All I heard was the tree's rustling and the wind blowing. Glory pawed the ground. Ben looked ahead of us intently. I thought I heard something. He says, totally focused. I finger my sword. Nothing happens. I guess I'm just jumpy. He says and relaxes. I laugh half heartedly. Let's keep going, we don't want to be late for lunch. He says and we continue on. Then I heard it. The leaves crunching rapidly. I stopped and spun around. No i think you were right. I tell him softly. He holds his sword at ready and i pull out mine. It comes out of my sheathe with a soft metal sound. I felt better having it out. Glory, can you fly? I ask her. She neighs and gestures to the canopy above. I realized the problem. It's too thick of canopy to fly out. I tell Ben. He nods gravely. Plan B? He asks. We fight whatever's out there. I say and he tenses. We wait another moment. Nothing happens and the sound was gone. Let's ride our Pegesus back, we'll go faster. I tell him and we both mount our Pegesus. We go at a gait so we go fast enough but not risking our Pegesus tripping over a fallen root or branch. I heard the invisible noises all around us. We need to find a place to fly out. I tell him. He nods and looks around. Over there. He says and points to a spot about 50 yards in front of us to our left. Good eye. I tell him. Thanks. He says and gives a small smile. Let's start moving there but dont make it obvious. I tell him. He nods and we continue on. I kept my hand tight on my sword and Glory's mane in the other, ready to hold on if we bolt. I tried to figure out what was making the noise. I saw nothing, only heard. The leaves crunching was getting closer. Then I saw something red dart pass. Glory whinnied and i felt her about to bolt. I stroked her and calmed her down. What was that?! Ben apparently

saw it too. We have to get out of here, now. On my mark, make Glory sprint for the hole and fly. He says in a low voice. What- Ben whats going on? I ask him, starting to worry. I know whats after us and trust me their bad news. Especially if Oblivion is here. He says and panic creeps into his voice. Ben, what are they? I ask him. He looks me in the eyes and i see them full of panic. My dad's wolves, that red one is Panic. Famine and Pain wont be far behind and we're dead if Oblivion is here. He says. I searched my mind for any info on the wolves. Only small things came up. Loyal only to Ares, the wolves were his hunters and did the dirty work he didnt do. I knew nothing about them or their weaknesses which frustrated me. I hated not being able to know how to defeat a foe. The Athena part of me. I saw shadows moving through the trees. Ben tensed. Ready? He asks. Ready when you are. I tell him. I see the shadows come closer. And now! He yells and i make Glory sprint. I heard him and Vulcan behind me. I risked a look back and saw three shapes running toward us. The red one, Panic, was fast and inconsistent, one moment by Ben, the next by me. Vulcan was a good Pegesus, but he was panicking and rearing everytime Panic came near him. If he gets closer to Vulcan then Vulcan's gonna buck Ben straight to the wolves. I realize. Before I could help him i was jerked from Glory and landed wrong on my arm and I saw stars. I groaned and heard someone yell my name. It took me a second to sit up but once i did I realized that one of the wolves was running straight for me. I try and lift my sword up but my arm screamed at me. I yelled out in pain as my arm refused to work and instead shot liquid fire up my arm. It was hard to focus with the pain but i managed to use my other arm to raise my sword. Something collided with the wolf that looked sickly before it hit me. It was inches from me. Vulcan and Ben stood between me and the wolf. Down boy! Ben said and the thing surprisingly faltered but then renewed its attack. Vulcan get Glory! Ben yelled through gritted teeth as the wolf, I think was Famine, charged and attacked him. Vulcan neighed and went past me. I try to stand and fight but my arm refused to help me. I finally did and realized we were surrounded. You ok? He asks me. Im fine, just my arm- WOAHH. I say as I look at it. It was twisted in a weird way and a cut was dripping red blood. My blood. He glances back and pales. You need a healer stat. He says and swings his sword to fend off Famine and Panic. Im fine, i cant leave you here. I tell him. He grunted and we stood back to back. I could feel him breathing hard and noticed a small nick on cheek. I heard whinnies in the distance. Pain, the other wolf, crouched in front of me and snarled at my sword. It weighed a lot more in my non dominant hand then regular. It took a lot t swing it properly. I was good with both hands but every move I made sent shock waves of pain through me. Pain saw my weakness and lunged. I braced as i swung and it hit but then i realized I hadn't. It was latched onto my blade. But the blade wasnt cutting through it. Odd. It was Celestial Bronze last time i checked which was deadly to monsters. Pain yanked on it and the movement caused my arm to twist further and I bit back a yell. Out of the corner of my eye i saw white and black running toward us. Their coming! I tell Ben who was slicing at Panic. I dont know if he heard me but i couldn't make sure because my arm and Pain were consuming all my energy and attention. I felt myself rapidly losing it. My cut on my arm wasnt getting any better and every movement made it worse. I started wondering if it was deeper than I thought. I saw Glory come in and a realized that she was gonna keep running. I need to jump on or I'll miss my chance. I think. I do the calculations. I waited for the moment and then jumped. It was a good jump but the jump made my arm spasm with pain which rocked my jump sideways. I grab on to her back and try to grab anything to hold on. I force myself to pull myself up on Glory. Everything yelled at me and fire raced not only through my arm but everywhere, threatening to send me unconscious. I sit up further and realize I'm airborne. I feel the creeping gripping sensation of blacking out pulling me under. I fight to stay awake and alert. Did Ben make it out? I ask myself but the pull was too strong. The world went black and I fell into blissful darkness.

22: i dont know when i woke up. Or how many times I did before I fully did. But when I did, I regretted it. My head bounded like elephants were running over it. My arm was stuck in place and was itchy and uncomfortable hot. I squinted at the sudden light. I groaned as my sight adjusted. Healers tent. Someone was humming nearby. Wait, i knew that song. My mom had sung it to me. Familiar golden hair came into view. Grey? I ask in a croaky voice and cringed at it. He stops humming and looks at me with those concerned big bro eyes. Audrey! Your up! Thank the gods. He says and walks over and kneels next to the bed. W-what happened? I ask him. Your Pegasus brought you to here and everyone freaked out. Some Ares kid, Ben i think he said his name was? He explained what happened. He says. Really? So hes ok? I ask him. He nods. Yep, hardly a scratch on him from those Harpies. He says in a confused voice. Harpies? I almost say out loud and realize he hadn't told the truth. But why? I need to get to the bottom of this. I think. He's a good fighter. I wasn't lucky but he made sure to help me. I tell Grey. Good. I'm glad you're ok. He says. I try to sit up but my arm is locked in place. Take it easy sis. Your arm isn't set yet. Quite the fall eh? He says. What's wrong with it? I ask him. Out of socket and broken. He says as if it was normal. You mean it was out of socket?? I ask him. Yep. You were lucky it wasn't worse. He says. Lucky me. I say and roll my eyes. He chuckles. At least u didnt hit your head. That would've been bad. He says. I didn't tell him that it did hurt. It wasn't that bad. So, after this dose you can walk around. He says and brings over a bottle of Nectar. Wohoo. I say weakly and, with his help, guzzle the golden liquid. I laid back and sighed in relief. The Nectar tasted amazing on my dry throat and soothed it immediately. Great! Now we just wait a bit and I'll change your bandage and then your home free! He says with mock flourish. I chuckle. He smirks. We wait in silence for an awkward moment. So, how long was I out for? I ask him and brace for the answer. Not too long, it's only 9 in the morning. Just under 24 hours? A DAY??? I say. Yep. He says. I couldn't believe it. I thought it was afternoon judging by the light but as I look at it better I saw it was coming from the east, not sinking in the west. Dang it. I think in frustration. I can see your upset but its ok. It could be worse! He says. I guess. I mumble. Well, time to change those bandages! He says and grabs more white bandages and a sling. You might want to stay still for this. He advises and I freeze. He opens up my bandage with a small knife. He carefully removes it and my arm sighs as all the stuffiness disappears. That feels better huh? Grey asks with a smile. Yep. I say. He moved my arm slightly and pain went through my arm. I sucked in a breath. A little tender still? He asks. Yea. I say through gritted teeth. Well that will change soon dont worry. He says. I nod. He is extra careful as he wraps my arm in a smaller cast and then helps me sit up to put on the sling. There, that should do it! Come back and grab another bottle in an hour or two. Find me if it gets worse. He says and walks off. Thanks Grey! I yell after him and sigh. I get up with little trouble and walk out and see my sword and sheath. I grab it and struggle to put it on and get frustrated with it until it finally buckles. I walked out of the tent into the sunlight and enjoyed the sunshine on my skin. I was about to walk away when a white wall ran into me. I groaned and looked up to see Glory's white muzzle over my head. Glory! I say and hug her head. She neighed in pleasure and I stood back up and she steadied me. Thanks girl. I tell her. You ok? I ask her and walk around her looking for any injuries. Nope, but she refused to leave her until you came out. A voice says. Lola! I say and embrace my friend. How are you? I thought you weren't getting here for another few days. I ask her. Greyson texted Xavier and me about what happened and I convinced my step dad to drive me. She says. Cool. I say and we fist bump. Is Xavier here? I ask her. No, his mom had to work until the end of this week before she can drop him off. She says. Ok. I say. He was SUPER worried about you. She says with a smirk. She didn't even know about that night. I brush the comment off. Ok. He's my friend. If you got hurt, he would be super worried as well. I tell her. What's up with you? Ever since Nerth passed you've been... different. She says. I stop. Well, its not like it used to be. I tell her. She nods. Well enough doom and gloom. Let's do something! She says. I smile. Sorry but Grey has put



me on a strict 'be careful' intrusions. I tell her and gesture to my arm. Well then tomorrow! We still have time before Xavier gets here. Let's do something fun! Just us girls! She says. We should! I yell after her. She disappears over the hill and Glory paws the ground and I notice her coat was all dirty and she looked tired. Did you stay here the whole time girl? I ask her. She nuzzled me and i chuckled. I was touched that she had. How did i get so lucky? I ask her. She just neighs. Let's go get you an apple, heck a bucket of apples. I tell her and she looks so happy. We walk to the stables where the volunteer on hand asked where she had been. I explained what happened and she accepted it. I told her i would help with her and she let us be. I brushed her down and gave her some oats and a few apples. I was covered in sweat and exhausted but happy. Glory looked brand new. She settled down and promptly fell asleep. I chuckled and let her sleep. She deserved it. I was about to leave when i saw a familiar black stallion. Vulcan? I ask when i walk over to his stall. He whinnied and i pet his muzzle. Hey buddy. Thanks again for helping Glory yesterday. You were amazing. I tell him and grab a sugar cube and feed it to him. He nuzzled my cheek and i let him be. I wonder where Ben is. I think as i walk back to my cabin. I need to thank him and ask him questions. I tell myself and close the door to my room. I need a quick Power Nap. I tell myself and fall right to sleep.

23: I set my alarm, otherwise I would've been out for the rest of the day. And I almost was. I was so tired when my alarm went off. But I force myself to get up and realize I forgot to get my last batch of Nectar. I climb down the ladder and run to the healers tent. I was out of breath by the time it came into view. I entered and everyone in there gave me odd looks. I tried to not look out of breath but I failed miserably at that. Grey chuckled and walked over. You're late. He says and hands me the vial. I know, I took a Power Nap. I told him. He nods. I can forgive you since you were resting like I wanted you to. He says. Thanks Grey. I tell him and drink the tiny vial. Better? He asks. So much better. I tell him and notice I could wiggle my fingers and move my shoulder with little ache. Time to get rid of that big cast for an even smaller one! He says. Wait what? I ask him. Yep, this will be your last one. He promises. Ok. I say and he use that same knife to cut through this cast then hands me a black flexible semi cast. He helped me but i was delighted that i did most of it myself. I wasn't allowed to ditch the sling though. Finally, he handed me the last vial and told me to drink it before I went to bed so I could ditch the cast and the sling tomorrow morning. I waved goodbye and put the small vial in my pocket. I need to find Ben now. I think. I go back to the stable and look there first and find Vulcan missing. Glory was awake and gladly let me saddle her. We took off and I had a hard time holding on but I was lucky that I had basically grown up on Glory's back. We looked all over, starting with the camp. After a fly over we circled back and they still hadn't gotten back. We flew over the lake and the training fields. No sign of the charcoal stallion and his rider. Last of all we headed to the racing course. I dont know why i didnt check here first because sure enough, there they were. Vulcan and Ben were riding the course, halfway there but they were nowhere near beating the record. It made sense because Vulcan was bigger and heavier then Glory or Silverwing but he was surprisingly agile and cleared the hoops with ease. They finished about 8 seconds behind the record but that was still impressive. They landed on the small starting pad where the horses landed when the races were over and they crowned the winners. I landed next to Vulcan and Ben jumped as if I had startled him. H-hey Audrey! How's your arm? He asks. Fine, almost all better. I tell him and demonstrate by wiggling my fingers. Thats good. He says. Yeah, Ben what happened? Grey said you told him that we were attacked by Harpies but we weren't. Why didnt you say anything? I ask him. He doesn't look at me. It's... complicated. He says. I wait for him to say more. He doesn't. I was about to press him more then i saw deep pain and loss in his eyes. Ok. I say. Thank you for understanding. He says. No problem, but if you do want someone to talk to about whatever's going on, just ask. I tell him.

He finally looks up. Thanks Audrey. You have no idea how much that means to me. He says and gratitude lit up his eyes. Heat came to my cheeks but I look away before he could see it. Hey you saved me its the least i can do. I tell him. He chuckled. I didn't do much. We were lucky Oblivion wasn't there. He says. I was about to ask him but the horns blasted from camp. The warning horns. We both took off and flew as hard as we could back to camp. We came out of the trees and found the camp in a mess. Everyone was grabbing weapons and heading for the border. Campers were already up there fighting... something. We both nodded to each other and i fingered my sword as we flew to the hill.

24: We rode up and found the campers fighting a Minotaur and a bunch of Cyclops. There was something in the middle of them but I couldn't see what it was. Vulcan dips down and Ben starts hacking at the cyclops. I clicked the button to make my sword a bow but then realized i had no way to shoot. I cursed softly and brought Glory around and used my sword. I tried to get the focus off the campers and on me where they couldn't get me. I got a good look at the thing they were protecting in the middle. It was some glowing thingie or someone. I couldn't tell before the brute swung its club inches from Glory's head. I grimaced and hung on as we climbed up. I heard someone shout my name and winced when Grey scowled at me. Back to camp. NOW! He shouted at me and I made the smart move and went back. I landed and waited at my cabin's porch. Glory nibbled on the grass while i paced. The battle still hadn't ended and roars echoed through the camp. Those who were too young to fight were protected by the ones who couldn't fight well as a last line of defense. They were all by the campfire. Glory lifted her head up and I saw Vulcan land next to her. Ben dismounted and ran over. He was out of breath and golden monster dust coated him. Ben whats wrong?! I ask him. Their... asking for... you. The monsters... want to speak... to you. He says panting. Me? Your joking right? I say. No and the only thing keeping them from destroying the camp is because they just came to talk to you. He says. Im taken aback. But i realize whats at stake. Ok, lets go. I say and hop onto Glory. We take off and i see the campers in a ring around the monsters. There was a small area where the glowing thing and Grey were standing and watching us. I felt unsettled as all eyes looked at me. Murmurs went through everyone. I walked over to where Grey and... a ghost spirit of some sorts, were standing. The ghost looked triumphant as I approached. Ah, Audrey Baxter, Daughter of Lura and Devin Baxter, Granddaughter of Athena and Apollo. We finally meet. It says in a sinister voice. How do you know who I am? I ask him. He laughs. Word gets around. Especially when your destiny is intertwined with my master's. He says. I was taken aback. My destiny? Was the voice that had talked to me not just a voice? Who is your 'master'? Grey asks him in his serious voice. The thing laughs and I almost claw out my ears at the sound. It was like a chainsaw against a metal chalkboard. I'm surprised you don't know Greyson Baxter Grandson of Apollo. Considering that you and Cypher, Son of Cole, will be the one to send her into my master's death trap. He says with a cruel and evil smile. Grey looked shocked. He even took a step back. W-what? How do you know these things?! Grey asks him. He chuckles. My master sees all. My master knows all. You have no chance. He just sent me here to make things more interesting. He says. Everyone was deathly silent. I expect to see you soon, Granddaughter of Athena and Apollo, only next time it won't be pleasant for one of us. He says with an evil laugh and he gestures to his monsters and they leave. I stand there in shock. Grey looks at me. Everyone! Please go back to your cabins! Heads of cabins make sure you have everyone! Chiron's voice echoes around the plain. He gallops over to us out of breath and gestures for us to come with him. We walk with him and i share a look with Ben. He looks at me with a questioning look but i just shake my head and shrug. He nods and leaves but points to the cabins as if to say, ill be over there, then leaves. Lola runs up to me. What. The. Heck. Was. THAT?! She asks me. I have no idea. I tell her. Ms Lola im gonna have to ask you to leave, we have important things to talk about with Ms. Baxter. Chiron says. Im sorry Chiron but

wherever my friend goes, I go. She says and she stares right back at Chiron. I admired her tenacity and determination but this was not the best time to be stubborn. He regarded her for a moment. Very well, as long as its ok with Ms. Baxter. He says and stares at me. Um sure, thats fine. I say and I'm secretly relieved. Great then let's go. She says and we continue on. Thank you. I mouth to her. She winks at me. I got your back. She whispers back. I allow myself a small smile. I let the ghost's words sit for a second. The big things that stuck out were 'death trap' and that Grey was going to send me there. Great. Hardly 13 and im already gonna die. I think negatively. Wow that was depressing. What was wrong with me? We walk up to the Big House and I have a really bad feeling about what was gonna happen next.

25: Cypher met us as we walked into the Big House. He regarded me with a serious but empathetic expression. We all went to Chiron's study and sat down in his chairs and couch. Lola had her hand on my back in comfort but i was in too much of a shock to really notice. So, that was an interesting turn of events. Chiron said from his wheelchair. Ya think?! My sister was just told she was gonna die! Greyson explodes. I was surprised at his outburst. I understand Mr. Baxter but maybe she won't. We have no idea what his words mean. Um, i think we're about to find out. Lola says and I turn to where she was looking and see Cypher clutching his eyepatch. Code Green! Cypher says and collapses. We were all standing up at this point. Green mist starts to pour from his bad eye and moves toward me. I take a step back. Cypher floats up and his eyes were pure green. He slowly raises his hand and points straight at me. Me. My heart stopped. This was the moment me, Lola, and Xavier had dreamed of for years. But being in the moment now, i was terrified.

Kin of the kin, destiny intertwined with the evil, will be sent into the inn where nobody lives. Son of war's curse will decide their fate in the end.

The ultimate cost shall end their quest and control the fate of the evil one.

Cypher says and drops to the ground. We all sit there and wait for the mist to leave but it doesnt. In fact it gets thicker. Grey? I ask but i see him levitating off the ground in golden light. He points at me and his face is one ive never seen before and it scared me. He points at me. Only she has the power to stop it, and it shall be her who shall pay the price. All must be done before the 3rd day of the 3rd week or the world will be plunged into the evil's hands. And then he falls to the ground. Then the mist leaves. Chiron rolls over to me. Ms. Baxter. This is serious. This hasn't happened but it seems the ghost was correct. This quest you have been given doesn't sound like a normal one. And the deadline... that's only a week away. He says gravely. I nod. You must choose your two then get ready. Ill give you half an hour. No more. Then you must meet me by the border. He says, visibly shaken. I had never seen Chiron this way. All i could do was nod. I choose Lola Daughter of Hermes as one. I tell him. He nods. Yes! Lola says. But Xavier isn't here, who's the other kid? Lola asks. I think for a second but it was obvious who it was. I know someone, come on. I tell her and we run out of the Big House and to the cabins. Audrey... wait up! Who? She asks me as we run. I dont answer and just keep running. Please let him still be there. I pray and thank all the gods silently as Vulcan comes into view. Ben looks up and gives me a questioning look. Ben. I say out of breath. Yes? What's wrong? How'd it go? He asks me.

26: i out of breath explain it all to him. The prophecy says 'Son of war 's curse will decide their fate in the end' and the only Son of War I know is you. I tell him. He lets it all sink in. I didnt tell him that he wasnt just the only one i knew but the only one that he was the one I wanted to come anyway. He shifted uncomfortably. Um sure i'll come. He says and relief blossoms in my chest. Great, Chiron said to pack then meet him by the border. I tell him. He nods. Meet back here in 15? I ask. Sounds good. They both say. We all run to our respective cabins. I already

had a bag packed with the essentials just in case something like this happened. It was awkward with my sling but i managed. I packed some extra stuff and slung the heavy pack on my good shoulder. I walked out of my cabin and waited for Lola and Ben. Lola came by a minute later with a similar pack. She smiles. Wow this is crazy. But this is our chance right? She says. I know right. I tell her. So, whats the deal with that Ben kid? She asks me. He was the kid that was attacked by the harpies with me. We were both at the racing course and got attacked on the way back. He fought them off after I hurt my arm. I explain. And hes an Ares kid? She asks. Yep. I say. We wait for another 5 minutes before he shows up. He has a shield, a sword, and his pack all ready to go. He looked extremely nervous. I kind of felt bad that i had roped him into this but there was no other Son of Ares i knew and trusted. And I also felt bad that Xavier wasn't here. It felt wrong going without him. Ready to go? I ask both of them. Born ready. Lola says with a grin. Yea. Ben says quietly. Lola gives me a lol but i just shrug. Let's go, Chiron will be waiting for us if we dont hurry. I say. They both nod and we hurry to the border. He was waiting there in centaur form. Ah good! Right on time. Listen closely because there are some things you need to know. He says we all listen close. I did some research on some of the aspects of your quest. The nature of it is so plain as it is complicated and mysterious. We know kin of kin is Audrey since shes the Granddaughter of Athena and Apollo. Son of War is Benjimanin. The inn where no nobody lives was tricky but i found mention of a mansion such as it in an old text. It used to be in the countryside outside of Athens but it moved with Olympus. It's now currently in Kansas. Off of I-70. He says. I-70 got it. I say. Be careful though. There's a reason nobody lives there. It's supposed to be infested with all sorts of monsters. He says. Nothing we cant handle. Lola says confidently. I love the confidence Ms Lola but you will need to be careful to not be overconfident. He warns. She nods. Alright. I also looked through texts to find more about this evil one but theres no mention of him with a name. Only him as the evil one. He says. Any information on possible weaknesses or powers? I ask him. Only that he holds great power and was defeated thousands of years ago by a Greek hero named Bellphon. Bellaphon. I knew that name. You mean the first Pegesus rider? i ask him. Yes, that one. It is said that after he successfully defeated the Chimera, he slipped off records. He says. But there was one mention of him defeating a great entity called 'the evil one' that nearly cost him his life. I believe this is the same evil one we're talking about. He says. Crap. If some incredible hero from long ago barely survived fighting this thing, how am I supposed to?! Ben seemed to be thinking the same thing by the worried expression on his face. Chiron regarded us for a moment. I will not lie to you. This quest is full of unknown and ancient dangers. There is a high chance you could not make it. But, you are some of the camps best. If anyone here can do it, its you. Go make yourselves proud. Chiron says and I feel tears come to my eyes. He was like a grandfather figure to me. Thanks Chiron, we'll be back next week. I tell him. He nods. Go on then. And may the gods be in your favor. He says. We head on but he holds me back. Audrey, this is serious. I've never seen a quest like this before. It's never had this many variables before. He says thinking. We'll be careful Chiron, i promise. I tell him. The ultimate cost part is what worries me. He says. Me too. I tell him. WAIT!!!! Someone yells and I see Grey sprinting toward me. He was unsteady on his legs but he managed to get to us. Audrey... Audrey you cant go. He says. Why? I ask him. I cant lose you. Mom and dad would kill me. He says. Grey ill be fine, I've trained my whole life for this. I tell him as he stands next to me. Ok, but... this is... this is real life Audrey. Not training. It's not... anyways just dont underestimate whats out there. He says. I wont, i promise. I tell him. He shakes his head. Mom is gonna kill me for letting you go. He says. I smile at him. Don't worry Grey, she'll understand. I tell him. I know she will but... wait you cant go with that cast on. He says inspecting my arm. It's fine, ill just take it off later. I tell him. No, let me. He says. He starts to glow golden and the ache in my arm disappears. He takes off the sling and cast. I move my arm and inspect it. It was good as new. Your telling me you could've done that this whole time?! I ask him. He shrugs. I guess, never really crossed my mind. He says. I punch him in the arm. Ow ow ok ok! Calm down! I



scowl at him. He wraps me in a hug. Stay safe. He says. You too. I tell him. I wave goodbye and run to catch up to Ben and Lola.

27: I loved having my arm back. I swung my sword around and accidentally cut some poor branches off a tree. I put it away after that and caught up to Ben and Lola. Where you been? She asks me. Grey wanted to say goodbye. I tell her and gesture to my arm. Nice, now lets go to Kansas! She says. We walk for the rest of the day and make camp as the sun sets. I stretched my legs from all the walking and groan slightly as i realize how sore their gonna be in the morning. Ben grabbed the fire wood and we made a small fire while Lola fixed us some of our rations on leaf plates. It wasnt too bad all things considered. Ben offered to take first watch and I would take the second watch. I rolled out my sleeping bag and told both of them goodnight. I embraced sleep but my dreams went from pleasant to nightmares. Screams ripped through my mind and snarls and roars overwhelmed me. I saw wolves surround Ben and Lola while a massive black shape loomed over me. It laughed and then surrounded me and I stood prettified as my whole world vanished in darkness. Camp being destroyed, everyone I loved lying there dead. I sobbed as I saw mom, dad, and Grey all lying dead by the camp entrance. Dad had a spear through him and Mom's throat had an assassin smile on it. Grey had dozens of arrows stuck in him that made him look like a bloody porcupine. I cried as visions of friends and family laid there dead at my feet. This is the future. It is unavoidable. Since you won't see it I wanted to show you the pain you have caused. A deep ancient voice booms in my head. I felt someone yelling my name and I was being pulled out of the nightmare. Until we meet again, Granddaughter of Athena and Apollo. It says.

28: I woke up to Ben leaning over me. Audrey! Thank goodness! What happened? You looked like you were having a nightmare. He says. I sit up and I'm aware of how close we are. I-I'm fine. Just a bad dream. I tell him and realize that I had been crying. My heart was racing and blood pounded in my ears. Hey, let's just take some deep breaths ok? He says. We take a few deep breaths and I finally calm down a bit. Thanks Ben. I tell him. He nods. I get it. He says. Is it my turn? I ask him. Yeah, but I can take it if you want to go back to bed. He says. Going back to sleep sounded like the worst idea ever. No, I'm good. Thank you though. I tell him. No problem. He says and walks over to his sleeping bag. I get up and fish out my journal from my pack and my pen. I wouldn't be falling back to sleep anytime soon. I sketched the scenes I had seen and sketched the small fire. The exercise relaxed me and my adrenaline calmed down. I set it down and walked over to the edge of our camp. It had a ledge that overlooked the forest and the moon. It smiled down on the forest and bathed it in a silver glow. I grabbed my journal and sketched some more. It really was nice. It took my mind off the whole quest-doom situation. I looked at my watch that dad had gotten me for my birthday two years ago. Just thinking about him made my mind go back to the gruesome images of him and Mom dead. I shook my head and tried not to cry. I didnt cry often, only things that deeply affected me made me cry. Like Nerth's death. Stop Audrey. Your not going to a good place. I tell myself and it was true. I was just going down a rabbit hole that i had been stuck in for weeks. It took me at least a month to claw my way out. I took deep breaths and thought of happy things. It sounds corny but hey it works. I checked my watch again and realized it was almost time to wake Lola up. I got up and put my journal away. I decided it was close enough to time and woke her up. She took a hot minute to get up and i was pretty sure she was going to fall asleep the minute I went back to bed. I laid there and looked up at the trees. I turned over the prophecy's words in my head. Son of War was Ben but what was his curse? He seemed fine. I mean he was quiet and seemed more nervous than normal but nothing obvious. Then there was the cryptic part

about a girl being the deciding factor in it. There were two girls on this trip. Me and Lola. One of us is gonna 'pay the price'. What that price was I didn't know but the fact that it said the 'ultimate cost will end the quest AND control the fate of the evil one'. Most people say the ultimate cost is death. Was one of us going to have to die?! The thought of Lola dying because of me was sickening and made me feel incredibly guilty for bringing her along. Worries and doubts filled my head and before I knew it an hour had passed. I knew there was no way I was going to sleep anytime soon, or ever. I sat up and stifled a laugh as I looked at Lola. She was fast asleep sitting up with her head resting in her hands. I guess I'll take this watch as well. I think. It wasn't such a bad idea since I was already up. I sat by the fire and listened to the cackle of the burning wood and the crickets singing in the night filled the clearing with peace. I sighed. This wasn't so bad. I think. Then I heard shuffling. I turned around whip out my dagger. Instead of some monster I found Ben packing his bag. Ben, what's wrong?! Why are you packing? I ask him and he freezes. I-I thought you were asleep. He stuttered but continues to pack. Well I couldn't sleep and someone had to keep watch while Lola slept. I told him and was confused at why he was packing. He just continued to pack. Ben why are you packing? I ask him again. He sighs. He closes his pack and stands up. He slings it over his shoulders. Look, I-I can't continue on. There's something wrong with me and it just gets worse and hurts those near me. I'm sorry, but I can't let you and Lola get hurt. He says and walks off. Ben? Ben! Ben! What do you mean?! I yell after him. Goodbye Audrey. He says and disappears into the night. I was left all alone by the campfire.

29: I stared at the spot where Ben had disappeared. I stared in disbelief, angry, shock, hurt, and doubt. What did he mean by something wrong with him? Why did he just leave like that all of a sudden? I was mad at him for just leaving us like that since we needed him. The only way we could complete the quest is with a son of war. But ours just left. Things are falling apart. I think and hang my head. Why? Lola choose that moment to wake up. What time is it? Is breakfast ready yet? She asks groggily. I stare at the spot and new determination comes over me. Pack your bag Lola. We need to go find Ben. I tell her and douse our fire and quickly grab my own pack. Wait what? Where is he? Your sure we need to go now? She asks. I give her a stare my mom taught me. She froze and nodded and got right to packing, but she did grumble like I didn't hear her. I sighed and she followed me as we made our way through the forest. I tried to follow his tracks but it got hard because there was hardly any light. It got easier as the sun came up. He seemed to be heading up the coast deeper into the woods. Lola made marks on the trees as we went so we wouldn't get lost. We walked for the better part of the morning, following the tracks until they were fresh. I knew we were close but in forest like this it was hard to tell where things were. And I was getting frustrated because we had passed the same marker 3 times. Then when I thought all hope was lost, I heard voices. I held my hand up and me and Lola walked over as quietly as we could which was pretty quiet since her dad was Hermes and my Grandma was Athena. Very light feet. The voices got loud and we came to a small hidden clearing where Ben and some dude with a bad buzz cut and multiply tattoos stood. He was wearing sunglasses and a biker outfit. He looked about late forties and was talking to Ben. I tried to make out what they were saying but it was hard. I'm gonna get closer. I whispered to Lola. She nods and mouths 'good luck' back. I slowly walk toward them and find a small bush not too close but not far either. The perfect eavesdropping place. I crouched and listened. So your sure they won't try and follow you? The man asks in a voice like a grumpy cab driver. I'm almost positive. Lola was still out and Audrey doesn't seem like the person to do that. He says and I was slightly hurt by that. If only I could jump out and yell 'you thought wrong!' But I couldn't. Good boy. Did you ditch them like I told you? He says. Yes sir. I did exactly as you said. Ben says. Who was this dude? I think. Good. I'm impressed. Good job. You

may go now. He says and turns to leave. But- but you said that you would lift the curse! Ben exclaims. I said, never promised. As long as that curse is on you, you are at my mercy. The man says sinisterly and grins at Ben. Ben visibly shook. But-but I did what you asked! I... I left them behind! They cant do the quest without me! Ben says. Listen kid. Nobody tells me what I can and cant do. You may be my son but you are not like me in any way. He says. I could tell that was like a punch to the gut to Ben. He recoiled. So thats Ares? I thought. But why would Ares want the quest to fail? Why even give us a quest if your just gonna kill us? This whole quest was just getting more and more confusing. Now get lost. Ares says. Ben looked like he was going to say more but nods and runs off. He runs right past me and into the forest behind me. Ares chuckles and walks off. I had an eerie feeling that something was VERY wrong.

30: when Ares was gone, I motioned for Lola to come out and together we went after Ben. It wasnt long before I heard him and told Lola to stay put. Why? She asked me. I think I should just talk to him first. I tell her. Ok, ill set up temporary camp here. She says and plops down right there. Be back. I tell her and walked toward Ben. He was sitting against a tree with his head in his legs. I heard snuffles and I would've bet all my draconia that he was crying but I took a deep breath. Ben? I asked and the crying stopped. He looked up at me and looked startled. A-Audrey! What are you doing here? He asks me and quickly wipes his eyes. I knew he was trying to make it seem like he hadn't been crying but he was doing a crummy job of it. We went looking for you and I saw you run this way and, well, you know. I tell him. He stiffens. Did you see anybody else? He asks me. I hesitate. Do I lie or tell the truth? Neither sounded good. I guess theres no point in lying at this point. I think. Yeah, was that your Dad? I ask him. He sighs and puts his head down. Yeah. He says in a really small voice. We sit in silence for a moment. Can I sit? I ask him. He nods and I sit down across from him. I had a thousand questions swirling around my head but I sat in silence. What all did you hear? He asks. What do you mean? I ask him. I know you heard what we were saying, if you saw us then you were close enough to hear us. He says. I fumble with my words. Something about a curse not being lifted and that Ares said he was using you and that he made you leave us. I tell him. He sighs. Yep. That's about it. He says. Ben, what's the curse? It's a part of the prophecy. I ask him. He did another deep sigh. I guess you would've figured it out sooner rather than later. He says. So, back when I was little, it was just my mom and me. We lived in downtown Tampa and well, things got a little rough. Mom started drinking and would come home drunk. She never hurt me thankfully. She would just cry and rage in the kitchen. He says and layers of memories hide behind his eyes. He grimaced as he thought. Most times she just would get mad over small things but then one day it all changed. She cursed him. She shouted every bad thing you could think of at him. Somehow he heard it from wherever he was and appeared right then and there. He got mad at her. Telling she should be grateful that he even fancied her. She should've just apologized but she took it too far and cursed him right there. That was the tipping point. He walked over to where I was hiding and picked me up by my shirt and held me there. He says and looks in the distance. I still remember the red in his eyes. The look of hatred and malice. It was terrifying. He says. I started to feel bad for Ben. He didn't have it as good as I did. Dad never talked about his past, though me and Greg assumed it was too painful for him to talk about. He must've been in a similar place as Ben. My mom begged for him not to kill me. She did everything. He eventually did spare me. But not before cursing me for what had happened. He says. He left but the minute he did the wolves attacked. He says. They don't hurt me, they barely touch me besides growling and nipping at me. But if someone's around then they attack. My punishment. My mom wanted people away and I got the curse of it. That's why I don't talk to people, that why I'm always flying with Vulcan. Now you know the truth about that day. Me and those wolves are bonded for life. But not in the good way. He says. That's why

you left, so they wouldn't hurt me and Lola when they caught up to us. I say, thinking out loud. Yea. But that wasn't the only reason. Dad promised, or I thought he did, that he would lift the curse if I stopped the quest but turns out he was just using me. Ben says. I didn't know what to say. What do you say? He clearly didn't want to be pitied, he didn't seem like the one to be really open with feelings either. Ben. I don't know what to say. I tell him. Yea, I get it. But now you know so we can move on with the quest. He says and gets up. I stand too. He walks toward where Lola had made camp. He does something unexpected. He turns and looks at me. Dead in the eye. Thanks Audrey. Most people just write me off as someone to pity but you didn't. And you didn't run away either. It's nice to finally get it off my chest. He says and keeps walking. It took my brain a second to process his words. Wow. You coming? He yells. Y-yea! J-just a second!! I yell back. I walked blindly toward the camp. What was this feeling in my chest? In my stomach? I froze. Did I have feelings for... Ben?! I mean sure he was cute and nice and enjoys the things I do but, we just met. Snap out of it Audrey. You're on a quest. Now's not the time. I started to walk back then the forest rumbled and I heard roars in the direction of the camp. Crap. Nothing like a monster attack to bring you back to the present. I think and run toward where Lola and Ben were.

30: I drew my sword then pushed the button and it flipped open into my bow. I drew it halfway with my arrow and rushed toward them. I did as my dad had taught me, half up and half drawn. I got a look at the Cyclops and looked through my stores of data for weaknesses. Tough skin, brute strength. Bow was a good choice. One hit from that things club and I was going to the Underworld early. Go for the eye. I thought. I see a rock that I could boost off of and run for it. I brace myself and catapult off it and shoot. Bullseye. I think and smile as it crumples into dust. One down, one to go. I think and clicks the button and the arrow zooms into my hand. Gods I loved this weapon. I see Ben trying to fight it and basically having to dodge the whole time. Lola wasn't having much luck either. I took aim and shot but the arrow was slick with the dust and miss fired. It got stuck in the beast's shoulder. It roared and turned to me. I tried to recall my arrow but it was lodged too deep. It's eye focused on me as it ran at me. I turned and ran the other way and heard it right on my heels. I tried to shake it in the trees but it was still right behind me. Ok plan B. I think and click the button twice. It compacts back into my sword and I run faster. I looked for anywhere I could hide or get it off my tail. Nothing but trees for endless miles. I'm wasting time, this thing isn't going to slow down anytime soon and the trees only do so much. And I'm getting tired. I think and cringe at the sore and tiredness in my legs and the labored breathing that forced me to slow down. I need this thing gone. I think and look around again. No bow and sword is risky but what other move do I have? I think and push my exhausted legs harder. A small uphill nearby offers me a chance. I run towards it and feel the burn in my legs as I force myself uphill. The fact that the Cyclops had not yet caught me was a miracle but it wouldn't last for long. There were less trees here and more plain space. I tried to run up as fast as I could but it wasn't enough. I felt the Cyclops hot breath right behind. I had the urge to duck and ducked just in time as its massive club sailed inches over my head. I lost my balance and fell forward. I tasted grass and tried to find purchase to get up and run but I heard it roar in triumph and I felt something come over me. I was going to die. I watched in slow motion as the club came hurtling toward me. I felt a surge of power and awareness flash through me and on I rolled to the side of the club and brought my sword up and through the things chest like it was made of butter. It grunted one last time then turned to dust like its friend. I was dimly aware that my sword was glowing with that gold and silver light but the surge of power was gone and with it every shred of energy I had left. I collapsed and embraced sleep like an old friend.



32: I had that dream again. Or nightmare I guess. But this time there was no creepy voice laughing at the destruction. But that didn't make it any better. This time it seemed to take me through the fields of my dead loved ones even slower. Every moment seemed to take an eternity. I couldn't look away. I couldn't even blink. I saw scenes of friends, of family, even total strangers I would just randomly see around camp brought tears to my eyes. Because I knew deep down that it was all my fault. Because I had failed. When I was finally able to break the cycle and wake up I probably should've stayed under. I woke up to my body sore from exhaustion. I could barely move. My legs were the worst. I heard the crackling of a fire and the whispers of my friends. She's awake! Lola says as I try to move. They rushed over to me and bombarded me with questions. My head started to hurt from all the information. Guys! I yell and they stop. Ben helps me sit up against a tree. W-what happened? I ask them as the scenes of running and fighting the Cyclops returns to the front of my mind. Well, you ran off with that Cyclops chasing you. We tried to keep up but you were SPRINTING. When we finally caught up the thing was towering over you. Then you did your glowie thing and killed it and then passed out. Sick right? Lola says. Yea, I guess. I say then have one of those moments where your like, wait what did you just say? Wait I was doing the glowie thing?! I ask. Yep! Pretty cool if you ask me. Lola says. I had tried for weeks to replicate what I had done that day of the Great Battle. No luck. Grey could control his as soon as he got it. Me, nope. Mom said she had a glow as well but not like ours. Ours we could call on command, hers she was given during specific times by Athena. Dad said he never really had one. Yeah, I was just as surprised as you were. Lola says, reading my mind. Feeling alright? Ben asks. Yeah, just tired. I tell him and he nods. Great shot by the way. That Cyclops didn't stand a chance. He says and gives me a smile. My heart did a stupid flip and I tried to stop my cheeks from flushing red. Thanks, it's not that hard when there's a big eyeball like that. I tell him and the part of me that is a Forgotten Sibiling screams at me. I cringe at how weird that sounded. He nods. I guess. Still. He says and goes back to tending the fire. L leaned back and looked up at the stars. Wait stars? The sky was dark. I was passed out for the whole day?! I still felt like I could sleep for more time. Ugh. Why did using my power have to be so draining? I shook my head to clear it and regretted it. My head spinned and hurt. Not doing that again. Sleep, we'll get going tomorrow. Lola says softly and I comply.

33: the next morning I felt a little better but still a train wreck. Lola and Ben were already up and arguing. I get up and sit next to them. Why are y'all arguing? I ask them. They stop and glare at each other. So, we were talking. The thing is we don't have a clue how to defeat this 'evil one'. Lola says. I know that but why were y'all fighting? I ask. Because she has the bonkers idea to go find help from Bellaphon. Ben says with venom in his voice. But hes in the-ohh. I say as I realize the problem. It's the smartest move! He's the only one who would know how to destroy this thing! Lola practically yells, throwing her arms up in the air. No it won't! Going to the Underworld is trouble! Suicide! Ben yells back. I had never seen him this riled up. Ok. I see both points. I say trying to calm them both down. They glare daggers at each other. Great, two days in and my team is falling apart. I think depressingly and push the thought away. I thought for a quick second. Ok look. Both of you are right. It is suicidal to go there but it's also our only chance to find some sort of chink in this thing's armor. The only chink. I say and both listen. I realize how they both listened to me and how much this next decision weighed in our quest. Don't mess up Audrey. I think and take a deep breath. Ok. I think I know what we have to do. I say. It's worth the risk to find a way to defeat this enemy. If Bellaphon did it and lived then he is the one we need to talk to. To the Underworld it is. I say and Ben looks at the ground and Lola smiles at me. See I told you! The only thing is, how are we gonna

get there? Lola asks. I had an idea. I may know a few people who have survived the Underworld. I say. Who? Ben asks me. My parents. I say and Lola chuckles. Wait, your Mom and Dad have been to the Underworld?! Ben asks, shocked. Yep, and my Aunts and Uncles too. I tell him. They have an apartment in the city. Let's just hope they haven't left for Nashville yet. I say and start making my way to the city and our chance to defeat this thing.

34: the trek wasn't so bad, but the constant pounding in my head wasn't great. Still, we pressed on. We eventually found the main road and hitch hiked the rest of the way. Some really nice woman in a black mini van stopped and took us the rest of the way. She was from Iowa and here on business. Turns out she was heading the same direction we were and was happy to help. Why are you guys hitch hiking? You seem a bit young to be. She asks. We uh... got lost on our way back to camp. My parents live in the city so I thought if we could get there then they could take us back. I lie. She nods. Why didn't you call them? She asks. Our camp takes our phones away and has them stored at the community building. Ben chimes in and I was impressed he thought of that on the spot. She nods. I like that. Kids are on their cell phones too much these days. I'm going to make sure my little one doesn't when he grows up. She says and we start to see the outer edges of the glimmering city. You have a son? I ask. Yes, he's 3. Cutest little thing. My husband is watching him while I go to this meeting. She says. That's nice. Lola says. Yeah. He's great. I got lucky. She says. We enter the city and the feeling of being tiny compared to all the towering skyscrapers sets in. I was used to it but it was weird since I hadn't been here in a few months. We lived in Tennessee for the winter and Mom and Dad used the apartment here to be close to us and a place to hide in case of an emergency. I told her the address and soon we were there. I breathed a sigh of relief when I saw Mom's car still parked in the small parking area. We got out. Thank you so much Ms-? I say. Ms Helen dear. And my pleasure. She says and smiles. I smile back and wave goodbye to her. I lead Ben and Lola up the stairs to my apartment and grab the hidden key on top of the threshold, clever right?, and insert it in. I open the door. Mom was doing dishes at the sink as we walked in and didn't notice us at first. Nice place. Ben remarks, looking around. Thanks. I say. Audrey?! My mom asks looking up at me in shock. Hey Mom... um did Grey tell you what happened-. I was stopped by her giving me a bear hug. What happened? Is everything ok? Are you ok?! She asks me, looking me over. Mom I'm fine. Everything's good. It's good to see you. I'm assuming Grey told you about everything? I ask her. He did, this is insane Audrey. She says. I know Mom. But we're going to be ok. We have a plan. And that's why we came here. I tell her. She nods but looks confused. Ok... oh hi Lola and... I'm sorry hon but I don't know your name. She says looking over my shoulder. Benjamin Darwin ma'am. But everyone just calls me Ben. And it's an honor to meet you. He says politely and I was surprised at his manners. I mean, he was like some fancy gentleman talking like that. My heart did a stupid flutter. I almost cursed out loud because of it. Nice to meet you Ben. And the honor's mine. You can call me Lura. You must be a pretty good kid for Audrey to pick you for this. My Mom says and I almost slap my face with my hand. Why did moms have to be SO embarrassing at the worst times? I think and shake my head. Well, I'm sure y'all need to finish this quest soon so let's get down to business. How can I help? My mom asks and sits up down on the couch. Did I mention how much I also loved my mom? She never wasted time and was always doing something productive. One time, she was waiting around at the hospital for Dad to get off for lunch and they needed someone to step in for a doctor who had called in sick at the last moment and she was bored and was like 'sure why not? I'm certified' and did the whole surgery successfully almost single-handedly. Yeah. She's cool. I started to explain the predicament and realization spread on her face. And we need to ask him for help to defeat this thing because-. Because he's the only one to have done it and lived. My Mom finishes. Yea. I say and sit back. She thinks for a second. She lets out a sigh. As much as I hate letting you do this, there is a way I can help you. It's difficult but there's

a way. And I might have someone who can help you but its a long shot. She says. We'll take anything we can. Lola says. She stands up and looks out the window, thinking. Ok. Let me make a quick phone call while yall rest and then I can take you to the entrance, with or without my friend. Hopefully with. She says. I nod. Thanks Mom. I say. She kisses me on my forehead. No problem. I hate this for you. Quests are not to be trifled with, no matter how prepared you are. Me and your Dad almost died on ours and still have the scars to prove it. She says sadly and her eyes glaze over for a second. I knew what she meant. Her friend, Jacob, had died on that quest valiantly sacrificing himself to kill the dragon. She always visits his small memorial at the Smokies every year. It's ok Mom. I tell her but a small voice in my head knew somehow it wouldnt be. I silenced it as quickly as possible. Enough of this depressing talk, your just in luck that I have some brownies on the counter. She says and my mouth waters. Thanks Ms Baxter! Lola says and runs for the counter. Why is she running? Ben asks, confused. You have to try my Mom's brownies, then you'll understand. I tell him and yell for Lola not to hog them all. We enjoy the tiny moment of joy. The brownies were AMAZING. Just what I needed. Ben tried one and immediately ate it and asked for another one. He and Lola fought over the last one. I made them spilt it but it was funny to see them fight like little kids for that one tiny brownie. You were right, that was the best brownie I've ever had. He says and leans back. I told you. I say. My mom walks in. She sets her phone down on the counter. Ok, so good news and bad news. She says. Uh oh, good news first always. Lola says. Ok. Good news is that my friend might be able to help. She says. And the bad news? I ask. She sighs. Well it involves making a LOT of powerful people angry. She says. Wait, you asked Uncle Cole to help us?! I ask her. Yeah, hes the reason we made it through. But Zeus and Hera kind of don't want him leaving Olympus right now. Or ever really. She says. I groan. Well, I guess it will have to do. I say. Ok then. Let's go. Mom says and Ben looks confused. Whos your Uncle Cole? And why is he in Olympus? I thought only gods lived there. He says. Because idiot, her uncle is Cole the god. Lola says like its the most obvious thing in the world. Ben's eyes go big. Wait what?! Your Uncle is a god?! Oh wait all of our uncles are Greek gods. He says. Well yeah but even more so. Astraea, his wife, is my adopted sister so even without the fact that we're all related he still would be her uncle. Mom explains. Let's go. I say tiredly and we all leave. Mom writes a quick note and sticks it on the counter for dad. He's gonna hate that he missed this. She says absently. It's ok. I say and she nods sadly. It's just that... well never mind. Mom says and we leave. We walked through the parking lot and got int the car. Seriously, how famous is your family? Ben asks me on our way there. You have no ideas. Lola tells him and I roll my eyes. It made my worst insecurities come out. The one with the fear of never living up to my family's legacy. Letting everyone down. I tried not to think about it but I had made a whole club about it and thought for years on end so... anyway, back to the task at hand. Me and Lola took the back and Ben took the front. So, here's the rundown. There's a gate to the Underworld in Central Park. Uncle Percy and Grover Underwood used it during the Second Titan War. Mom explained. Percy Jackson?! Ben mouths to me and I nod. He sits back in shock. I could only imagine what was going through his head right now. Lola chuckles. It's Orpheus's Gate. It can only be opened by music. She continues and I think of the legend. Orpheus. He was this rockstar musician who was pretty cool. One day he and his wife were building their house and she died. He was so sad his music made a path straight to the Underworld where he played some more to Hades who made him a deal. He could take his wife back if he promised to not look at her until they were out of the Underworld. He tried to obey but it was too hard and he looked back right before they got out. Bummer right? Anyway Hades wasnt happy about the fact that he had given the guy a chance and he blew it. But the gateway never closed. I have my guitar in the back so Audrey you'll handle that. She says. Got it. I say. I loved the instrument. I played a lot, just not in public. Thanks Apollo I guess. And Cole is gonna meet us there when we get it open, do the challenge, then you can go find this guy. She says and we park. Sound good? She asks everyone. Yep. We all say. Great, then lets go. She says. Wohoo. I

think and get out. Let's go introduce yall to Hades. My mom says and I involuntarily shiver.

35: I slung the guitar case on my back and my mom took my pack as we walked. She came to a small hill where she stopped. Here. This is the place. She says. We all stop and I pull out my guitar. I tuned the thing and walked over to the small stone jutting out of the hill. I played a small piece of the song 'Perfect' by Ed Sheeran because it was the first thing that came to mind. The ground rumbled a little and a large crack broke the rock in half. A dark tunnel led downwards into the Underworld. It was so... dark. Great job hon. Let's go! Mom says and I put my guitar away. He should be here. Mom says and looks around. Im right here. Uncle Cole says, standing in normal street clothes beside a tree. He looked tired but not as bad as when I had last seen him. I couldn't believe it had been since Nerth's funeral. I guess he is stuck on Olympus arrest so thats why. I think. Mom smiled. They embraced. Hey Cole, how you hanging in? And hows little Isa? Mom asks. Shes good, just like Astraea. Wild. He says and Mom chuckles. I bet. Thats good though. Thanks for coming. She says. Of course. I needed to get out anyway. Astraea almost cursed me again when she couldn't come. He says and Mom laughs. Careful, shes got a really creative mind. Mom warns and he rolls his eyes. Tell me about it. I saw clouds appear in the once clear sky. We should probably head down before Zeus zaps us. Uncle Cole says. Good idea. Ben says. We all walk into the pitch black tunnel and I jump as the light completely disappears.

36: Uncle Cole glowed maroon and led us down. Don't get stuck this time Cole. Mom says in a sarcastic voice. Come on Lura, we promised to never mention that again. Uncle Cole says in a whiny tone. I cant help it. Being back here brings back so many memories. Mom says. I could hear their voices clearly but it was hard to make out everyone's figure. We walked single file down and I was definitely feeling claustrophobic. I stumbled and felt Ben catch me. His hands were warm and strong. Thanks. I tell him and thank the gods for the fact that it was too dark for him to see my beetroot red cheeks. No problem. He says and we keep walking. I heard my mom and Uncle Cole talking quietly in front as Uncle led us with his eerie glow. Finally, they signaled us to stop. From here on out, we stay as close as we can to each other. Hades could show up at anytime. If he does, let us all know and we will handle it. Uncle Cole says seriously and the red light made him almost scary looking. We all agree and come out of the tunnel and into the Underworld. It was dark but there was a distant fiery orange glow in the distance. I bet that's the Gates. I think. The place gave me the creeps. I was almost touching everyone. We walked toward the sound of the river. It was garbled and sounded washed out and weird. When we got closer, I could tell why. It wasn't like a normal river, all charcoal black and looked like sludge. The River Styx. I'm surprised we made it this far without running into Hades. Uncle Cole says. Well then your luck just ran out Nephew. A chilling voice rattles behind us. A tall skinny pale man with jet black hair and a haunting look smiles wickedly at us. Sorry to sneak up on you like this but I felt some new souls ripe for the taking and I couldn't refuse coming here. Hades says creepily.

36: I didnt like how it felt like he was staring straight into my soul. He chuckled. You stirred up quite the trouble when you left your imprisonment Cole. Hades says. He stiffens. I knew the risks. This is too important to just stand and watch. He says. The two gods stared the other down. Well, let's get this over with. Uncle Cole says cracking his neck. Uh uh uh. Hades says. What do you mean? I beat up one of your hideous monsters, you let the kids do their thing and



then we get out of your hair. Uncle says. Not this time. This is time I've thought better. Since you are a god it's not fair. So one of these mortals must. He says gesturing to us. No! That's not fair! Uncle Cole says. It is fair. My domain, my rules. Hades says and smiles his wicked smile. Mom stepped forward. I'll do it. She says. Lura no! You can't! This isn't like all those years ago! Uncle Cole says. Yes he's right Mom! No offense. I tell her and grab her arm. She looks at me and smiles sadly. I can't let you face whatever is waiting in that arena. I'll be fine. I'd rather die than lose you. Besides, you forget who was the best fighter in the camp at one point. She says. But that was like 24 years ago Mom! I tell her. She laughs. True but I could still whip half of that camp's behinds before they could blink. She says and pulls off her glasses, forming her sword. I'll fight. She says with determination in her voice. Fine. You know what to do. This time you won't be able to leave. Hades says maliciously. If I could do it once I can do it now. Mom says, staring him down. They stare for a moment then Hades walks toward a hulking arena that I hadn't seen before. Uncle Cole walked next to Mom and tried to talk her out of it. Lura you can't! You don't know what he's got planned! I hear him say. I'll be fine Cole. These kids need this. She says. Guilt flooded me, making it hard to walk. My mom was about to die because of my decision. Some skeletons grabbed us and dragged us one way and Mom the other way. Mom!! I yelled as it's tight grip dragged me from her. Stay strong! Don't worry! I love you! She says and disappears. It felt like part of my heart was gone. Lola wrapped her arm around me and pulled me close. She'll be ok. She's strong. She whispered. I didn't say anything. Hades this isn't fair! Let me fight! Uncle Cole begs. No. This is fair. I think its time to see how your friend holds up against the one thing that she's never truly beaten. Time to set the score right. Hades says sinisterly and makes us sit in a box above the stands. The arena was massive. Skeletons and ghouls of all kind cheered in the stands in a shrieking cheer. My ears hurt from the sound. You know, your mother stood just where you are now, GrandDaughter of Athena and Apollo. Looking down and watching their "Son of War" fight a dragon and Cerberus. Hades says. I look at where i was and feel the history of this place. My mom, younger than me, sat in this very spot, watching something just like this. Hades chuckles. Though sadly you wont have the same pleasure as she did. He says evilly. My head spins and my heart clenches. What was my mom going to face? She had fought plenty of monsters in her life, but none stood out. Lola and Ben sat on either side of me and Uncle Cole was pacing above us, mumbling to himself. A gong sounds from the other side of the arena. Skeletons and ghouls, Furies and Monsters! Today we have something special for you! A challenger from the living fights tonight to win the freedom and safe passage of her friends and family through our domain! Hades addresses the crowd. The crowd boos and curses Mom. I hated it and it made my stomach knot. I know i know! But, we wont make it easier on her! For tonight, she fights our best Hellhound, the same beast that killed her father and scarred her for the rest of her life, Lyulph  
The Hellhound! Both gates rise and a vicious and humongous Hellhound runs out of the second gate and howls. It's howl pierced the crowds roars. It stalked over toward the other gate. My mom stepped out in full armor and her sword raised. I couldn't see her face very well but I thought I saw something flicker in her stance. Let the battle begin! Hades yells and the gong sounds again.

37: My mind went nuts with info. Lyulph. Well it seems like they had history. Scarred her forever... HER SCARS! The Hellhound that killed Grandpa John. The Hellhound that gave her those ugly scars on her back. I had seen them. I had cried when she explained them. They were so crud and cold, which wasn't my mother at all. She explained that these scars had been given to her when she fought a Hellhound that had killed her father. I did the math. Even. Hades was meaning that they were even right now. Both had killed the other. Hades wanted to pit them against each other one last time. See what would happen. Uncle Cole sat down but

digitated and continued to mumble. Uncle Cole... she beat this thing once before right? So she can do it again? I ask finally, finding my voice. He was horrible at masking the doubt on his face. I'm not gonna tell you she can because there's a good chance she won't. True she fought and kill this thing twice but it was always above ground and normal size. This thing is in its true form. Uncle Cole says. I sat back, all glimmer of hope gone. My Mom was down there, about to die, because of me. I was transfixed. I couldn't do anything other than watch. My Mom started on the defensive. She kept dodging and blocking any claws or jaws that came near. But she soon got tired and relieved her first hit. It wasn't a bad cut but it almost ripped off her chest plate. She stumbled but managed to keep her footing. The same outcome repeated. She got hit after hit that just wasn't serious but still rattling. I knew she couldn't take much more. She stumbled after receiving the next hit. She clutched her arm which had been grazed by the hound's claws. I could tell she was in pain and fighting on empty. The hound noticed it too and charged her. She lifted up her sword and it rammed her right into the ground. I heard a pained cry from Mom. The crowd went nuts. MOM!!! I yelled and tears threatened to fall. Everything was silent. Waiting for the hound to finish my mom off. But, something changed. The hound seemed confused as well. Something glowed at the base of the Hellhound's head. Silver. The light flashed, blinding me. When my eyes adjusted, I gasped. There was my mom, glowing in a silver light and throwing the Hellhound off her. She looked completely unfazed. Wow, she looked like a hero. The hound got up and growled. Mom let loose a war cry then charged with lightning speed. The hound had little room to evade and fight back. When Mom finally pulls away, the two foes stand apart from each other. Hades stood up. Athena!! You have no right to interfere! Fine! If that's how you want it! Hades says bitterly and starts chanting. I didn't know what he was saying but it sounded dark and sinister. He started glowing red and then pointed at Lyulph. The glow burst from Hades to Lyulph and covered Lyulph. It howled and grew in size again. It burned with a red glow and it seemed his whole body was on fire. But the hound wasn't affected by it. The two foes were illuminating the arena with their godly glow. The hound was now towering over my mom. Yet she looked so brave facing this monster. Like nothing in the world could stop her. The hound howled but it sounded more like a roar. Its now fiery body seared the ground around it, leaving slight scorch marks on the tan earth. From what I could tell, that silver glow was Mom's blessing from Athena. Hades was probably 'blessing' the hound as well. Thank you Grandma for protecting her. I think silently. But it would take more than a blessing from a goddess to save Mom. The hound howls/roars again and charges. Mom shifts her sword to a bow and fires two quick arrows before dodging out of the way. The arrows didn't stop the hound. They burned off it and didn't even leave a mark. Mom shifts her bow into a sword and runs at the hound. Her power protected her from most of the heat but it flickered ever so slightly when she attacked the hound. She was able to score a hit on its side before it snapped at her. She danced away and continued to fight like that. It was beautiful and grotesque at the same time. My mom made it seem like a dance more than a battle. The hound couldn't land anything on her. She was almost faster than the eye could track. Audrey, your mom, she might win! Ben says excitedly. I couldn't help but smile. The hound had so many cuts and bleeding wounds that I didn't know how it was still alive and fighting. Mom had almost taken out its back leg and its hide was a bloody mess. My mom paused to catch her breath. Hades let loose a growl that startled me. Not again. I promised you wouldn't get lucky, so you won't. He says under his breath and stands. He chants even more and the hound's wounds close and the fire burns brighter. Then it froze and its limbs twitched. It let loose a pained whine as its legs and back moved on their own and morphed into... something. It was ugly to look at. Its fangs doubled in size, claws becoming even more lethal, and, excuse me while I hurl, it grew another head. It like bubbled and exploded out of its neck. It seemed confused by its transformation( and the fact it had an entire new head) but it was momentary. It lunged again and this time its claws landed a hit. It hooked onto her armor and flung her across the arena. She landed and skidded a few feet before lying there. MOM!!! I

yelled again. This time she didnt get up. No... no she cant be dead! She was winning! She had a chance. I couldn't move, couldn't look away. MOM!!! I yelled out in a strangled voice. Lola held me and I sobbed. My mom. Dead. I just... I couldn't believe it. She was the strongest person I knew. She... she couldn't be dead... no she couldn't be. There was no way. My mind went blank. All life drained out of me. Everything was white noise. It was like Nerth all over again but this was 10 times worse. I stared into nothingness. My vision went silver. Don't lose hope. Im not finished yet. That voice from the hollow says. I was jerked from my daze and stand up. Lola and Ben's confused questions followed me as I walked to where Uncle Cole sat, head in hands and tears rolling down his face. Shes not dead. I say in a voice full of conviction I didnt know. Audrey, theres no way- HOLY CRAP! Uncle Cole says as I jump off the edge of the balcony. I moved on autopilot. I had one mission. Get down there. I slid down the side and landed on the arena floor. I ran past the hound to where my mom was. Your not done yet Mom. I say and put my hand on her chest. Everything else was a blur. But I did know that I was glowing again. And she was too. Thanks baby. She says and smiles. No problem. Shall we? I ask her. She nods and we both charge the hound. My mind had one doubt but it was gone and replaced by immediate resolve. This thing wouldnt kill my family.

38: We fought together and the Hound did not last 5 minutes. I had never fought one of these things but my mom had. She yelled out the weak points and I attacked. The hound was too slow to react. My mom kneeled and I ran toward her. I dont know how but I used her to boost me and I flipped and came down with my sword on between the thing's heads. The flames were just a flicker of heat against my skin. It gave way under my sword and all that was left was golden dust and scorch marks on the ground. I looked at my mom, she was battered and tired but she still smiled at me. We both ran and hugged. I thought I'd lost you. I sob into her shoulder. I did too honey, but all that matters is that we're alive and we stay that way ok? Or else your father's gonna kill me twice. She says and I laugh. It took me a moment to realize skeleton soldiers were closing in on us and the crowd was in an uproar. Hades looked furious as he walked over to us. Lola and Ben were being restrained by skeletons and brought to their knees beside Hades. Where was Uncle Cole?! I thought. Disqualified! Does not count! You sealed your fate the minute you crossed over into my territory. He says. I wanted to disappear as he stared into me. But I would not let him know. How are we disqualified? You said a mortal had to fight and one did. We defeated your monster which, by law of the agreement, means we can carry on safely in your realm. I point out and the back of my mind is screaming at me asking why I was defying a god. He could zap me into nothingness with his pinky finger. Shes right you know. Uncle Cole says stepping out of the shadows. How does a 7'4 guy do that?! You have no right to interfere here! Hades snarls in his face. Uncle backs away with an innocent face and Hades turns his iron gaze back on me. Why are you here? He asks. To save the world. I have been given a quest to defeat a entity known as 'the evil one'. I have come to get the only person who has survived and killed this monster's advice. And I need it before next week. I tell him bluntly. He barks a laugh. You think I'm just gonna let you walk through Elysuim to ask some hero how to kill some monster? The evil one was vanquished centuries ago and will never come back. Hades says but I catch the tiniest hint of uncertainty in his voice. I sensed my chance. But handle it delicately, or else he'll turn us into another scorch mark on the ground. The tiny warning voice in my head says. Then how was I given a quest to defeat it? Then why did a spirit come to camp demanding to speak to me, only to tell me I was going to die because the evil one was back? I ask him. He looked down. Maybe you're right, but I made sure that he was locked in the belly of Tartarus. There is no chance he made it out. My head exploded and I screamed out in pain. Fools! All of you! You think just because you chain me in a pit you can get rid of me? Think again! My mouth says in that ancient voice. I

tried to stop it but I was helpless against it. Mom grabbed me and restrained me as I fought towards Hades. I felt hatred for him, complete loathing. I saw images of a dark inky black cave and felt red hot pain on my legs and wrists like chains scraping them raw. Searing heat surrounded me. All these feelings and images could only come from one being. The evil one. Hades motioned and skeletons took my mom's place. Hades! I see your fear! You should be! For when I am done killing off these pesky mortals and their 'all powerful' gods, you will be next. And I will enjoy watching you suffer as I have for centuries! Mark my words, the next time you see me, it won't be like this! The voice says and Hades turns paler than I thought was possible. I was trembling at the power that presence had, the way he could just take over anytime he wanted. I felt helpless and scared out of my mind. Whatever hope I had was gone. I felt the thing leave and with it, all the strength I had. Not again. I think as I fall into the black abyss.

39: voices. Images. Flickers of light. My head hurt like crazy, making it hard to focus on anything. The only thing I could make out was that I was moving. Oh please dont let the evil one be making me move now! Him taking over my voice box was one thing but total control? I struggled through my pain and groaned as my vision went in and out of focus. It finally focused and I realized that I wasnt moving on my own. I was being carried. But, in some sort of bone cage. I groaned and realized I was leaning up against one side. Everything hurt and my head pounded. I heard rattling and then the sound of people talking. My vision still wasn't completely focused so I couldn't tell who was talking. And anyway, they were talking behind me and moving sounded like the worst idea ever. I tried to clear my vision but the pounded and pain made it hard to think. I noticed a structure of some sort in the distance lit by small lights which I assumed were torches but it was hard to tell. Everything hurt pretty bad. But i dont think I would be in pain if I was dead. The more I thought the less blurry and pained I felt. It was like coming out of a deep sleep and the longer you're awake and trying to wake up, the less of the affects you feel. But my head didn't feel any better. Ugh. I tried to move but it made me dizzy and the soreness made my arms and legs scream.