

The Titan Cronus, Lord of Time, opened his black eyes wide. Helen could see the whirling galaxy in the center of them grow closer as if they were drawing her near, and then there was darkness and bitter cold.

Helen and Lucas appeared across the street from the Delos brownstone on Washington Square Park in Manhattan.

As they looked around, Lucas took a deep breath. "This is so weird," he said, letting his breath out in a gust. "It's the same, but different."

It was nighttime. There were still a few people about, but they were going somewhere else and not there to linger. Helen and Lucas looked at the Delos' front door.

"Is it just me, or is 1993 a little dirtier than now?" Helen asked.

The streets weren't as well-tended. There were cracks in the sidewalks and the black railing around the park was old and bent in places. Even the buildings looked slightly less scrubbed and polished compared to how they were in Helen's time. It was still a lovely neighborhood, but it wasn't perfect. It wasn't pristine. It looked a bit more lived-in, a bit more approachable, and Helen found herself rather liking it.

Lucas laughed under his breath. "Grunge," he said.

There were lights on inside the Delos brownstone. Every floor blazed with activity. Using their Scion hearing, Helen and Lucas could hear the low rumble of many male voices, and every now and again the high, piercing laughter of a young girl.

"Pandora," Lucas whispered, hearing his aunt's voice from when she was a little girl.

Helen turned her head to watch Lucas. He'd spoken of his aunt Pandora only maybe once or twice since she'd died, but Helen knew he missed her deeply. The color of his heart was a dull, bruised red.

"Do we wait for Ajax to come out?" she asked, mostly to give him something else to think about. Lucas operated best when he had a problem to solve.

He shook his head. "We'll probably be here until morning if we do," he replied.

"Ring the doorbell, then?"

Lucas' brow furrowed in thought. He looked up at the building's façade. He pointed at a window on the third floor. "That's Ajax's bedroom," he said. "We could fly up, hidden, and..."

“Freak him out when we suddenly appear in his bedroom, and either have to knock him unconscious so he won’t shout for help, or get into a giant fight with him that brings everyone running?” Helen asked sardonically.

“Good point,” Lucas admitted.

Helen chuckled. They both perked up when they noticed the door opening. Lucas quickly veiled them in invisibility.

“Oh my god,” Helen gasped. She saw what looked like herself and Hector, though of course it wasn’t either of them.

“Tomorrow?” Ajax asked.

“Tomorrow,” Daphne agreed. She went down the steps, but Ajax didn’t close the door. He watched her, heading for the park.

“He’s going to go after her,” Lucas whispered, his eyes glued to Ajax.

He was right. Just as Daphne was alongside Helen and Lucas, Ajax jerked forward and followed her, like an invisible string between them had pulled taut.

“That wasn’t enough,” Ajax said, as he turned Daphne around and kissed her.

Helen and Lucas stayed very still, though Ajax and Daphne could have been hit by a car without noticing. Helen couldn’t take her eyes off them. It really looked like her and Hector, and she could feel Lucas getting irrationally angry as he watched them kiss.

“You’re not wearing a coat,” Daphne said, pulling away from Ajax and trying to chafe some heat into him. “Or shoes,” she added, gesturing down to his bare feet. Daphne laughed and untangled herself from his big arms. “You’re going to get a fungus!”

Lucas and Helen both breathed out matching surprised laughs. Helen had never seen her mother smile this much.

Ajax and Daphne kissed their last goodbye, and Ajax started back for his door. But as Daphne illegally cut through the park after dark, striding with New Yorker purpose, he stayed and watched her until she was all the way across before he turned and slowly made his way back to the front door.

Lucas looked at Helen. “Disguise yourself,” he whispered. She nodded and he unveiled them.

“Ajax,” Lucas called.

Ajax was at the base of his steps. He spun around quickly, immediately taking a fighter's stance. Lucas held up his hands in a placating gesture.

"Daedelus," Ajax growled, then he looked closer, confused. "Wait. Who are you?"

Helen could see Ajax's heart racing and his hot blood fanning out to his muscles, ready for a fight. Lucas was reacting too, even though he didn't mean to; it was just too engrained in him to stand his ground when facing aggression. Helen stepped forward before things got out of hand.

"I'm Helen, this is Lucas. Hecate should have told you by now that you're supposed to help us steal something," she told Ajax.

It was disorienting to be talking to someone who looked so much like Hector but was not him. Certain details were different, like his hands, his movements, and the sound of his voice. Speaking to Ajax was akin to being on this street in another decade. Ajax was close, but not exactly what Helen knew. Daphne, on the other hand, had been an identical copy of Helen physically, except for her cropped hair. Helen didn't know what to think about that yet.

Ajax dropped his stance and cursed under his breath, taking a few calming breaths. "Your name is *Helen*?" he asked, unable to help grimacing. He glanced anxiously up at his door. "My brothers are going to notice I left the door open soon, so talk fast. What do you need?"

"The Omphalos. It's a rock," Lucas replied, glancing up at the door with dread.

Helen knew he was picturing seeing his dad come through it and squaring off with him as Ajax had done. Lucas looked like he was from the House of Athens. Even without the Furies, his father or uncles would attack him on sight.

Ajax shook his head, confused. He had no idea what they were talking about.

"It's about this big. It's mostly round. It just looks like a regular stone," Lucas said, describing it quickly with his hands. "Check around the house. It could be there."

"And if it isn't?" Ajax asked, his eyes darting to the door. Someone was coming. "Meet me in the park after school tomorrow," he said hurriedly, and then he flew up to his bedroom window so quickly a human couldn't see him do it in the dark.

Lucas veiled them just as *his parents* came to the door.

Helen took Lucas' hand. They watched an early twenty-something Noel and Castor come outside, in the middle of what seemed to be an argument.

Helen and Lucas weren't stunned simply because Noel and Castor looked so young. It was how raw they both seemed emotionally, that came as the greatest shock. Neither Helen nor Lucas was used to seeing either of these people so tangled up in their feelings.

Noel was carrying a large duffel bag. A look of determination was fixed on her face. Castor chased after her. Noel paused when she noticed that the front door was already open. This gave Castor a chance to touch her arm and turn her around.

"You don't have to go," Castor said. "Just quit."

"I'm not quitting my other job!" she told him angrily, throwing off his hand. She tried to go down the steps, but Castor reached for her again, like he couldn't stop himself.

"We'll pay you whatever you're making at *Lush*, and then some," he promised.

She dropped her head back for a moment, like she was asking the stars for help. Then she looked directly at Castor and said, "So this can be my only job, and then I'm screwed if the Delos family decides to fire me? No, thank you."

"Where does that mistrust even come from, Noel?"

"Practice!" she shouted back at him. "I've been taking care of myself and my dad my whole life, and the one thing I know for sure is that you can never rely on anyone." She poked him right in the middle of his chest. "*Especially* not the people who promise you that you can."

She tried to leave again, and Castor followed her, stopping her at the bottom of the stairs right next to Helen and Lucas. Helen could feel Lucas' heart thrumming. She could also see the wildfire of longing and fear in Castor. And she could see the hurt, the want, and the rage boiling away in Noel. Lucas' mother had been an angry young woman. Helen never would have guessed that.

"Adonis and Leda Tiber are dangerous, Noel," Castor said, gripping her by the shoulders and nearly growling at her. "The only reason they hired you was because of me."

Noel laughed in that way people do when they want to scream instead. "That's just... unbelievable," she said coldly. "I've been slinging drinks since I was sixteen, and you think I got my job at the hottest nightclub in town because of *you*?"

Castor let her go. "I have history with the Tibers, okay?" he admitted.

She smirked at him suggestively. "Which one? Leda or Don?"

"Our *families* have history," he clarified, obviously in no mood to banter.

Noel made a dismissive gesture. “Look, I’ve never talked to them about you, and they’ve never asked questions about you, so you don’t have to worry about me telling them private things about your family, if that’s what this is about.”

“It’s not,” Castor replied. “I’m not worried about you saying anything. I’m just worried about *you*.”

“I can take care of myself. And I barely know you,” Noel shot back. “What do you care where I go to work when I leave here?”

He threw his arms wide, like he was giving up. “I’ve never cared about anyone outside my family, but I care about you—and *they* know that.”

Knowing the situation had deepened, Noel didn’t attempt a sassy comeback. She stood there, staring at him, like she could nearly figure him out, but not quite.

“*Flaca!*” called a young woman. She came striding up to them, wearing lace-up platform combat boots, torn fishnets, a tiny miniskirt that puckered around her bodacious backside, and a cropped leather motorcycle jacket. She snapped her gum behind her deep wine-colored matte lipstick, lined in black.

“Hey, Castor,” she said, her full lips sliding apart in a knowing smile.

“Aileen,” Castor said, tipping his chin up at her in greeting.

Helen had to cover her mouth to keep herself from gasping aloud. Aileen was Pallas’ wife—and Hector, Jason, and Ariadne’s mother. She’d died years ago. The firecracker in front of her was not what Helen had imagined.

“*Mami,*” Aileen scolded, taking Noel’s hand. “You better have something else to wear in that bag,” she said, her voice sliding up and down and all around with her New Yorican accent. “We’re working the same well. No tits, no tips.” She pulled Noel away. “Bye,” she singsonged over her shoulder to Castor. “Oh, and tell your brother he can kiss my ass.”

Aileen’s laughter floated through the air, as Castor went inside, his eyes hungrily following Noel’s every step, like his worry for both of them was dragging him down.

Helen and Lucas waited until the door closed. Then Lucas let out a held breath.

“That was so bizarre,” Helen said, turning Lucas around and having him sit down on the Delos’ stoop. “Are you okay?” she asked, sitting next to him.

Lucas shrugged. Then shook his head. And then laughed. “I don’t know what I am. It’s so strange to see all of them like this.”

Helen curved her hand over his bicep and leaned her head against his shoulder. But they didn't get much of a chance to process what they had just seen. Not three minutes after Castor had closed the front door, it opened again.

"It's like Grand Central," Lucas complained.

Still veiled, he and Helen turned to see a girl—black-haired, blue-eyed, painfully skinny—tiptoe out of the brownstone and close the door silently behind her.

The girl, who resembled Cassandra and had the same haunted look, rested her hand flat against the door.

"Goodbye," she whispered, and then she tiptoed down the front steps. Helen noticed she was wearing slippers, and underneath the black wool overcoat that was several sizes too large for her, Helen saw the hem of a white nightgown.

Helen felt Lucas' hand tense around hers so tightly it was painful.

"Pandora?" Helen whispered, though she knew it couldn't be her. She just couldn't think of any other young girl in the Delos family at this time.

Lucas shook his head, his eyes wild. "Antigone. The Oracle before Cass," Lucas whispered back. "We have to follow her."

Helen nodded. Something seemed terribly wrong. There was no way they weren't going to see where Antigone led them.

Helen and Lucas stayed veiled as they followed Antigone to the 8th Street N/R subway station. They stood near her on the train while she sat, curled tight inside the enormous man's overcoat she wore. Her eyes were hollow, and her face was gaunt, like she was used to staring down demons, but her legs were too short to reach the ground. Her little white bedroom slippers with pink bows dangled childishly beneath her. The whole ride downtown Lucas never took his eyes off her.

Antigone got off at South Ferry, the very bottom of Manhattan Island, and the territory of the House of Athens. In 1993, Helen remembered, Athens and Thebes were bitter enemies. If Antigone were to encounter anyone from the House of Athens, the Furies would possess them, and the girl, who was no warrior, would surely be killed.

Helen could hear Lucas' breathing rasping in and out with anxiety as they followed Antigone to the water. She stayed small as she passed through the station so no one would see

her. She crept closer to the long wooden pilons that stretched out into the water and demarcated where the ferries made berth at South Ferry Station. She paused, feigning nonchalance until no one was looking. She squeezed through a fence and hid, waiting.

Then she started to walk out onto the pilons, jumping wildly from one to the next. The wind snatched at her frail body. Her huge black overcoat flapped around her girlish white nightgown.

Lucas strained to chase her down and grab her, but Helen stopped him.

“She’s planned this,” Helen whispered to Lucas.

He nodded and squeezed his eyes shut for a moment. When he opened them again, he looked at Helen.

“So, we have to stand here and let her kill herself?” he asked, his throat working like the words were too bitter to say.

“I don’t know,” she replied.

Helen knew why this was hurting him so much. Instead of Antigone, this could easily be his sister. Helen searched her mind, looking for anything that would comfort him. “When did Antigone die?” she asked.

Lucas brightened. “After Ajax,” he said.

“That means she doesn’t die tonight,” Helen said optimistically.

Lucas’ eyes scanned around. No one was anywhere near them. “Who saved her, then? Did *we* do it?” he asked desperately.

Helen shrugged and shook her head at the same time. She didn’t know. But she did know that Cronus had told them to get the Omphalos. And *nothing* else.

“I don’t think so,” she replied.

Antigone had reached the end of the pilons. She held out her arms like she was going to hug that famous, sparkling skyline. And then she toppled forward, into the cold, black water.

Lucas charged down the pilons and Helen followed. She caught him before he could dive and held him back.

“Wait!” Helen hissed in his ear. She clamped her arms around him, stopping him from saving Antigone, and hoping he wouldn’t hate her for this. “Please, Lucas. Just trust that this is exactly what’s supposed to happen.”

Lucas went slack in her arms as they watched Antigone's white nightgown get sucked beneath the surface, her pale face sinking like the moon into the sea.

Suddenly, they saw the flash of iridescent scales, and an enormous creature with triangular spikes sticking out of his back breached the surface and dove after her. The creature took Antigone in his arms and darted down beneath the waves with her.

Helen and Lucas shared one shocked look, and then—without thinking—they both jumped into the water.

Helen found that she could swim and even breathe underwater again and sensed why. In 1993 Poseidon was locked up on Olympus and not actively working against her. She assumed the same would hold true if she tried to fly.

She saw an iridescent flash of scales in front of them and took off after it, with Lucas right behind her.

They almost couldn't keep up, but as they chased the sea monster and the girl he had stolen from death, Helen recognized him. It was Ladon, First Born to the House of Athens, Disowned Son of Bellerophon, and most importantly to her, Orion's uncle.

It wasn't long before they were swimming through old brick tunnels and sunken supports—the flooded bones buried under New York. Some of the submerged chambers were long tubes with train tracks at the bottom. The ornately tiled walls were crumbling from the water, but the style put them somewhere in the mid to late 1800's. In some places barrel vaults were all that remained where the ribbing of arches held; the walls had collapsed. They breached in one of those forgotten chambers.

Helen and Lucas stayed just beneath the surface as they swam to the edge of Ladon's subterranean cove, and then Lucas veiled them as they came silently up from the water and onto the stones that sloped up into an Art Nouveau style subway station, complete with stained glass panels in the ceiling. They heard Antigone scream and turned to see her skittering away from Ladon on the heels of her hands and kicking at him with her tiny feet.

Ladon cringed away from her, trying to tuck the most monstrous bits of him out of sight so as not to scare her.

"Please—I won't hurt you," he begged. "But you must stay still, or you could injure yourself on me."

Down Ladon's back and tail were scales that were so sharp they gleamed. Ladon tried his best to keep these parts of himself away from her.

Antigone rolled over and, bracing herself on her thin, shaking arms, wretched several times to clear her lungs. Ladon slithered closer, his human torso and head hovering above her anxiously, but not touching her.

"I will bring you a blanket," he said, his long, draconian lower body undulating across the brick floor toward what appeared to be a very refined living room, right in the middle of a sunken early 1900's subway station.

Helen and Lucas moved closer, dodging crumbled bricks and loose subway tiles as they made their silent way around the edge of the subterranean cove that was Ladon's lair.

While Helen and Lucas inched closer to the comfortable and tasteful living space that he had amassed for himself, Ladon gathered blankets and lit frosted kerosene lamps for Antigone. He paused briefly to put on clothing. Helen observed him. From the waist up Ladon was very much a man in his late twenties. He looked like Lucas. They had the same black hair and blue eyes of the House of Athens, and most of him was covered in the same smooth skin. But there were patches of iridescent scales on his handsome face and torso, and from the waist down and across his back, Ladon was a dragon. He had crooked legs, talons, and a tail. His spine had a row of wicked-looking spikes sticking out of his fiery-blue hide, and his tail seemed to snake about on its own.

He was monstrous. And beautiful. And he had a problem dressing himself. His dragon scales seemed to slice his clothes to shreds. He tried to cover his bare chest and his lower half, but it was a losing battle. Finally, he gave up and went back to Antigone, cringing in on himself so he didn't frighten her with his huge body.

Antigone had pulled her knees up to her chest. She was shivering and crying quietly.

"Why didn't you just let me die?" she sobbed.

Ladon laid a blanket near her and backed away quickly. "Why would someone as young as you want to die?" he asked.

Antigone heaved a sob that was almost a laugh. Tears slipped in curtains down her cheeks, and she brushed them away heedlessly with the back of her hand.

Ladon nudged the blanket closer to her, his hind talons prancing with worry because she hadn't put it around her yet.

“You’re cold,” he offered. “The blanket will help.”

She pulled the blanket up over her bare legs. “Are you House of Athens?” she asked, sniffing.

Ladon nodded. Then shook his head. “I am Disowned.”

Antigone hiccupped as she stared at him. “Why don’t we feel the Furies?” she asked.

Ladon backed away from her and curled his lower body in a coil. He rested his human torso on top of his dragon half.

“I think the Furies are gone,” he replied, sounding quizzical. “But they have never bothered me much to begin with.”

She took a deep, shuddering breath and snuggled down into her blanket. “I’m so tired I could die,” she said. “The Fates haven’t let me sleep in weeks.”

“The Fates?” he repeated, then he froze. “You’re the Oracle.” His voice was low and unsteady.

“I am,” she said. “I wish I wasn’t.”

“Why won’t they let you sleep?” Ladon asked, approaching her cautiously.

She laid her head down. “They’ve been punishing me for disobeying them. They want me to say something, but I won’t.”

“It must be very hard to fight them,” Ladon said, sympathizing.

“It’s torture.” Antigone rubbed her eyes. Then she looked around. “The Fates aren’t here with you, either.” She let out a long sigh. “They’re silent. Finally.” She yawned so hard her whole body shook.

“You can sleep. I’ll watch over you,” he told her.

She stared at him with owl eyes.

“I have tea,” he said. “I’ll make you tea.”

Ladon rushed off again to his living area and lit a small camp stove. He put a kettle on and fumbled with a mug while Antigone fought to keep her eyes open.

She laid her head on the crook of her arm. “I’ve never seen you before in any of my visions. I thought I saw everything,” she said. “What’s your name?”

“Ladon,” he replied over his shoulder.

“Ladon,” she sighed, her eyes closing. In a few more breaths, Antigone fell asleep. Ladon gave up on the tea and went back to Antigone. He watched her until he was satisfied that she was sleeping deeply, then he came right for Helen and Lucas.

He moved surprisingly fast, darting forward to corral them against the wall of the cavern. His sharp scales flared out from his skin, creating a gleaming ruff.

“Though I cannot see you, I can smell you and I can feel the heat of your body. Reveal yourselves,” Ladon called quietly, looming above them. “I don’t need to see you to kill you.”

Helen and Lucas didn’t have a choice. Helen used the Cestus to change her face and Lucas unveiled them.