Erine Pershings and the golden lyre: an historical novel about ancient Greece for upper-elementary aged students

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Erine Pershings and the Golden Lyre: 
An Historical Novel about Ancient Greece for 
Upper-Elementary Aged Students

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Erine Pershings and the Golden Lyre: An Historical Novel about Ancient Greece for Upper-Elementary Aged Students

Kate Vasconi

Abstract

Erine Pershings and the golden lyre is an historical novel exploring Ancient Greece for upper-elementary aged children. The story follows Erine Pershings, a 10 year old girl from a military family in 2013, as she travels back in time to Ancient Athens in 458BCE. She arrives during the famed theater festival, the City Dionysia, where the likes of Sophocles and Aeschylus are competing. Her enjoyment of the theater is short lived, however. The night before the festival begins a violent theft threatens to change history and only Erine can stop the thieves and recover the golden lyre.

The thesis also includes the story of how Erine Pershings and the golden lyre was written; guidance for young readers in deciphering historical fact from fiction; a review of stories for upper-elementary aged children about Ancient Greece; and lastly, Erine Pershings and the golden lyre is examined from a developmental perspective, showing its relevance to upper-elementary aged children.
# Table of Contents

Erine Pershings and the Golden Lyre ........................................ 4

A History of *Erine Pershings and the Golden Lyre* ..................... 100

Deciphering Fact from Fiction: A Modern Girl's Visit to Ancient Athens ................................................................. 103

*Erine Pershings and the Golden Lyre* and the Upper Elementary Aged Child ................................................................. 105

Books for Children about Ancient Greece: How *Erine Pershings and the Golden Lyre* contributes to literature on the subject .................................................. 109

References Consulted ............................................................. 112

Appendices ............................................................................. 114
  - Original Draft of the Story
  - Permissions
Erine Pershings and the Golden Lyre

By: Kate Vasconi
# Table of Contents

Glossary of Ancient Greek Words 6  
Chapter 1: A New Life 8  
Chapter 2: Circe and Io 13  
Chapter 3: The Embassy 16  
Chapter 4: The Dipylon Gate 23  
Chapter 5: An Athenian Lady 34  
Chapter 6: The Procession 44  
Chapter 7: The Lyre 54  
Chapter 8: The Festival 66  
Chapter 9: The Plan 73  
Chapter 10: A Boy in the Agora 79  
Chapter 11: The House of Abderus 85  
Chapter 12: The Hero Thief 89  
Chapter 13: A Winning Trilogy 94  
Chapter 14: A Secret Homecoming 99
Glossary of Ancient Greek Words

Acropolis- From the Greek word akron meaning edge or extremity, the Acropolis of Athens is the a religious sight on top of a rocky outcrop in the center of the city. It was the eventual site of the Parthenon.

Agora- Literally translated, agora means a “meeting place” or “gathering place.” The Agora of Athens was a central marketplace and hub of democracy.

Andron- The men’s quarters in homes of Ancient Athens.

Brazier- A portable heater, usually containing coals.

Chiton- A sewn, square garment pinned at the shoulders. Usually worn with a belt to give it some shape.

Choregos- A wealthy Athenian citizen who was chosen to be a producer for the plays of the City Dionysia.

Deipnon- A midday meal, typically the largest of the day.

Demes- Neighborhoods of Ancient Athens.

Drachma- A coin form of currency used in Ancient Athens.

Dromos- A main road leading into the city of Athens.

Ephebi- A young man between the ages of 18 and 20.

Erine- (Pronounced Ee-ren-yay) The ancient Greek word for peace.

Gunaikon- The womens’ quarter in an Ancient Athenian home.

Hellas- Greece in ancient times was not one unified country. Instead, the region was called Hellas.

Kerameikos- The Potters’ Quarter of Ancient Athens.

Lyre- A handheld, harp-like instrument.

Oikos- The Ancient Greek household.
Peloponnese- The region of Hellas where Sparta is located.

Pnyx- A rocky hill in Athens where assemblies took place.

Pompe- A procession or parade
CHAPTER ONE: A NEW LIFE

Erine Pershings had lived many places in her ten years. She’d driven along Fairy Tale Road in Germany, learned to roll sushi in Japan, eaten Gelato in Italy, and listened to K-Pop in South Korea. She had frequented the Rodeo in Colorado, nurtured her cacti in Arizona, and mastered rainy day games in Washington. Erine handled every move her family made with the grace and efficiency of a veteran Army-child. In fact, at 10 years old, she could get her entire room packed up and ready for a move in 2 hours or less. Now some children might think that living in all of these far off and exotic places must be terribly exciting, while other children might think that all that moving must be a nightmare. Erine was somewhere in the middle. Being the daughter of Army parents was all she ever knew and, therefore, moving constantly was as normal as a glass of lemonade on a warm summer day. It was nothing to be excited about and nothing to moan and groan over. It was simply her family's duty to go where they were needed. Erine Pershings was practical. It is this fact alone that makes what happens to Erine Pershings so very unbelievable.
Washington, DC, Present Day

"Erine, hop-to, you're going to be late for your first day. It is already 0750!" Colonel Fitzgerald Pershings had a booming voice that he often used to rally the troops, and more often used to rally his daughter in the morning. "Let's go young lady. You don't want to be tardy on your very first day."

Unlike her parents, the Colonel and the Colonel Pershings, Erine was not a morning person. It didn't matter what time zone the family found themselves in, the morning routine was always the same. Colonel Elizabeth Pershings and Colonel Fitzgerald Pershings always woke up at 0430 (that's 4:30am to you civilians) and went for a 6 mile run. Rain, shine, sleet, snow, hurricane, or any other natural disaster that you could think of, you could set your watch by the colonel and the colonel leaving the house for their run. And no matter what time zone or what weather condition, Erine slugged out of bed at the last possible moment (usually when the Colonel and Colonel threatened to flip her mattress), got dressed into her most practical clothing and joined her parents for breakfast.

This morning, Erine slugged out of her brand new bed in Washington, DC. She strained to open her eyes and saw the empty eggshell colored walls and a floor covered in unopened boxes. There was nothing about this room that made it hers since she'd only arrived from Japan 48 hours prior. Getting
out of bed, she tripped over one large cardboard box marked "sweaters." As she collided with the floor, her mother's voice traveled up the stairs from the kitchen.

"Fitz, did you hear that crash? Sounds like Rennie is up finally. I'm going to make her a smoothie. She'll need something she can take with her."

"Doesn't the DFAC at her new school have breakfast?"

"Dad it isn't called a DFAC at a school. It's called a cafeteria!" Erine yelled down on her way to the bathroom.

"Oh right right. Civilian school," he muttered under his breath.

Not even the familiarity of the Pershing's morning routine could ease Erine's nerves about her first day of school. The truth of the matter is that no matter what school she went to, the curse of the first day followed her. Now being a practical person, Erine was not inclined to believe in curses, but the hard evidence of the existence of this curse was impossible to deny. When she began school in Arizona, a bookshelf full of paint toppled over near the play area and Erine had been covered from head to toe in a new rainbow look. In Korea lightning had stuck a tree outside her classroom and the school lit on fire. In Germany, she had tripped on a wire in the computer lab and knocked over and broke 5 computers. She had been electrocuted, trapped in an elevator, and attacked by a rapid dog. So, Erine knew that her day was going to be difficult and she wasn't looking forward to it. The Colonel and the
Colonel, for their part never acknowledged the curse, but insisted that their daughter was prepared for anything, just in case. Which is why, when Erine Pershings left her new house that frigid December morning, her backpack was stuffed to the gills with what Mrs. Colonel Pershings described as "field gear." She had a tactical flashlight, a compass, a first aid kid, some trail mix, a swiss army knife, a change of clothes, baby wipes, duct tape, a flare, work gloves, notebooks, folders, and a pencil case. Her own set of dog tags jingled about her neck underneath her heavy wool coat and thick olive sweater. Mr. and Mrs. Colonel Pershings smiled happily, chattering about how she was prepared for any situation when they dropped her off at school.

"We love you honey," said Mrs. Colonel Pershings when they pulled up in front of the Circe and Io school. "Now try to stay out of trouble today."

"Rennie, you have your field kit. Remember to make good use of your peripheral vision to help you identify any possible threats. Turn your head with every step. That should help you avoid falling objects and wild animals." Mr. Colonel Pershings smiled like this was the most normal first day of school advice in the world. His face got serious again and he leaned in close to her through the bullet-proof window of their sparkly new black car. "Vigilance is the key Rennie. Be proactive, so you don't have to be reactive." He looked back at Mrs. Colonel Pershings who was nodding in agreement and then checked the time on his wristwatch. "We need to bug out. We'll see you at 1530."
With the pep talk out of the way, Erine Pershings was all alone and heading up the stairs of her new school, turning her head with every step.
CHAPTER TWO: CIRCE AND IO

The Circe and Io School was founded on July 17, 1790. The day after Washington, DC became the nation's capital. Since that time it has been molding the future leaders of tomorrow by catering to the children of the leaders of today, at least according the brochure the Pershings had read. For hundreds of years the Circe and Io school was the number one education choice of senators, congressmen and women, lobbyists, reporters, foreign diplomats and ambassadors...and of course the children of prominent military officers. The school had many features that would draw prospective students to their doors: small classes, prestige, a beautiful cafeteria where the children ate off of china plates, majestic hallways, an extensive library, a garden courtyard, and a commitment to learning about democracy through studying the nation that started it all: Ancient Greece. Every grade had a project about Ancient Greece to complete. The kindergartners were read stories about the fantastical creatures of myth and created griffins and sphinxes out of paper plates. The high school seniors learned about the governing bodies and legislation. In between, topics like clothing, theater, art, architecture, religion, wars, food, and speech making were all covered in great detail. Erine Pershings had learned that her class would be studying ancient theater on top of a rigorous academic course load.
The Circe and Io school was an incredibly overwhelming place, especially to a young girl who had once gone to a school where tumbleweeds passed by outside the window. Erine couldn't help thinking as she walked down the dimly lit hallway to her class, feet tiptoeing along the deep burgundy rug, that there was so much that could go wrong today. She could fall and break that old vase or bust of Socrates. That giant statue of Pericles could come crashing down on her head and she would be crushed! She didn't even know who Pericles was yet!

When Erine found out from her new teacher, Mr. Bogdanos, that the class would be going on a field trip today, she wasn't sure if she was relieved or even more terrified. Would the curse work off of school grounds?

"Citizens, we have a new member of our ranks among us," Mr. Bogdanos said in his deep baritone voice that slightly reminded her of her father's. By the look of his tight haircut and posture, Erine was sure that he had served in the military as well. "Please welcome Erine Pershings, daughter of Colonel and Colonel Pershings. Erine, did you know that your name is Ancient Greek?"

"Yes, it means peace." Erine said nervously looking around the room at the children who hadn't looked up from their morning work to greet her. The boys in the class all wore dress shirts and ties with freshly pressed slacks and newly shined black dress shoes. The girls all wore neat cardigans either over
dresses with stockings or silk blouses and black pants. Erine glanced down at her standard issue utility boots, cargo pants, and wool sweater. Why hadn't anyone told her how the students dress here? These boys and girls in their business wear looked like they belonged in this stunning room and she looked like a ragamuffin by comparison. In place of desks or small tables, there was one large, round, wooden conference table with ornate legs. An entire wall of the space was floor to ceiling windows looking out on the courtyard with a large stone fountain sitting dormant for the cold winter months. A gentle layer of frost clung to the edges of the window. This was like no school Erine had ever seen.

"Erine." Mr. Bogdanos' voice snapped her back to reality. "Please grab a trip sheet and a clipboard. We don't want to be late. We are going to be guests of the Greek ambassador! She has invited us to be the first group to see the embassy's new exhibition on theater in Hellas." With that he picked up his briefcase and the students shuffled out one by one behind him. Not one stopped to say hello or even looked back to see if Erine was following. Maybe this, she thought, is the curse. "Maybe I'm not going to make any friends here." Little did she know that the curse was still lurking and had something much bigger in store for her.
CHAPTER THREE: THE EMBASSY

Mr. Bogdanos and Erine's new classmates walked at a lightning pace down Embassy Row in a two by two line. Each step they took was in sync and it reminded Erine of marching drills around the posts she'd lived on. Instead of marching cadences, though Mr. Bogdanos played a game with the students. He would simply point his fingers at an embassy and all of the students would call out the country it belonged to. They were so quick at it that Erine, at the back of the line hardly had a chance to see the building before it was identified. Eventually, the group came to the Greek Embassy at 2221 Massachusetts Avenue. Standing outside on the perfectly manicured lawn were two women. Closest to the group was a shorter woman in a traditional navy blue skirt suit and a mess of dark curly hair shaping her round face. A large Greek flag was pinned to her lapel. Behind her, was a taller woman wearing a draped white sundress with a large pin on one shoulder and bright red hair braided back neatly.

"Welcome to the Greek Embassy," the first woman said with a huge smile. "I am Ino Kostopoulos, the ambassador to the United States. I recognize many of you of course from my acquaintance with your parents." At this, Erine saw a couple of students smile knowingly at each other. "We are so excited to give you all the very first look at our new exhibition on Ancient
Greek theater. My colleague, Hanna Reissko, is the curator of this exhibition and one of the foremost scholars on the City Dionysia festival. I must leave you in her hands, because there are policies to be made, dignitaries to greet, and treaties to be signed! An ambassador’s work is never done.” She chuckled to herself as she walked back into the building. Hanna Reissko smiled at the children, and motioned for them to follow her into the building.

Without saying a word, the tall scholar led the children through the foyer of the building into a back room, closing the door behind them. The class walked into a traditional conference room space with brownish-purple rugs and curtains, the kind you can’t see stains on. Throughout the room, however, were display cases containing artifacts of all shapes and sizes. Looking around excitedly, Erine spotted some theater masks and old vases, and a number of objects that she couldn’t quite place. So immersed in the artifacts peppering the room, she did not realize that her class had been led over to a spot near the beginning of the exhibit and were all sitting down. Sheepishly, she walked over and joined the group.

"Welcome to the traveling exhibition on the City Dionysia festival of Ancient Athens. Mr. Bogdanos assures me that you are all experts on the festival, so I will not take up much of your time giving you background details." Hanna spoke with a thick Mediterranean accent. There was something about it that put Erine a little on edge. Perhaps it was how deep
her voice was, or the slow cadence with which she spoke. Maybe it wasn't her
voice at all, but her penetrating grey eyes that seemed to keep flicking back in
Erine's direction. Regardless of the cause, the daughter of Colonel and
Colonel Pershings knew how important listening to her instincts was, and
gripped her backpack a little closer.

Whether or not Hanna was creepy, Erine had a bigger problem. The
kids in her class were sharing facts about the City Dionysia festival left, right,
and center, and she'd never even heard about it before. Her pencil furiously
took notes on every comment and fact.

City Dionysia Festival

Theater Festival that took place in Athens in ancient times.

It was a competition between three playwrights. There was music.

Actors wore masks on stage. All actors were men, even for female roles.

The festival was in honor of the god Dionysus, whom Ancient Athenians believed
created theater.

Mr. Bogdanos looked at Erine sympathetically.

"The children are all young classicists, Mr. Bogdanos. I am quite impressed
with their knowledge. So now I invite you all to explore the exhibit. Please
do not touch the display cases." The class got up and fanned out around the exhibit, but Erine stayed seated finishing copying her thoughts in her notebook, her pencil now dull from the pressured scribbling. She did not need to look up to see the Hanna's eyes intently focused on her. Erine could feel her stare, so much so that she was afraid to look up.

"You have many questions about Athens." It wasn't a question. Erine watched as Hanna's sandal clad feet came closer and closer to where she was sitting. "Your classmates know much of the history of Hellas. You are not so confident."

Forcing herself to look up and meet the cold, inquiring stare of the woman, Erine answered. "It is my first day at the school. I've never studied Ancient Greece before. I guess I'm behind."

"No," said Hanna. "You are not behind. With history we are all ahead. Come with me. I will help you understand Hellas."

Erine looked around nervously. Her classmates, who had paid her no attention to begin with, were otherwise engaged examining the display cases. Mr. Bogdanos was in active conversation with one of the embassy's staff. There would be no one to see her leave with Hanna. "Are we going to look at the artifacts," she asked, hoping to mask her true fear.

"You can learn only so much from artifacts. History is a rich and vibrant subject. I'd like to give you a more immersive experience. Now hurry,
we haven't much time.” With that she ran off across the gallery. Erine’s instincts told her to stay where she was. Her feet dug into the carpet like she was putting roots in the very spot. But, as she watched Hanna hurrying away, she couldn’t help noticed how engaged her classmates were. They were talking to each other about the festival and really enjoying themselves. Could whatever Hanna was offering help Erine to make friends? Could it really help her catch up in school? She took a deep breath in, pulled up her roots, and followed the strange woman across the gallery to a dimly lit office space.

"Where are we going? Shouldn't we stay where Mr. Bogdanos could see us?" Erine was getting nervous as they moved further and further away from the embassies exhibit space. Now they were amongst a bank of cubicles that looked like they hadn't been used in many years. A thick layer of dust covered the old computers and plastic protection laid over the chairs. Why would an embassy have such an unused wing?

"You ask too many questions Erine Pershings."


Hanna stopped before the end of the cubicle bank and turned to face her. "I know what I need to know, Erine."

"That isn't an answer."
"I don't owe you any explanations," she said anger rising in her voice. "I am here to give you a gift. What you make of that gift is up to you."

Erine turned around eyeing the door back to the gallery space.

"That door is locked. There is no way back now that you've committed to this path."

"What path exactly? I thought you were going to teach me about Ancient Greece!" Tears formed behind Erine's eyes and it took all of her energy to keep them from falling freely. "I just want to be caught up and fit in here."

"I never lie Erine. I said I would teach you about Hellas, and I will," Hanna said, her voice softening. "I will not hurt you, though I cannot promise that the journey will not be perilous. Upon your return, you will have all of the knowledge you seek and more." Something in her voice left something unsaid and Erine wondered if what she had meant to say was “if you return.”

She decided it was her imagination, but some small part of her knew differently. Deep down, she knew this was a dangerous situation, but she wasn’t yet ready to go back to her class. Hanna walked slowly to a door on the other end of the cubicle bank. "Let me show you."

Against her better judgement, Erine walked toward the small white door. As she got closer she could make out glittering gold letters: "Wisdom begins in wonder." Erine traced her finger over each letter etched into the
door. As her hand connected with the wooden door, Erine could feel heat. Strange indeed given the temperature of the December day.

Without thinking, she pressed her ear against the wood. So faintly, Erine wasn't sure if it was all in her head, she heard the hum of a crowd.

"What is behind this door?" She asked, mesmerized by the possibilities.

"The past," Hanna said simply and then pulled an old iron key out of her pocket. The head of the key was shaped like an owl and fit perfectly into the palm of her hand. "Stand back child." Erine backed away hesitantly.

"Look at me Erine. Behind this door is a corridor. You must find the door marked 458 BCE. Do not open any other door. That is of the utmost importance. The door opens into the Kerameikos, or Potters’ Quarter. Momos will be waiting for you at the Dipylon Gate. Give him this." Out of her pocket, she pulled a small piece of wax with a seal impressed upon it. "Momos is a good man and will take care of you." With that, she slid the owl key into the lock and led Erine into the small corridor.
Once Hanna closed the door, the corridor became pitch black. Erine fiddled around in her backpack until she located her flashlight. "Thank you Mom and Dad." The fear that she had felt so acutely in the office was replaced with excitement now. She was on her own. She had to keep her wits about her in order to get through this. There was, after all, something magical about that white door. Something that had entranced Erine's imagination. The bright white glow of her flashlight illuminated a thin corridor with six doors.

"458 BCE, 458 BCE," Erine softly recited to herself. Erine moved down the hallway carefully checking each door. After carefully examining the small hallway, she determined that all of the doors were identical except for the gold engraving upon their white wood. The first door said "The Mycenean Period- Trojan War." As the gold letters began to glitter, the mesmerizing feeling began to overtake Erine again. Perhaps she should go into this door. In a trance her fingers carefully caressed the small bronze doorknob, but as they did she began to hear the sounds of swords clashing and men screaming out. Though so low, she could barely make it out, the reality of a full fledged war behind this door brought the fear back. She needed to find her door before she ended up someplace horrible. Erine passed three more white doors with
gold letters dancing across them: "The Dark Age 900 BCE- Religion is Formed," "776 BCE- First Olympic Games," and "480 BCE- The Battle of Thermopylae." Each time she had to fight the overwhelming urge to enter. Finally, Erine came to the fourth door. It was labeled more simply than the others. The glittering gold engraving read simply "458 BCE." Once again Erine could hear the faint hum of a crowd. This was her door. Emboldened by the entrancing quality of the door's magic, she gripped the knob, took a deep breath, and opened the door.

The blinding light of the sun completely engulfed Erine. She was trying to regain her bearings when she was abruptly shoved from behind. "Out of the way girl, you're blocking the path." Looking up from the ground, Erine saw the woman who had shoved her carrying a large woven basket filled with fish. She had dark black hair braided neatly. Her gray woolen chiton was stained all up the front with gills and the essence of fish butchery and had small tears along the sides, probably from the straws in the basket. Erine noticed that the woman wore no shoes, and her small, tan, feet were covered in blisters and calluses. Her face was stern, but began softening as she saw the confusion on Erine's face. Putting the basket down, she helped the young girl up. "What are you doing in the middle of the road? The festival makes this a busy time for people coming to Athens. You can't just stand here. You're lucky it was me that ran into you, and not some chariot running you over."
"Athens?" Erine exhaled slowly taking in her surroundings. Underneath the bluest sky she had ever seen was a dirt path bustling with people. Women, Men, and Children wearing draped linen garments and leather sandals. On either side of the road were workshops filled with craftsmen coming and going. On small tables were examples of their fine work. Vases of all different sizes waited to be purchased. "Athens," she repeated again.

"Yes, Athens. Now girl your garments are much too fine for you to be out here on the Dromos by yourself. Where is your slave?" Erine looked down and realized that her boots, sweater, and pants had been replaced by a long, white linen dress, tied at the waist by a large belt and pinned together at her shoulders. On her feet was a pair of leather sandals. As if waking up from a dream, Erine realized what this change in clothes meant.

"My backpack! My backpack! Where is my backpack?!" Erine searched frantically around her for her field gear.

"Sshhhhh, be quiet girl," said the woman, pulling her into a nearby stall and sitting her down. The potter working there gave them a cursory glance, but said nothing as he went back to his wheel. The fish woman, popped back out onto the street and came back with a small brown satchel. She handed it to Erine. "I do not know what a backpack is, but you were carrying this when you fell." Erine took the small satchel and opened the flap. Inside was the
wax seal, and fourteen small coins. "You should be more careful walking around with fourteen drachma. I do not know why you are carrying currency at all. It is not safe for a lady. Screaming nonsense about a backpack. Do you want to draw attention to yourself? A woman of your standing should not be the object of gossip. Now, where are your slaves?"

Erine looked around nervously. This woman obviously did not think that she was safe here. Her fingers pulled out the small seal. No matter what, Erine had a mission: to find Momos. Hanna said that she would be safe with him and, though whether she could trust Hanna was a debate in and of itself, it was her best option right now. She would stay mission focused and find a way home. Focusing on that would help her stay calm in this unbelievable situation. After her parents' last deployment, Erine had asked them if they got scared. They told her that even though there is always fear, at some point adrenaline kicks in and their training takes over and they just do what they have to do to accomplish the mission.

"I am Erine and I am supposed to meet Momos at the Dipylon Gate. Is that close? We are in the Kerameikos?" Erine sat up tall in her seat and tried to sound regal, as this woman obviously thought that she was a high born lady.

"Yes, this is the Kerameikos and the Dipylon Gate is right up the Dromos," seeing her confusion she stopped and explained, "the road leading into the main part of the city. You must be here for the festival. Well, you
can't go walking around the city alone. I will make sure you get where you need to be. I am Galene, daughter of Glaukos." With that Galene picked up her basket and the two walked along the Dromos, up to where the impressive gate waited for them.

Galene chatted happily about the festival as they went. "I am happy to see my sister. She will come in from the country with her husband and stay with us for the theater and to worship the god Dionysus, who blesses us with such festivity and the fertility of our grapes. Of all of the Olympians, Dionysus has the most fun festivals, though not the most important. It is Lord Poseidon, after all, that blesses my husband with fish to sell and food for my children to eat." It did not take long for the pair to make it to the city gate. The stone and mudbrick gate led the travelers though a thin corridor leading up into the city. Erine could see the tactical advantage in such an entrance. "This would make a siege on the city difficult, since an army would have to come through in such thin lines."

Galene laughed a little to herself. "Your father gives you much too much freedom to be around men and to hear them talk of their battles. A young girl should not concern herself with such things. The walls were built after the invasion of the Persians. That is all the war strategy you need to know." Erine wanted to argue. She wanted to tell Galene that she was wrong and that women can be great warriors, like her mother, but this woman had
been so nice and she didn't want to draw any more attention to herself. In the corner of her eye, Erine noticed small groups of people leaving gifts at two stone altars in the courtyard.

"Galene, what are they doing over there?" For a minute, Galene looked confused at the question and Erine wondered if perhaps it was a question she shouldn't have asked.

"They are making offerings at the altars of Zeus Heraikos (of the courtyard) king of all gods and Hermes, god of travelers. It is important to pay respects to the gods who grant us safe passage into and out of the city. They are leaving offerings to gain the favor of the gods. Is this not a custom where you are from?"

"Well, our altars look a bit different at home."

"Really?" said Galene. "I have not seen much of Hellas or the barbarian lands. Where is it that you come from?" For the first time since their encounter, Galene seemed uneasy about her newfound traveling partner. Erine racked her brains trying to think of another place in Greece. Where could she be from? Where could she be from? Why had she not been at the Circe and Io school long enough to study a map of Greece. There was one place that she was pretty sure was in Greece. It would be a risk, but she had to tell Galene something.
"Um, I was born in Athens, but my family moved to Sparta when I was just a little girl." Galene looked around nervously.

"Shh...do not say that too loud around here." She glanced around again and lowered her voice to a whisper. "There are many who feel that a war with Sparta is imminent. You do not want to be labeled a spy."

"I'm not a spy. I am a ten year old girl!"

"It explains your strange behavior," Galene said to herself. Then she turned to Erine, "I have heard many rumors about the strange ways of your people. That every child in Sparta, male and female attend school. That they all become fierce warriors. That you are left out in the woods and forced to hunt and steal in order to make it home again."

The ways of Spartan children were much different than the ways of Athenians, it seemed. So long as she didn't appear suspicious this discovery could work in Erine's favor. Now through the gate, Erine scanned the crowd looking for Momos. She had no idea what the man looked like, nor whether he would actually be there to greet her. All she had was the hope that Hanna had been telling the truth and Fate would be kind to her. Galene looked up at the sun, "Oh, it is nearing midday already! Good tidings Erine. May the Olympians bless your journey and may Dionysus grant you favor for venturing so far to celebrate his festival. Most Athenians meet by the fountain. I am sure that is where your Momos will be. I must deliver these
fish to my husband. He will be exceedingly cross with me if I do not reach the market soon.” She leaned down with her dark brown eyes level to Erine’s. “Be careful here child. The festival can be a rowdy affair. Young girls should not be wandering the streets on their own. Do not bring shame to your host.” With that she picked up her basket and hurriedly walked away.

Erine was deep in thought, wondering just how much danger she had put herself through, when the trickling of a nearby fountain captured her attention. The mix of the heat and the walking had left her mouth parched and her legs tired. One by one, the travelers emerging from the gate walked over to quench their thirst at the fountain. Since Galene seemed to think that Momos would be waiting their anyway, a quick stop for a drink didn’t seem like it would deter the completion of her mission. The water was cool as it flowed down her throat. The midday sun was beating down on the back of Erine’s neck and she thought that it was easily 70 degrees. Strange to think she had bundled up for the cold December weather just that morning. Around her, people were greeted by waiting family members and friends and rushed to homes after long journeys to relax and enjoy a midday meal. It would take Erine months to find a complete stranger in this crowd.

“Momos!” Erine heard the name called out and whipped around to find the voice. Walking through the crowd was a short, bald man with three small boys in tow and a traveling sac. He was waving to someone, but Erine
could not make out who. Into tracking mode, like a hunter stalking her prey, she weaved through the crowd, trying to keep the man in her sights. Finally close enough, she could see the man who must be Momos and hoped that it was not too popular a name. He was dressed well in a dark blue chiton that ended at his knees. Atop his head sat a wreath of jet black curls that fell down to his shoulders and a well trimmed beard of the same color.

“Greetings Hermolaos. Glad to see that you and the children made it in from the country this year. I hope Hermes blessed your journey.”

“Indeed, the boys and I had a good journey. I hear that you are working with Aeschylus and Xenokles this year. By the will of Dionysus, you will be victorious.” Momos politely thanked Hermolaos and then the man and boys were on his way. Moving quickly, Erine approached Momos.

“Excuse me sir.” She said clutching her satchel to keep her hands from shaking. Momos looked up in surprise and seemed to be studying her face.

“My name is not Sir. You must have me confused with someone else.”

“Is your name Momos, because that is who I am looking for.” Erine was shaking. What happened if this was not the right Momos or what happened it Hanna was wrong and he wasn’t expecting her. She reached into the satchel and pulled out the wax seal. “I was told to give you this when I arrived in Athens.” Momos took the seal from her and held it to the sun to get a more detailed look. Then he smiled warmly.
“It is a happy day. I never thought I would get the chance to meet my brother’s child.” He looked around her. “Surely you did not come alone? It is a long and dangerous journey from the Peloponnese.” His face darkened with concern as he looked at the young girl in front of him. When Erine did not answer immediately, Momos changed the subject. “Well, regardless of how you arrived. I am happy that you are here. My children wait for you at the house. Are you hungry?” Erine smiled gratefully and answered that she was, and followed Momos away from the crowd at the Dipylon Gate and down the road into the city.

“I was surprised when the messenger arrived and told me you were coming,” Momos said as they walked. “My brother has no love for Athens and I had not heard from him at all in many years. I am happy to welcome you to the city where he was born. What does my brother call you child?”

Erine hesitated. Should she use her own name or make one up? Remembering a new name would be too difficult. It seemed the best to tell the truth as much as possible. Besides, she was no expert on Ancient Greek names. “My father calls me Erine,” she said and when Momos smiled, relief swept over her body like a wave meeting the surf. Erine walked slowly, a few steps behind Momos, because she wanted to take in all of the ancient city. Momos chuckled when he noticed what she was doing.
“I forget that Athens is an impressive site to behold. Unfortunately, we must move a bit quicker as I have many preparations for the festival. Our home is not much farther. My daughter and the house staff will take care of you when we arrive.” And so,

Erine walked on with Momos, until the large stone buildings and public squares gave way to narrow roads lined with homes. “Here we are,” Momos said happily. “Here is home.” Despite the comfort that being with Momos gave Erine, she knew this was not her home and wondered whether she would ever see her mother and father again.
CHAPTER FIVE: AN ATHENIAN LADY

Momos was not what Athenians of his time would have described as aristocratic and wealthy. However, Erine was pleasantly surprised at how comfortable his home was. Built out of sunbaked mud bricks on a foundation of stone, the two-story home was of a relatively large size, not much smaller than homes she’s seen in other urban locales. With a roof of clay tiles, a dirt floor, and small windows with wooden shutters but no glass, Erine was grateful that the weather was so pleasant. At the front of the house were two entrances, one for the main house and one large enough for deliveries into the store room.

Meeting them at the door was an older man, Erine guessed that he was in his forties, but it was hard to tell as his beard was almost entirely gray, but his hair was a chestnut brown.

“Welcome home,” the man said to Momos. “Syntyche has prepared the midday meal for you. Will you be eating in the andron?”

“Yes Philo. Please bring it straight away. I wish to return to the rehearsals as quickly as possible. This is, Erine, the daughter of my brother. Please escort her to the courtyard. I assume that is where Astraea is having her meal. Tell my daughter that Erine will be our guest for the festival.” Philo nodded his consent and escorted the guest down the hallway and into the courtyard of
the house. Erine had seen similar courtyards when she’d lived in Italy and thought them a wonderful idea. What fun to be able to be outside in the very center of your home!

The sun shone brightly down on the two figures working diligently in the space. Philo walked over to the elder of the two women and quietly shared with her the words of Momos. After hearing his words she turned the fish she was cooking over on the portable brazier in the courtyard and walked into a room behind the courtyard, which Erine assumed must be the kitchen as she came out with an empty plate to put the fish on and a dish of olives and nuts, which she handed to Philo, who disappeared into the house with them.

Throughout the exchange, the young girl in the courtyard seemed oblivious to what was going on around her. Concentrating on the small spindle and whorl in her hand, the dark haired child deftly spun the wool into yarn. Her black ringlets hung free around her face and fell down past her chest. Erine thought that the hair looked even darker as it fell on her white chiton. When she had finished wrapping her newly created yarn along the long stick of the spindle, she looked up with her startling blue eyes to see Erine.

“Astraea,” said Syntyche. “This is your cousin Erine from the Peloponnese.”
Astraea rose from her small stool and walked over to give Erine a hug.

“Greetings cousin. I am so happy that you have come to Athens. I hope that Hermes has blessed your trip?”

So sincere was the girl that Erine felt immediately guilty about lying to her. “Thank you for your hospitality. My trip was very easy.”

“You must be a favorite of the traveling god! I have heard that the trip from Sparta is a dangerous one, and time consuming. You bless us with your presence.”

“Wait, I’m actually supposed to be from Sparta?!” Erine couldn’t believe her luck, but Astraea was looking on with concern. “I mean...you don’t mind that I am from Sparta? I know that Athens and Sparta are not getting along right now.”

Astraea chuckled. “You are family and your father is an Athenian citizen by birth! I have no prejudice against you cousin. Now, please come and have something to eat.” She turned to Syntyche, “We will go to the gunaikon for deipnon. I’d like to get my cousin out of the sun.” Syntyche nodded and Astraea led Erine to a small wooden ladder-like staircase to the east of the courtyard. The gunaikon was in the back of the second floor of the house. It was sparsely decorated with a few couches and some side tables for each. Two looms lined the back wall with their projects half-finished and awaiting the return of the weaver. Small baskets contained spun yarn and there was one
tapestry on the wall that was stunning in its detail. Erine walked over to get a closer look. Woven into the fabric was a tall woman with startling gray eyes, a shield, and a helmet.

“My mother was an amazing weaver. She made this one for me when I was born.”

“It is beautiful. Is that supposed to be you in the picture?”

Astraea laughed. “No, come sit and I will tell you the story.” Syntyche came in with plates filled with olive, nuts, and figs. There was flat bread, olive oil, and a plate of anchovies with onion and garlic. She placed them on a small table between the two couches. Astraea laid out on one and motioned for Erine to take the other. Erine thought the furniture was quite strange; a mix between a couch and a small bed, but it was relatively comfortable and she enjoyed being able to eat laying down, something her parents never let her do. Erine was inclined to wait for a fork in order to begin her meal, but Astraea had no utensil and used her flat bread to scoop food off of the plate and into her mouth. Erine wondered when forks had been invented…and why, for it was much more fun to eat with your hands.

“The woman in the tapestry is the goddess Athena. Has your father told you how she became the patron deity of our city?” Erine shook her head no and Astraea continued on. “There was a competition to see who would become the patron god of the great city of Athens. Poseidon and Athena both
vied for the title. So, in order to choose fairly each god decided to give the people a gift. Whichever gift was more popular with the people would become the patron of the city. Poseidon went first and struck a rock with his trident. From the rock burst water in every direction. Poseidon promised that draught would never come to the city if he were the patron. However, when the people tasted the water, it was salty.”

“Like the ocean, because he is the sea god,” Erine interjected excitedly. Astraea smiled encouragingly.

“That’s right. The people cannot drink sea water or put it on their crops, so it did not seem practical to the people. Next, it was the grey-eyed goddess Athena’s turn to present the city with a gift; a small seed. From that seed sprung the very first olive tree and the people rejoiced, for the tree could give them food, oil, and wood. She was chosen to be the patron of the city and Athens was named for her.

“That is a wonderful story!” Erine said happily. “Your mother really captured it in the tapestry. It must have taken her a very long time.”

“Indeed I believe it did. My brother, Lykos, told me that she worked all the hours that there were light on it. It is my most prized possession and all I have left of her. She went to Hades when I was very young.” Talking about her mother, Astraea seemed younger than she had before. He bright blue eyes
dimmed just a bit and her polite hostess quality revealed that she was just a child no older than Erine.

“I am sorry to hear about your mother. You must miss her.”

“As the woman of the oikos, it is my responsibility to make sure that Mother has what she needs in Hades. I go to the cemetery often to bring her offerings and pour libations.” Astraea smiled. “It is a job that I love to do.” Erine smiled and scooped some sardines, garlic, and olive oil onto her bread.

“Where is your brother?” Erine said looking around.

“You ask that like you expect to find him in the gunaikon! He is not a little boy to play in the women’s quarters,” she said laughing. “He would not take kindly to that jest. Lykos is at school.”

“Why aren’t you at school?”

“Oh yes, I heard that the women go to school in Sparta. That must be wonderful. Athens does not see the value in it. Only the very wealthiest young ladies go to school here, and not even the majority of those who can afford it. Syntyche serves as my tutor. We are lucky to have 3 slaves who are well-educated and Greek. The barbarian slaves can be quite dangerous.” Astraea’s pride shone through with every sentence.
“Syntyche is a slave? You have slaves?” Erine was shocked. Momos and Astraea seemed so nice and friendly. How could good people think slavery was okay.

“Of course we have slaves. Did your father tell you we were poor and living on the streets?” Astraea was indignant. “We have three slaves. Syntyche and I handle running the oikos. Cooking, cleaning, getting water, spinning, and weaving. She also tutors me. Philo assists father by keeping records, going shopping, sending messages, and other duties. Ampelios is Syntyche and Philo’s son. He attends Lykos.”

“But don’t you think that having slaves is wrong?” Erine looked at Astraea with disbelief. How could she be so proud to own people?

“What is wrong about it? The slaves are members of our oikos. It would be shameful to treat them poorly. Father would never allow it.” Astraea studied Erine with a careful glance. As if on cue, Syntyche walked in. Erine looked closely at the woman with her shaved head a long chiton. How did she feel about living in slavery? How did she end up this way? Could Erine ask? This woman was Greek. How was it that she’d been imprisoned by her own people?

“We should get back to your spinning,” she said to Astraea with a stern look. “You can recite the poetry you have learned to me as we do.” Astraea
nodded, grabbed the plates, and went downstairs to get her distaff spindle.

“How are your skills?”

“What skills?” Erine said confused.

“Your skills at spinning and weaving. I assume you have been taught the basics. There is an extra spindle, a whorl, and some wool in that basket. You will join us for lessons this afternoon.” Syntyche grabbed her own spindle and had a seat in a small stool across from the couches. Erine walked over to the basket that she had indicated, but there was one problem. She had no idea what a whorl or a spindle looked like. She glanced over at Syntyche to see if she could determine what would be needed for the lesson. “Child, are you looking over here to see what a spindle looks like?” Syntyche raised an eyebrow in question. Erine’s heart was pounding fast. What if they realized that she was not a cousin?! Would they throw her out on the street? Hanna had said that Momos would keep her safe until it was time to return home. If she left the house would she ever get back to her parents?

“The spindles look different in Sparta. I wanted to make sure that I had the right one.” Out of the corner of her eye, Erine was sure she saw Syntyche smile, but just as quickly the smile was gone.

“I see. Well, let me show you.” Syntyche explained that the spindle was just a long stick with a hook on the end. This allows the spinner to catch on end of the yarn in order to spin it. Next, she held up a terracorra disk with a hole in
the middle. This, she explained, was the whorl. “It is a weight that allows you to turn the spindle evenly. Do you understand?” Erine nodded, grateful that the woman was taking the time to teach her so patiently. Then she grabbed a piece of wool and pulled on it. “You see, the wool is not pulling apart. This is because I am holding both end of the fibers. The key to spinning is to allow the fibers to get as far apart from each other as possible without separating. We keep the short fibers together by twisting them. This creates a tight bond between the fiber.” Astraea walked back into the gunaikon just as Syntyche began to demonstrate, and continued to work on her earlier spinning.

Erine was entranced by the deftness with which Syntyche handled the wool. She started with a small piece of goats fur no longer than half a foot. Gently her small hands tugged the fibers of the wool apart and her piece got longer and longer, but never separated. Syntyche hooked the end of her wool to the hook on her spindle and slowly began to turn. She held the wool she was turning taut between the hook and the larger clump of undrafted wool. As it was twisted to her satisfaction, she spun the yarn pieces around the stick of the spindle. Then, she began drafting, or pulling apart more wool from the large clump, before twisting it into wool and wrapping it around the spindle. It was unbelievable to watch how one tiny piece of wool turned into yards of yarn in this woman’s skilled hands. After she had worked through a few
lengths of her own yarn, Syntyche looked up at Erine whose spindle, whorl and yarn still lay in her lap. “It is time to try the spinning.”

Astraea smiled encouragingly. “You can do it. We will help you.”

“It is an important skill to learn or you will have no clothes for you and your husband and children,” Syntyche said sternly and Erine had to keep from laughing. Other than sewing on a button or a patch onto her dress uniform, Mrs. Colonel Pershings had never done anything resembling making a garment and yet the entire family was always clothed. Erine wondered what her mother would say if she could see her now, spinning wool into yarn!

Erine, the same girl who had given up knitting because nothing ever turned out the way she intended. “This is supposed to be relaxing,” she’d tell her parents, “but there is nothing relaxing about knots in the fabric and a hat that came out the size of a toilet seat cover.” Exasperated she would sit with her parents and listen to stories of failed projects from their childhoods. There would be no Colonel and Colonel Pershings to cry to if this didn’t work out, though. No story of her father’s exploding science project and her mother’s attempt at modern art. For all Erine knew, ancient Greece could be her life now and girls in ancient Greece needed to know how to spin and weave. So, that meant that she had a new mission to accomplish. Erine Pershings, born in the United States of America in 2003 was going to learn how to be a proper Athenian lady in 458 BCE.
CHAPTER SIX: THE PROCESSION

"What do you mean that a woman's place is in the home? That is ridiculous."

Erine's matted attempt at spinning now lay in her lap. "You never go out?"

Astraea and Syntyche gave each other a worried glance, before Astraea began to explain, "Of course I go out. I told you that I am responsible for making sure that Mother is taken care of in the afterlife. I often go to her grave."

"A cemetery! That is the only place you can go in the whole city?" Erine was beside herself. She had tried being a proper Athenian lady for a whole afternoon. She had worked on her spinning and questioned Astraea about her life. In asking what she liked to do in the city, however, Astraea had been a bit taken a back. Good Athenian women, she had answered, know that they belong at home. To Erine, it was unbelievable. "Don't you have friends? Where do you go to meet with them? What about shopping? Don't you have to at least purchase things for the home?" Erine was struggling to keep her voice down now. She had been trying all afternoon to match Astraea's calming tone, but this had shattered that attempt.

"Erine, I did hear that things were different in Sparta, but I do hope you can respect our way of life here. A woman's job in Athens in to run the household. I have many responsibilities as the lady of the oikos and I am proud of them." She paused and looked down at the floor. Erine felt a twinge.
She hadn’t meant to embarrass her warm and welcoming host. "It is often said that the perfect Athenian woman is never mentioned. She is never the object of gossip. I do what must be done for my family without making a spectacle of myself." Syntyche walked over and sat down next to Astraea, tenderly patting her arm.

"Just because women of Athens are not leaders in democracy does not mean that they have no power, young one. Astraea has power over this oikos and that is the foundation upon which Athens is built." Astraea smiled up at Syntyche, grateful for recognition. "There are expectations of women of a certain standing in the polis. Astraea is not a poor widow or a slave to be wandering about the Agora purchasing food for deipnon. That is not her place. This does not mean that she is chain-bound to the gunaikon. The life of a woman in Athens is better than those in many other parts of the world."

There was no mistaking Syntyche’s tone. Mrs. Colonel Pershings had mastered it and Erine had heard it many times before. It meant the conversation was over. It meant Erine needed to stop and respect the judgement of her elders. The silence in the room was deafening. A wave of guilt swept over Erine. She realized that she had gone too far and offended her hosts. Living all over the world, required the Pershings to learn many different customs in order to be respectful of their host countries. The Colonel and the Colonel Pershings had taught Erine the importance of
understanding that different didn’t mean wrong, especially when it came to cultural practices. “I apologize for my rudeness. I was just surprised at how different our lives are.” Erine looked at the floor as she spoke, unable to meet the eyes of her young host.

Astraea, feeling the need to gently change the subject arose from her seat and smiled.

"Things sound like they are very different in Sparta, but we have something that you do not. We have the most amazing theater festival in all of Hellas and likely the world and you and I and Syntyche are all going!" She clapped her hands with excitement. "It is my favorite festival of the whole year." With that, she walked down the rickety ladder and out of sight.

"The City Dionysia," Erine whispered to herself. "I am actually going to see the City Dionysia? Are you kidding?"

Syntyche looked concerned. "Child, are you feeling alright? Isn't the festival the reason that you traveled so far?" Erine's heart beat in her chest as the sheer excitement mixed with fear at the suspicion with which Syntyche was now looking at her.

"Yes, of course. I am just so excited. It is quite unbelievable to be here." With that, she followed Astraea down the ladder and away from the skeptical glances of the elderly slave woman.
In the main courtyard stood Philo, Astraea, and two young boys. Erine estimated that these new strangers were a bit older than she, maybe 12 or 13. The dark black curls and bright blue eyes of the taller boy made it easy to guess that this was Lykos. While the short chestnut-colored hair and grey eyes of the other boy made Erine wonder if this was Syntyche and Philo's son, Ampelios.

"Brother, I would like to introduce our cousin, Erine. She came all the way from the Peloponnese for the festival." The boy looked up from underneath his dark curls and smiled warmly. He looked so much like Astraea that the two could have been twins, and Erine looked quickly from one to the other comparing their features. "Erine, this is my brother Lykos."

"It is a pleasure to meet you Erine. I hope that the gods smiled upon your journey." He smiled brightly at her.

"Indeed they did. I got here in...no time at all." Lykos looked at her in surprise and then turned to his younger sister with an inquisitive glance.

"I am glad to hear it cousin." He turned to the rest of the party, "We must be going the procession has arrived in Athens and we don’t want to miss anything. Sister, grab a cloak and one for our cousin, though the cold season has just passed there will be a chill in the air when night falls."

Immediately, the household mobilized, Astraea and Syntyche hurried into the gunaikon to grab soft wool cloaks for the women, then they walked
out of the house and down the narrow streets leading to the marketplace. In the hustle and bustle of the leaving the house, Erine realized that Momos was not with the group.

“Isn’t Momos going to come with us?”

“Father is going to be in the procession of course, he is the head musician for Aeschylus this year!” Astraea beamed with pride as she spoke of her father’s accomplishment. “I am just sure they are going to win. No one is a better musician than my father. Xenokles was lucky to get him. Father gets picked first every year and the other choregoi were so jealous!”

“Less talking, and more walking you two! We’re going to miss the entire pompe,” Lykos called from the front of their group. The girls giggled conspiratorially and then ran to catch up with the others.

After about ten minutes, the rows of houses lining the narrow streets gave way to hordes of people lining a much larger dirt road. Lykos led the group through the crowd to the edge of the road near the Agora. The group was just in time to see the statue of Dionysus, flanked by the ephebi, his guardians. As the wheeled cart with the gods image drew near, an eruption of praise and cheering rose from the crowd. Astraea leaned over and spoke loudly into Erine’s ear. Despite this, it was difficult to hear her with all of the noise around them.”
“Every year, the most handsome ephebi in all of Athens are chosen to be the guardians of the statue of Dionysus. It is a huge honor. When Lykos turns 18. He hopes to be chosen. He spends much time looking at his reflection in the bathing waters.” Astraea giggled a little at this and Erine smiled back. Making fun of one’s siblings was a timeless activity she supposed. “The Statue and the procession will stop here for a performance, and then we will follow them up to the temple at the Acropolis.”

The pompe reminded Erine of a parade. She couldn’t take her eyes off of all she was seeing. After the statue and the ephebi came a group of young girls holding baskets on their heads filled with tools. Then there was an entire train of bulls! Erine couldn’t even count how many. There had to have been 30 at least. She had never been so close to a bull and couldn’t decide if she should be scared. Behind the bulls came the tragedians and their choregos. Each one after the other. The first playwright and his choregos came and went without much fanfare. It was the next two who were expected to compete for the title.

“There he is. Sophocles,” Astraea said into Erine’s ear. “he’s our biggest competition.” Dressed in a gold mask and flowing purple toga was the playwright.

“I’ve heard of him,” Erine said. She looked over to the man next to him. His dark blonde hair stood in stark contrast to many of those surround him. He
wore a black mask with gold detail and a scowl. The same detailing was brought down into the black garment he wore. It was beautiful, but something about the man put Erine on edge. Just looking at him gave her shivers. She turned to Astraea. “Who is that man with Sophocles?”

“That is Abderus.” She leaned in closer. “He is one of the richest men in Athens, but also one of the cruelest. You should see the way he treats his slaves. It’s horrible. They say he will do anything to win. He offered my father drachma and land in return for not participating in the festival this year.” She looked around to make sure no one had overheard.

As the cart pulling Sophocles and Abderus rolled through the marketplace, cheers rose up louder and louder through the crowd. As Sophocles’ chorus passed, an elderly man in dark blue chiton with bright white trim came into view. He smiled brightly and waved to the crowd.

“That’s Aeschylus!” Astraea called excitedly.

It was obvious that this man was beloved amongst the people and it was no surprise given that he had been victorious in this competition over ten times before. This would be his final City Dionysia Festival and, fittingly he would be in competition with his fiercest rival, Sophocles. Next to the elder statesmen was Xenokles, the choregos. He wore a golden crown and a red chiton with golden jewelry. Erine thought they made a fine pair as the procession came to a halt.
“There’s Father!” Astraea called and pointed to Momos, who was wearing a bright white chiton and a wreath in his hair. He caught sight of his children and waved excitedly before taking his place in the middle of the procession line. His lyre clutched in his hand, Erine could make out the intricate details carved in the wood under the strings.

“What’s he doing?” She asked Astraea as Momos moved to the center of the pompe.

“He’s going to lead all of the choruses in a performance. He is awarded that right as the best musician in Athens. May it please Dionysus!”

Once in position, Momos caressed the strings of his lyre and the most beautiful sounds were caught by the wind and carried through the throngs of people who had come to see. The sound, so like that of a harp, was ethereal and sweet. Soon, other musicians, some player lyre and others the flute joined in, and the chorus members began to dance. It was a spectacle like nothing Erine Pershings had ever seen before. She was transported in that moment and everything seemed to fade away but her enjoyment of the festival.

“Get out of the way, child! I don’t want to watch this drivel” Erine was shocked back to reality as she was shoved from behind by a large man in a gray chiton. Now fallen to the ground, and with blood slowly dripping from scraps on her hands and knees, Erine looked up livid to see who had pushed her. Towering above was a large man, of build and stature. His gold rings and
necklace conveyed a high position in society and the way that the crowd made way for him to pass told of his nefarious reputation. Upon his head was the same dirty blond hair as Abderus...and an even more severe scowl. Well, Erine was just about to give this rude man a piece of her mind, when a gentle hand grabbed her around the waist and pulled her close.

“Just let him go,” Astraea said. In a moment, Lykos, Philo and Syntyche had flanked her on all sides, keeping her away from the rude man.

“Well, Erine was just about to give this rude man a piece of her mind, when a gentle hand grabbed her around the waist and pulled her close.

“Just let him go,” Astraea said. In a moment, Lykos, Philo and Syntyche had flanked her on all sides, keeping her away from the rude man.

“Who does that guy think he is?” Erine said exasperated. She got up and brushed the dirt off of her chiton. The music had now stopped and the pompe continued the journey to the Acropolis where the statue would rest for the festival. As the crowd around them slowly started to leave. Lykos met Erine with a cold stare.

“What were you thinking? Were you going to single handedly take on a man of Kyrillos’ size by yourself?”

“You know that guy? Why didn’t anyone say anything.”

“Yes,” Lykos said impatiently. “Everyone knows him. He works for Abderus, a cousin from the North. You could have gotten seriously hurt, never mind the damage to your reputation. You cannot go around speaking to men, let alone consider chastising them.” As he spoke Syntyche took Erine’s hands to examine the scratches. Out of a small bladder that hung from her waist, the woman poured cool water on the cuts, clearing them off.
“There you are child. These are only cuts,” Syntyche said gently. “As the drinking begins it will be more important than ever for you to hold your tongue. The festivals can get quite rowdy and are a dangerous place for a young girl with a sharp tongue. Do you understand?”

Erine nodded hesitantly. Astraea took hold of her arm and smiled.

“Well what are we standing here for, we’ll miss the sacrifices and the feast?”

“What do you mean sacrifices? Human sacrifices?”

Astraea laughed. “No, silly, we are not barbarians. What do you think all of those bulls were for? It is going to be a delicious meal!”
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE LYRE

Momos, Astraea, Erine, and Lykos walked back to the house with full stomachs and happy souls.

“I can’t believe they slaughtered all of those bulls!” Erine said still thinking about the ritual she’d seen at the temple. “I had no idea that those young girls were carrying carving tools in their baskets. I don’t think I’ll ever eat meat again.”

Momos laughed. “I guess it takes some getting used to if one is not accustomed to the sight, but there are few meals greater than one shared with the gods and all the people of Athens. Meat is a rarity for many of the city and public holidays are one of the only times that it is given to all.” He put his arm around his son and smiled, still glowing from the wine consumed during the festivities. “If only I had my lyre. I would compose a beautiful song about the girl who cried for the bulls.” Lykos and Astraea laughed.

“Syntyche and Philos put it away by now, father,” said Lykos. “They will not fancy you taking it out again so late. Nor will the neighbors. Apollo is beginning to stir, and ready his horses. The sun will be up in no time.”

“Is it that late, son? We must all get to sleep then! The festivals begin tomorrow and Sophocles is up first. We would not want to miss it!!” As they walked, the city’s revelry continued around them. It seemed too early to go to
sleep, like they would miss everything going on around them. There were musicians in every enclave playing flutes and reed pipes. Families happily chatting with neighbors and groups dropping in praise of Dionysus. The noises mixed together to create a soundscape of a city on holiday and Erine wished she could share it with her own family. Sadness crept over Erine as they reached the house with Momos and Lykos loudly humming a tune and Astraea laughing.

“Stay here,” Momos said suddenly alarmed. “Lykos, you too, stay with the girls. They can’t be out here by themselves.” Erine looked up and saw what caused the change in Momos’ mood. “The door. It’s been forced open.”

Astraea grabbed her hand and began to whisper. “Hestia, goddess of hearth and home, hear my call. Stay with us tonight and keep our home and family safe by the warmth of your eternal fires. Ancestors and household gods, hear my call. Astraea daughter of Momos…” She was interrupted when Momos emerged from the house, his brilliant white chiton covered in blood.

“Lykos, run to Xenokles’s house. Apologize for the lateness, but demand to be seen. Tell Xenokles that I require his presence and need his slave with the healing talents.”

“Father are you…” Lykos began to ask.

“There is no time boy, do as your father commands.” With that he ran off.

“Astraea, Erine hurry inside. It is not safe for you out here.”
“Father, what is going on,” Astraea said as she walked toward the house; Erine following closely behind.

“Children, I need you both to be brave. Syntyche needs this from us.” As the girls crossed the threshold into the household, they heard a wailing noise. Everywhere they looked, furniture had been tossed haphazardly around as if someone had ransacked the place. As the girls moved carefully towards the courtyard, the crying got louder and louder until they saw the source. Syntyche, was leaning over Ampelios who lay motionless on the floor covered in blood.

“My son, my son. Hades please give me back my son. Take me instead. Hades, please!” Erine heard Astraea gasp in disbelief before running over to Syntyche’s side and putting her arms around the mourning woman. Momos, had moved over near the entrance to the gunaikon, where Philos was sitting up and breathing, but badly injured. Feeling her feet move before she could even realize what she was doing, Erine ran into the kitchen and found a large bowl and filled it with water that Syntyche had retrieved earlier in the day. She grabbed some rags and a cup and joined Momos by the side of Philos.

“Old friend, tell me what happened here,” Momos said gently as Erine began to clean the wounds on the old man’s face, just as Syntyche had done to the small scratches on her hands.”
“The lyre,” Philos said quietly. “They came for the lyre. We tried to stop them, but they were too strong. Ampelios,” his voice cracked as he spoke his son’s name, “he saw them first. He was sweeping the courtyard when they entered the house. My poor boy. He called for help, but I could not get there in time.” Tears streamed down his face, creating small rivers through his swollen, blood stained face.

“I am sorry about your son, Philos. You will see him again in Hades and may those who did this to us be punished by gods and men where they stand.” Erine could not believe what she was hearing. Could someone have actually killed this young boy over an instrument? Erine wished that her parents were here. They were always so strong. They had been to war many times and knew what it was like to lose someone. They also knew how to find the person who tried to cause them harm and bring them to justice. If her parents were here, this never would have happened. They would have been safe and protected. Erine had never felt so vulnerable and alone. What would her parents want her to do now? What would they say? She heard Mr. Colonel Pershings say “Renny, it does no one any good to get panicked in an emergency. You have to stay calm, trust your instincts, and help anyone that you can.”

A commotion came from the front door as Xenokles, still dressed in his golden crown and flanked by half a dozen slaves entered the building.
“Momos, what happened? I brought Iaso, she is my best healer.” A middle-aged woman, with light brown hair held back in long braids sat down next to Syntyche. She examined Ampelios before shaking her head. “The boy is with Hades now. He walks with the living no longer.” She motioned for two of the male slaves to move the body. At first Syntyche resisted, but Iaso gently took her hand. “Sweet mother, you must ready your son for his next journey. Myron and Amtron will take him to your quarters so that you may say your goodbyes privately. I will tend to your husband.” With that the two young men took Ampelios body and carried it to the slave quarters in the front of the house. Astraea helped Astraea up from the floor and walked her behind the limp body of young Ampelios. The beautiful Iaso carefully moved Erine out of the way so she could examine Philos. After a few moments, she looked up at Xenokles. “It will take time, but he is in no mortal danger.” She turned back to Philos, “It will be painful for many weeks. You must take it very slow. I will clean your wounds.”

“Philos,” Momos said quietly as Iaso worked. “Who did this to you?”

“They were wearing masks. I could not make out a face. If I had even a guess I would not be sitting here, but out seeking justice for the life of my son.”

Xenokles, who had been standing quietly in the corner of the room, inched closer, motioning for Amtron and Myron to come. “Help this man to join his family. Iaso is finished with him and can check on him tomorrow with salves.
He should be with his family now.” He waited pensively as his orders were followed. Once Philos was out of sight, he stationed three of his male slaves at the door to guard the house and directed Iaso to the kitchen to bring wine and bread to the family. “We have much to talk about, Momos. Let us go to the andron where men can speak freely.” Momos shook his head in agreement, all traces of joy and excitement now removed from his face. Astraea and Lykos joined Erine in the center of the courtyard. Eyes filled with tears and chiton covered in blood, Astraea was quite the sight to behold. Lykos, on the other hand, wore a steely gaze like a mask as his looked to his father for direction. “Father, what happened?” Lykos said with as much strength as he could muster.

“Children, Xenokles and I have much to discuss. You should all get some rest now. His men are guarding the door and we are all quite safe.”

“Father, I am no longer a child to be sent to bed. Please tell us what you know.”

“Lykos, do not claim to be a man just yet. A man has many responsibilities that you are not yet ready for. However, I will tell you what I know. Someone broke into the house to steal my lyre. Ampelios and Philos tried to stop them. We do not know who it is, as they were wearing masks.”

“Cowards,” said Lykos through clenched fists. “Hiding their faces in the night and taking on slaves.”
“Shouldn’t we call the police?” Erine said quietly. “We need help. Whoever did this is not going to get away with it.” Her voice didn’t sound like her own. She had been sitting quietly for so long that it hurt her throat a bit to talk.

Momos was getting exasperated. “Erine, I don’t know what you mean by the police. This is not a word I know.” He sighed with fatigue. “I will do my best as the head of the household to bring whoever did this to justice, but there is no one to call during a festival. The courts will not meet, nor can we conduct the funeral rites. I don’t know how things are done in Sparta, but in Athens we must wait. It is the only way to show our respect for the god Dionysus, who has been disrespected by this show of violence.” He began to leave the courtyard and motioned for Xenokles to follow. Before exiting, he turned back around to the children. “It is time we go to bed. We must attend the festival tomorrow.” There was to be no questioning Momos, on this point. That was for sure. His tone was severe, yet strained by the emotions of the day. He and Xenokles left the room and the children, hesitantly went to their bedrooms.

Erine was sharing a space with Astraea next to the gunaikon on the second floor of the house. She wished that she could hear what was going on in the andron, but with the noise of the street and the cries of Syntyche below them, there was no way it would be possible.
“It is so strange,” whispered Astraea and they lay in their flimsy mattresses.

“How can so many people be celebrating and making such noise in the midst of this tragedy?”

“Astraea? Is there no one we can call who can figure out who did this?” Erine asked with genuine interest. She rolled over on her small bed towards the sound of Astraea’s voice and was grateful that she did not have to sleep alone.

“Ampelios was Father’s property. It will be up to him to seek justice as the head of the oikos. There is no one to call. Even if we could figure it out, the courts will not hear the case until after the festival.” Astraea’s voice cracked as she spoke.

“The longer we wait though, the harder it is going to be to figure it out. All the evidence is going to be gone.”

“Erine, we have no need of evidence to know who committed this crime. There is only one person who wants Father out of the festival enough to kill for it.”

Then it struck Erine. “Abderus! And I bet his awful cousin had something to do with it to.” She started to get up out of bed. “We have to tell Momos and Xenokles. Come on!”

Astraea rustled in her bed before sitting up. “Erine, stop,” she said quietly.

“What do you mean? We figured it out. We have to tell Momos.” Erine found her sandals and began lacing them.
“Erine. Everyone knows.” There was no questioning in her voice. Erine didn’t need to see her face to know that this was simply a fact. No doubt. She sat back down on the bed, leather straps flopping to the floor with a soft thud. “Taking my father’s lyre is a huge blow to Aeschylus. A musician is only as good as his instrument. Abderus has spent a lot of money as the choregos for Sophocles. He wants to win, no matter what it takes.”

Anger boiled up within Erine. “No. Momos asked Philos who did it. I heard him.”

“If there is enough evidence, we may be able to take Abderus to trial, but Philos didn’t see anything and, even if he did, the word of a slave would not hold up against that of one of the most powerful men in Athens.”

Erine clutched the fabric covering her sparse mattress. She couldn’t believe what she was hearing. A young boy, not much older than her, was dead and no one was going to do anything. No, she couldn’t allow that to happen. She wouldn’t allow that to happen. In the darkness, Erine Pershings struggled to strap on her leather sandels and felt her way to the door.

“Erine, where are you going?” Astraea called, but it was too late. There were still a couple of lamps burning downstairs, allowing the youngest Miss. Pershings to find her way in the house. Xenokles must still have been there. As quietly as she could, Erine crossed the courtyard to the men’s section of the house, making sure to stay in the darkened corners and crevices, so as not to
be spotted by Xenokles’ slaves. Looking around to make sure she wasn’t spotted, Erine sat down in a dark spot against the wall of the *andron*. As Lykos predicted, the weather cooled down considerably as night fell and Erine felt a deep chill against her bare arms as she leaned against the sun-baked brick wall and the dirt floor. From the *andron* came two deep voices in heated debate. Their raised voices made it easy to hear, despite the street noise.

“Abderus, Hades- take him. He must have found out about Aeschylus having three actors. He knew he couldn’t defeat your music and someone leaked that Aeschylus is going to use a third actor. You know that has never been done before.”

“Having three actors is unprecedented. It will change everything. He will still lose. We have to believe that. It may be the only justice my household gets,” Momos sounded tired as he spoke, but determined.

“Momos, this is an insult to the entire festival. Indeed, to Dionysus himself. When the time of the god is over, we will search for witnesses who can speak on your behalf. There are people everywhere. Surely someone saw something.”

“Xenokles, the entire city was celebrating the god. Few were in this neighborhood. Those who were had been drinking in feast for hours. No,” Momos paused. “We must focus on beating Abderus and Sophocles.”
“If only you had your lyre. You’ve been playing it since your first lessons. Your music and Aeschylus’ work— it would have been unstoppable.”

Erine shifted in her seat against the cold ground. She was unsure what she was listening for. There had to be some clue, some hint, something that she could do to help Momos and Syntyche.

“I will borrow a lyre from Lykos. It is not trained to my hand, but has a sweet sound. It will have to be good enough. Unless someone spots my lyre in Abderus’ home, we have no case against his violence and no way of gaining back the best instrument in all of Hellas.”

“We will have to hope that your skill will be enough despite the inferior instrument.”

“From your mouth to Apollo’s ears. May the god of music be ever at my side in the festival, as he has been in so many before. In the meanwhile, friend, you should head home. Make sure there are extra guards near the costumes and masks. We cannot afford any more mishaps. We can tell Aeschylus in the morning.”

Hearing the men begin to stir, Erine sprang from her spot against the wall and leapt into a dark corner of the courtyard near to the front of the house. Xenokles and Momos exited the andron, but the shadows kept the small girl hidden from their view. She knew Momos would not be happy to know that she had been up listening to their conversation. Once the men
crossed the courtyard to the front of the house, Erine crawled up the ladder stairs back to the *gunaikon*, where Astraea was still laying awake.

“Erine, where did you go? You should not be out of bed at night with men in the house.”

“Astraea.” Erine paused as her new mission unfolded in her mind. “Where does Abderus live?”
CHAPTER EIGHT: THE FESTIVAL

The next morning, the household arose slowly with the light. Iaso visited first thing in the morning to apply a salve to Philos’ wounds and prepare a morning meal. She also packed each of them a lunch to bring to the festival. In the gunaikon, the girls picked out freshly cleaned chitons as the aroma of morning meal wafted up the ladder like stairs.

“This is madness Erine, if your Father were to find out that you snuck into a strange man’s home, there is no telling what will happen. You must relent for your own safety,” Astraea said in a desperate whisper. The night before, Erine had informed the girl of her plan. Erine Pershings was going to go to the house of Abderus and steal back the lyre. It was the only way to keep the evil man from winning.

“Astraea, thank you for your concern and everything, but this needs to be done. He killed a young boy over that lyre and my parents taught me that if you have the ability to help in this world that you take it.” The young girl across from her seemed unconvinced as the bright light from the tiny windows at the top of the mud-brick walls hit her face.

“It’s just too dangerous. You don’t even know the city. How will you get in without being seen? Abderus has hundreds of slaves, not to mention his
wife and children, and that evil cousin who lives with him! After the festival, it will be dark Erine and harder to navigate the city.”

Erine fidgeted with a small bronze pin holding her *chiton* together.

“That is why I am going to go during the festival. Tomorrow.” Astraea beautiful face showed all of her fatigue, shock and fear. “While Abderus and Sophocles are in all of their glory and their household at the theater to experience it with them, I will strike. There will be no one there to stop me Astraea. I can do this, but I need your help.”

Erine outlined the plan to her new friend. The Colonel and Colonel Pershings had long taught their young daughter for many years that the key to a successful mission was pre-planning and Erine needed Astraea for that. Despite her conviction that rescuing the *lyre* was the right thing to do, her host had also been right. Erine could not navigate Athens on her own. After all, she had only been there for one day! When the Colonel and Colonel were planning a mission, they always included the experts, people who knew the terrain and the culture involved. That is what Erine was going to do and then she would strike.

By the time Momos gathered the household up to walk to the theater, Erine and Astraea had all that they needed to plan with tucked away in their cloth lunch bags. Both girls wore scarves over their head and cloaks over their
body, as the weather had dropped considerably. The girls had borrowed two clay tablets from Lykos’ school pile as well as a couple of writing tools.

“I know that we’ve all had a long night,” Momos said to his family when they met in the courtyard. “A horrible tragedy has struck this oikos and I know you are wondering why we should not stay home and mourn.”

Momos looked somber in his dark blue clothes as he addressed the family.

“This is a time when we need the gods more than ever, so we will not begrudge the grace due to Dionysus on this day. We need him to help us in this competition and Athens needs him to bless us with his vines. The gods must always come first, for only they can make a horrible situation more tolerable. So, we will go to the festival and not pollute it with talk of murder.”

“Father,” said Lykos, his eyes weary from the long night, “You expect us to sit in a theater with that animal and say nothing? He killed Ampelios! He is polluting the entire festival by showing up with blood on his hands, not us.”

“Son, you will learn patience as you grow older. The gods know what Abderus has done. They will punish him for the insult should he dare enter the sacred space of Dionysus after committing such an act.”

Astraea and Erine looked quickly at each other. “So, is there a chance he won’t go?” Erine was trying to keep the anger from her voice. He had to go, her plan depended on it.
“Oh, he will be there, though a more pious and patriotic man would exile himself before bringing his deeds to a sacred space of Athens. The swine!”

Momos was angry now, that was clear, but he gained his composure and led the group out of the house and began walking them to the theater. With Lykos and his father a few steps ahead, Erine leaned over to her friend “I thought that our plan was over before it even began for a minute there.”

“If only. I fear that Athena herself could not persuade you to take a different course, which is the only reason that I agreed to help you. I will not have this family suffer another tragedy.” Astraea eyes were sad as she looked ahead.

The two girls walked quietly through the throngs until Erine saw it. A beautiful open air amphitheater carved out of the side of a hill. Prominently displayed was the statue of the god Dionysus that had processed into the city a day earlier. Hundreds of people were filling into their seats along benches, like those Erine had seen in baseball stadium bleachers. The stands however were actually each built in a semicircle shape along steps carved out of the mountain and Erine had never seen anything like it. People filed into the space on what seemed like a first come first serve basis and Erine couldn’t help but see the beauty in having a whole city come together like this. Here, in this one spot, were men and women, young and old, slaves and masters. It was a truly magical experience. At the bottom of the hill was a small stage with a tent behind it. Momos led the girls all the way down a long aisle to seats at the
front where government owned slaves were holding seats for prominent citizens and their families. Momos had been invited to sit with Xenokles. The walk was steep and Erine was a bit scared that she would tumble all the way down.

“Momos, over here,” waved Xenokles wearing a deep crimson garment with a gold chain and golden cuffs. He looked quite regal. As the family reached his row, he motioned to where his wife and young daughters were sitting. “Why not have your women join mine at the end of the row?”

“That is an excellent idea,” replied Momos and ushered the girls to two spots next to Xenokles’ family. Erine was about to sit down when Astraea stopped her and handed her a small cushion for her seat. “Erine, it is going to be hours and hours of theater. You cannot expect to sit for that long without a cushion.”

“No, I don’t suppose that would be comfortable.” Next to Erine, was Xenokles family, but they never looked up to greet them, nor even looked in the direction of the girls. Making these plans were going to be easier than Erine even thought. She began scanning the crowd looking for her target.

“Do you see him,” asked Astraea. “I don’t think that he is here quite yet.” Erine shook her head “no.” Her heart began beating violently in her chest.
“He has to be here.” She whispered to no one in particular. Just then a large group in elaborate costumes began processing out of the tent next to the stage. Musicians playing flutes accompanied them and they began to dance. The show was starting and there was no sign of Abderus or his evil cousin.

“Sophocles is over there! Across the aisle from Father and Xenokles,” whispered Astraea. Erine looked where her young conspirator had directed her.

“The seats next to him are empty,” she whispered, her heart dropping.
Astraea put her hand on Erine’s shoulder to comfort her. “This chorus is made of excellent dancers, let us give them the attention they deserve now.” Erine nodded and turned to the stage.

How strange it is, she thought, to have theater outside in broad daylight. She wished desperately as the chorus danced across the stage that her parents were there to see this with her. No one would have touched that boy if her parents had been there to protect him. They simply could have come as a family to enjoy the performances and the magic of going back in time without worrying about safety. She never worried when her parents were around, but they had been gone before on deployments and Erine had learned to be strong and take care of herself and others. She had grown up fast and was proud of all she’d accomplished. This was like that, she told herself.
She was not alone here. Her parents were home waiting for her and it was her turn to deploy on a mission. It was her turn to be the hero. Just as the conviction grew inside of her, Astraea tapped Erine violently.

“Abderus is here.”
CHAPTER NINE: THE PLAN

The first day of plays had been quite boring and Erine had never been so exhausted in her life. Astraea had not been kidding when she had said the seats were uncomfortable and every part of Erine was sore. Despite all that, though Erine was focused on her mission. The plan that the girls had devised during breaks in the theater ran over and over again in her mind. As they walked home Momos and Xenokes chatted eagerly about the day’s performance.

“The trilogy was a worthy gift to Dionysus,” Xenokles said loudly. “Our gift is much better, especially for a god with such a penchant for extravagance. The masks the actors wore were quite basic. I always say, if you have a whole day of theater, you must give the people something beautiful to look at.”

“Indeed,” agreed Momos. “There is no playwright that can truly compete with Sophocles and Aeschylus anyway. Watching three plays about the Persian invasion was a bit tiresome. I mean, we need only look around at the rebuilding of Athens to remember that the enemy was at our gates. The music was somber to match.”

“Not quite a celebration fit for a god of wine!” Xenokles and his family said their goodbyes and that left Momos and his family alone to walk the last couple of blocks home. Erine noticed each member of the family tense as they
crossed the threshold into the house, still shook-up from the events of the night before. Momos sent the children up to bed and then went into the slave quarters to check on Philos and Syntyche. Erine caught a glimpse of Philos and Syntyche on their knees next to Ampelios who was laid out on a table. Their eyes were puffy, swollen, and bloodshot, and they said nothing as Momos entered the room, just continued to hold hands and pray to Hades and their ancestors to protect Ampelios on his journey. Momos put a hand on each of their back in comfort and left the room slowly, so as not to interrupt their prayer. Seeing Erine peeking into the room, Momos reached out to her and led her into the courtroom.

“We must give them space to grieve and pray,” He said gently.

“How long will Ampelios stay in the house?” Erine asked in a whisper voice.

“It is not proper to go to the cemetery until the festival is over. They have begun the process by laying him out and beseeching the gods and their ancestors to take care of him. When the festival is done, I will rent them a cart to take to the cemetery. You must follow Astraea up to bed now young one. May Hypnos grant you peaceful rest.”

With that, Erine headed up to the gunaikon more convinced than ever that it was necessary that she do something to help this family. Astraea was waiting for her with the clay tablets upon which they had laid out their plans.
“If you insist on doing this, let’s go over the plan one more time,” she whispered with quiet resolve. She pointed to the makeshift map of Athens that they had worked together to create and Erine walked and sat down on her small bed, so that they could look at it together, under the soft glow of her lamp.

“Athens is made up of demes, or separated in groups by land,” started Astraea. “Like a neighborhood!” Erine offered in understanding.

“If that is what you call it where you are from,” Astraea replied before moving on. “We live in Melite, which is here.” She pointed to a spot on the western part of her map of the city. “We’re to the West of the acropolis. In this deme are the Agora and the Pnyx.”

“What’s the Pnyx?” Erine asked.

“The Pnyx is a rocky hill where we have our assemblies. We have past it a couple of times. It has the stairs carved out of the side. From the top, you can see the Agora.”

“I know where that is,” said Erine. “Maybe if I climb to the top, I’ll be able to see where I have to go better.”

“Oh Erine you musn’t,” she screamed before remembering that they had to whisper. “The Pnyx is sacred. No woman is allowed on it. Someone may spot you and it would be their duty to thrash you for polluting the space! You must give me your word that you will not put yourself in any additional danger.”
“I’m sorry to worry you Astraea,” Erine said sincerely. “I didn’t know that was forbidden.”

“It’s exactly why I shouldn’t be letting you do this,” she said as tears started to well up in her eyes. “It’s too dangerous. I should tell Father if you insist on going.”

“Oh, Astraea! You wouldn’t!” Erine reached for the girl’s hands as the clay tablet fell to the bed. “This is for Ampelios. I need to do this.” She gripped the small hands in her own a little tighter. “I know that it is dangerous, but I just can’t do nothing. My parents did not raise me like that.” At the mention of her parents, Erine started tearing too. “I miss them so much.” Astraea pulled her into a hug.

“You’ll see them soon; after the festival. Father will arrange it.” She stroked Erine’s back. “I won’t tell Father about the plan. I’m sorry I said that. I just can’t send another member of this family to Hades.”

Composing herself, Erine looked at her new friend and thought about all she had lost. “I will be fine. Everyone will be at the festival. I promise that I will abort the mission at the first sign of trouble.” Seeing the blank stare on the girl’s face she corrected herself. “That’s what we say in Sparta when we mean stop what we are planning to do. Now please, let’s review the map.”

Astraea nodded her head. “We are in Melite,” she said pointing again to the spot on the tablet. “You must get to Kollytos, she said pointing to the
Southern end of her map. That is one of the wealthiest *demes* in the city. We are hoping that most of the slaves will be at the festival with their owners, but some could be left behind to guard the homes.”

“I understand.”

Astraea took her writing tool and, instead of drawing a straight line from Melite to Kollytos, she traced a southern path along the Western edge of the city before eventually turning East.

“Why do I have to go so far around? That’s going to take twice as long. Can’t I take a more direct route?” Erine knew that the longer the route, the greater the chance of getting caught.

“You would have to walk through the *Agora,*” said Astraea.

“Alright, then that is what I will do.”

“Erine, women of our standing cannot walk through the *Agora.* Only the poorest women and slaves are allowed to enter. No, that path is impossible you must take this one.” She pointed again to the long, winding path on the tablet.

“If I was a boy, could I take the path through the *Agora*?” Erine asked.

“Yes, but you are not a boy.”

Astraea went on outlining her route to the house of Abderus in Kollytos, it was certainly well thought out, but seemed unnecessary to Erine.
Erine Pershings had an idea and it was one that she was sure was going to get her into trouble later.
CHAPTER TEN: A BOY IN THE AGORA

Erine Pershings woke up and snuck down to the kitchen early. Iaso would be there at dawn’s first light to prepare morning meal and pack *deipnon* for the family, so there wasn’t much time. Erine was looking for something very specific, something she had used time and again when she wanted to stay home from school. Now, Erine was a good student, but sometimes she just wanted to spend a day with her Mom, especially after a long deployment. Erine Pershings was trying to make an Ancient Greek version of fake vomit. She took a cup from the pantry and filled it with water, olive oil, a couple of small pieces of the bread she had eaten for *deipnon* the day before. “This doesn’t look right yet.” She grabbed some milk and honey out of carefully sealed clay jars with a large spoon and added them to her cup. She then resealed the jars. “I just need the secret ingredient.” Erine spotted it on a table near the breads.

She grabbed the egg and cracked it into the cup and vigorously mixed with her spoon. It was now a thick and disgusting texture, exactly what Erine was looking for. She grabbed the cup, and began to leave the kitchen. “Sweat…I need sweat.” She walked over to the large vessel containing the family’s water and filled a second cup with water. Sneaking out of the room,
she carefully climbed up the stairs to the gunaikon, making sure not to spill a drop of her concoction.

“Did you get what you needed,” asked a sleepy Astraea. “Iaso will be here shortly to wake us and prepare morning meal.”

“I have everything that I need and I am about to get very very sick.”

When Iaso came in to wake the girls up, she was shocked by what she saw. The “vomit” was all over the floor near her bed and she was covered in what appeared to be sweat.

“Child, what happened?” The woman rushed over to her side. “Astraea, you should leave the room. Put on your chiton now and I will meet you in the courtyard to braid your hair.”

“Yes, Iaso. Will she be alright,” asked Astraea trying her best to feign concern without smiling.

“I don’t know child, but you must move quickly.” Astraea gave Erine a quick smile when Iaso wasn’t looking, got dressed, and hurried down to the courtyard.

“Child, when did you feel you were getting sick?”

Erine spoke in her slowest and softest “I’m sick voice,” making sure to keep her arms limp and her eyelids droopy. “Mmmmm…I’m not sure. I just woke up early and… mmmmmmm… got sick. It must have been sitting outside
in all of that sun.” She threw in a moan and clutched her stomach for good measure.

“Does this sun sickness happen a lot? I have never heard of such a thing.”

“Oh,” she moaned. “My stomach is cramping.”

“Well you must stay home today. I will stay with you,” Iaso said determinedly.

“No,” Erine said with a little too much energy. She quickly corrected her voice and curled back up in a ball. “The sun sickness will pass by midday I am sure. I do get it often at home. It’s kind of a joke with my family.” She paused and clutched her stomach a little tighter. “You should go.” Iaso still looked unconvinced. “It would be an insult to Dionysus if you stayed where you are not needed.” Erine knew she had finally struck a chord with the woman, who sat up a little taller and began considering her options. “I’m already feeling better. I just need to stay out of the sun today.”

“Well alright then. I would hate to miss the dramas of Sophocles. If you are sure you are well.” She reached out and place a hand on her skin. “You don’t feel warm.”

That was when Erine knew she had Iaso tricked. The kind woman cleaned up the fake vomit, which Erine did feel bad about because it reeked, and then prepared morning meal. After what felt like an eternity, Astraea came up to let Erine know they were leaving. “Feel better,” she called loudly
before adding in a whisper voice, “Wait till the streets are clears before you leave and avoid the Agora.”

Once the family was gone, Erine was free to move about the house, albeit quietly so as not to arouse the suspicions of Syntyche and Philos. She suspected, though, that their grief would keep them occupied. The plan was going exactly as she and Astraea had laid it out, with one large change. Erine was going to go to the Agora, but she couldn’t do it as a female.

Erine entered the andron as quietly as she could. It looked similar to the gunaikon with its short, one-armed couches, but different in décor. Here, there were no spindles or looms, only a couple of finished tapestries hung on the wall, undoubtedly done by Momos’ late wife, who’s skill was undeniable. There was a large wine vessel on a side table and a rest upon which the missing Lyre had been. A smaller lyre rest was on the other side of the room, containing the lyre of Lykos. It was certainly no comparison in beauty or size to the instrument Momos used. They also had flutes and reed pipes scattered around, as well as some papyrus sheets and clay tablets.

Erine hurried through the andron to Lykos bedroom looking for a short chiton worn by the boys. She found a dark blue square with a ropelike belt and threw it on. She found a polished metal surface that Lykos used as a mirror and glanced at her slightly distorted reflection. She’d thought the boy’s chiton
would be enough, but her long hair, still pulled back in braids was a dead giveaway. She would have to cut it shorter in the style of boys at the time.

Taking a deep breath, Erine found herself in the kitchen looking for a sharp knife. What she found was huge and resembled a short handed sickle. Erine had once had an awful bowl haircut and it had taken forever to grow back out. She swore she would never cut it short again. This was what her mission called for, though. Looking at the knife, Erine remembered asking her Mom if she hated having to wear her hair in the same way everyday; in that tight army-approved bun. Her mother had laughed. “My hair is not as important as my safety or my job. On a mission, hair can get you in a lot of trouble and at home it is a symbol of what I do for a living. Sometimes we have to do things that we might not enjoy because we understand it’s important in the larger scheme of things.”

She now understood what her mother meant. Her hair was not as important as completing her mission safely. She took the sickle and started chopping away at her hair. The blade was not so sharp and Erine had to work to get it to cut through her long, thick hair. Soon long pieces were dropping the ground and Erine could only imagine what it looked like.

By the time she was done, Erine could no longer hear the crowds happily making their way to the Theater of Dionysus. It was time. There was
going to be at least one boy in the *Agora* today and she hoped she was completely alone.
CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE HOUSE OF ABDERUS

Erine moved swiftly across the Agora clutching her clay tablet with the map of Athens. She was using the sun’s position to help her figure out her direction and the time of day. Every once and a while, she would see a straggler walking amongst the empty stalls, but after a moment or two of hiding, she would continue on her way. Seeing the Agora like this, a place that Astraea had told her was usually a bustling marketplace and the place where business deals were made, was deserted. It was like she was in a ghost town. Erine could see the Acropolis high above her as a beacon helping her find her way. “Someday,” she said to no one in particular “there is going to be one of the most recognizable landmarks in the world right there. I hope I’ll get to look at pictures of it with my family again.” The momentary pause was a lapse in judgment; a mistake on her mission.

“Oy, boy what are you doing here. There’s nothing for you to steal. Now, be gone with you” called a man from across the way. She had been spotted by a merchant, who, by the sound of him was not Athenian. He started moving quickly in her direction. “Boy, if you are up to no good, I will surely give you a beating.” He raised his fist in the air and she decided that she could reason with him, and potentially be discovered as a girl, or run. She chose the latter.
Her feet stomped hard against the pressed Earth and she kicked up dirt behind her as she ran.

“You stop running boy, I want to talk to you.” He was gaining ground on her and Erine knew she was in trouble. Up ahead was just an open patch of land where juries were selected and groups gathered for speeches. She could not outrun him forever and if she kept going, there would be nowhere to hide. Clutching her clay tablet even closer, she jumped quickly zigzagged and ran behind a beautiful stoa, hoping the cloud of dust would conceal her movements long enough. The building was painted a beautiful assortment of colors and Erine would have liked to take her time and study it, had the circumstances been different.

“There has to be somewhere to hide. He’s going to find me here.” She walked sideways with her back behind the wall of the stoa, the stone walls giving her some comfort. On the other side of the wall, she could hear the man’s sandals flapping against the long marble walkway, flanked on one side by the ornate columns and on the other by the wall she was currently pressed up against. She could not run forwards or backwards along the path through the Agora without being seen by the man. So, she simply waited and prayed he gave up.
“Little boy, where are you little boy? Do you have something that isn’t yours? Are you vandalizing the property of the city? You high class boys are always up to something.”

In that moment Erine’s heart felt like it was going to explode out of her chest. This man could easily kill her if he thought she was up to no good, and she was. He would beat her for being a girl and do god knows what else. She smashed her back even harder against the wall until she felt pain. She couldn’t move or breathe. “Come on Erine, you are a Pershings, what would Mom and Dad do in this situation? Think, think, think. That’s when she saw it, a little goat tied up to a post at a stall behind the Stoa. He was small, and looked a little malnourished. Erine decide to set him free to see if he could find a better home. “That’s it!”

She untied the goat from its stall pointed it in the opposite direction from where she wanted it to go and gave it a hard smack on the rear. Taking a huge chance, she waited a beat and then took off running in the other direction. Again cloud of dirt when flying, but Erine never looked back. She ran as fast as she possible good past the wide open area and into a residential neighborhood, where she hid in behind a cart. There was no one following her any more. The man had done what she suspected and followed the goat. By the time he realized what he was chasing, she was long gone.

“Thank you little goat. I hope you find a wonderful home.”
Erine was on her way again and began moving more cautiously through the Koile, one of the demes between Melite and Kollytos. She walked briskly, according to her map she was not far. Athens was not a large city, and there were no crowds today to slow down her movements. After the scare in the Agora, though, Erine moved a little slowly, peeking around corners before making a turn.

After only about eight to ten minutes, Erine had arrived in Kollytos, one of the riches demes in Athens. She was surprised that the houses didn’t look very different from those in Melite or Koile. Perhaps a bit bigger with a little more room between them, but still quite simple. It seemed that only the public buildings in Athens were made of Stone. As she walked through the streets of Kollytos, Erine was lucky to meet up with barely a soul. It was completely deserted. “I bet it is a matter of pride to have so many slaves, they want to show them off. That’s horrible.” At the end of the street marked on her clay tablet map was the home. A giant Alpha symbol for Abderus was painted on the front and the doors and shutters were the most ornate in the neighborhood. It was the biggest one on the block, and Erine could make out a stone foundation.

Now came the part that Erine did not plan well enough... Was she simply going to walk through the front door?
CHAPTER TWELVE: THE HERO THIEF

Erine looked at the house and saw two openings, or points of entry as her parents called them. There was the front door and a side door large enough for a cart.

“If I go in the front door,” she whispered to herself, “there is no telling what might be waiting for me. But, if I go in the cart entrance, I could be going right into the slave quarters, and they are the most likely group of people who are home.” Eventually, she decided to try her hand at the front door. Wrapped around the handle was a leather thong strap, with the most complicated knot she had ever seen. She tried pulling at it and yanking on it, but it would not give. Erine took a deep breath, “Where are the ends of the knot?” She fiddled and fidgeted and nothing! There was the knot.

She was about to give up and take her chances that the servants weren’t home when she remembered the Navy captain her parents had introduced her to when they were living in Japan. Working on a ship, he knew every knot there was, and he also fancied himself an amateur magician. Captain Danny had taught her about a special magician’s knot that locked and unlocked in a “magic” twisting motion. “The Grief knot,” she exclaimed. “It can’t be.” Erine looked closely at the leather strap and saw that the pieces were criss-crossed. “Unbelievable.” She reached in and uncrossed the straps by turning
them like a key. Amazingly, it worked and she was able to pull away the leather and open the door.

Now, the voices of her parents drowned out the magic lessons of Captain Danny. “Erine, when we go into a house, we make sure that each room is cleared before moving on to another. The worse thing that can happen on a mission is for the enemy to sneak up behind you.”

Erine cautiously worked her way through the house, and as she tiptoed past the entrance portico and into the main courtyard there was no one in sight. She had to work hard to stay focused with such elaborate décor, obviously collected to show off Abderus’ wealth. Luxurious tapestries and furniture filled the portico and wall adjacent to the courtyard and a giant stone hearth set right in the middle, not a little portable brazier like the one in Momos’ home.

Astraea suspected that Abderus would want to show off his prize and, therefore, would keep it in the andron. So, Erine made sure the courtyard was cleared and headed for the men’s quarters in the house. She peeked into the andron from the doorway before walking in and there, right in the middle, was Momos’ gorgeous golden lyre. Cautiously she walked up to it and grabbed it off the rest in the middle of the well adorned room. Hurriedly she put it in a large cloth sack that she had carried for just the occasion and headed for the front door. Relief swept over her as she exited from the andron into the
courtyard and from the courtyard into the portico. Could she really get out of here undetected?

“Boy, stop called a deep voice.” There, on the other side of the courtyard was Kyrillos. By the looks of the way that he was swaying to and fro and slurring his words, he had been drinking wine all night. Erine thought to make a run for he, but even in his condition, Kyrillos’ size allowed him to close the gap to easily. He reached out and grabbed Erine by both arms and lifted her up into the air and pressed her up again a column in the portico.

“What do you want here boy? People who steal from my cousin are not treated kindly. I will see to you punishment myself.” He glared up at Erine whom he was holding a good three feet off the ground. “I think I will cut off one of your hands. If you do not bleed to death you will have learned your lesson.” He turned sideways without letting her down. “Anthro! Bring me a butchers knife. Hurry up Slave.” The slave called Anthro walked into the room and could not hide the shock on his face at what he was seeing.

“What are you gawking at, slave. Give me the knife. You’ll have to hold the boys arm. He is a little thief.”

“Was Ampelios, a little thief too, or do you just make a habit of killing young boys?” Erine’s voice rang out clear as day. It was a strength that she didn’t know she had. “His parents are inconsolable to have lost a child for something so stupid as a theater competition.”
Kyrillos slammed her hard against the wall and pain shot through the back of Erine’s neck. The pressure of the impact forced Kyrillos to stagger a bit, but he stayed upright. “Look what we have Anthro...a hero thief.” He threw Erine onto the ground in the courtyard and with a loud pop, she was sure that her shoulder was dislocated. “I was just going to cut off your hand, hero thief. You might have lived, but now that I know why you are really here, I am going to slowly beat you to death like I did you beloved Ampelios. Perhaps Syntyche and Philos will mourn for you too.” Erine tried to move from her spot, but the pain in her shoulder was just too much. Kyrillos was now looming over her, his muscles glistening under the bright midday sun. He reached up as if to strike her and Erine had finally lost all hope. She finally had an answer. She would never see her parents again. She would never get to say goodbye and they would never find her.

Kyrillos’ fist came cutting through the air heading straight for her head and Erine was even past fear, now. She closed her eyes and waited for impact. However, there was a loud crash and the impact never came.

“Get up, girl. Come on. He won’t stay out for long.” Erine opened her eyes to find Anthro holding a shattered piece of furniture over the unconscious body of Kyrillos. He gently lifted her up into his arms, she grabbed the bag with the lyre, and the two walked out of the house and into the street.
“We must hurry young one. We will go the long way home, through Koile and Keiriodai. We cannot risk being seen in the Agora.” He paused to look at her limp and by his side. “Can you walk child?”

“Yes,” Erine answered weakly. She had never been in more pain. There was blood trickling down from the back of her head and her shoulder hurt so badly that she thought she was going to black out. But, with Anthro’s help, she was able to walk slowly through the neighborhoods and back to Momo’s home in Melite.

Walking through the door, they were met by a worried Iaso, Syntyche and, Philos. “What happened to her?” they all seemed to say at once

Weakly, Erine simply said “We got back the lyre,” and handed the bag to a shocked Philos.

Iaso gasped before gaining her composure again. “Put her on a couch in the courtyard, I will tend to the child.” She ran into the kitchen to grab water and bandages. From a cloth bag she pulled out a small jar. “I want you to drink this before I see to your shoulder, it will help the pain.” Tentatively, Erine sat up on the couch and took slow sips out of the jar. The last thing Erine heard before falling into a deep sleep was Iaso getting Anthro to hold her down and her own scream as Iaso popped her shoulder back into place.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN: A WINNING TRILOGY

Erine woke up to the melodic sounds of Momos playing his lyre in the courtyard. The pain in her shoulder was now dull and the cut on her head was bandaged well. Her eyes slowly opened.

“Momos, you are telling me that this little girl feigned an illness and stole back the lyre from Abderus.” Xenokles laughed heartily. “Those Spartan women really are made of sturdier stuff.

“It is not the place of a woman to do such things. No one must know what transpired. We would not want men to talk about her and have her become a spectacle.”

“Her secret is safe with me, but I cannot hide how impressed I am. Maybe, I do fear a war with Sparta after all. We know the men are fierce, but the women may be just as dangerous.” He laughed again.

Erine tried to sit up. “Ahh, the Spartan hero wakes. You certainly showed us Athenians a thing or two.”

Astraea and Iaso rushed over to Erine’s side.

“Child, do not sit up. Your injuries will heal better with lots of rest.” Iaso began checking bandages and fussing over her, while Astraea gave her some water to drink, which Erine happily gulped down.

“Where is Anthro? He saved my life?”
“He is safe. Father made sure of it. That is all we can know,” she said while grabbing Erine’s hand.

Momos walked over and sat in a couch opposite his young house guest. “What you did, Erine was incredibly brave. That, I will say first. However, when your father sent you to me he trusted me to keep you safe. He trusted that my daughter would provide companionship and that you would not tarnish your reputation. You have put that trust in danger and so, I must insist that you never leave this house again without supervision and Astraea and Iaso will each report back to me frequently on your whereabouts. For now, I have sworn all who know about your expedition to secrecy.”

Erine could see that Momos was struggling. “Momos, I am sorry to have put you in a difficult position. Truly. I just knew that I could get the lyre back and get the evidence that we needed to bring Ampelios’ killers to justice. Now you can take him to court. Can’t you?”

“Yes, once the festival is over, Xenokles and I will testify to receiving the lyre back from the house of Abderus. We will give Anthro the credit for stealing it back and coming forth to talk with us. The word of two citizens and the lyre reemerging should be enough for a guilty verdict. Everyone will know what he did.” Momos spoke patiently as he sat next to Erine. “We must all be going to bed. We have a lot to do in the morning. He got up from his chair and picked up his lyre, but stopped before leaving the room. “Oh with
all of the excitement, I almost forgot, your father sent me a message. He’s sending someone to escort you home after the performance tomorrow. The messenger said her name was Hanna.”

With that he wished everyone a good night. Erine beamed with happiness despite the pain. Hanna was coming to get her. “I thought I’d never see home again. I thought I’d never see my parents again,” she confided in Astraea once they were tucked away in bed. “But Hanna is coming for me! I get to go home.” Astraea smiled and Iaso came up to give Erine one last dose of the medicine, causing her to drift back off to sleep with dreams of her parents and her new home in Washington, DC.

The next morning Erine woke up and insisted on attending Aeschylus’ trilogy. Momos’ music was beautiful and the story was, fittingly, about the establishment of the court system in Athens and the search for justice. Erine loved each of the three plays, one more than the last. Her heart was full when Momos came to the front and took a bow! She applauded and cheered as loud as she could. “I didn’t see Sophocle’s play, but I cannot imagine it was better than this one,” she said to Astraea who was clapping much more reverently.

As she, Astraea, Lykos, and Iaso exited the Theater Dionysus and found themselves back on the street, Erine heard a familiar voice.
“Hello Erine,” said Hanna standing there in a long purple chiton, gold jewelry and her red-orange hair pulled back and set with leather straps. “It’s time to go home.”

Astraea clutched her hand and gasped. “Right now? Can’t she at least say goodbye to Father?”

“I am afraid, Erine must make her goodbye now. I know you will give her regards to your father.” Hanna stared at Erine with her piercing gray eyes.

“We have a long journey home.” Erine nodded and turned to Astraea, “Thank you for everything. It felt like I had a sister though I’ve only known you a short time.” She gave Astraea a big hug. “Sorry I didn’t turn out to be a perfect Athenian lady.”

Astraea laughed, “I’m glad you are not. Otherwise, who knows if we would have gotten justice for dear Ampelios. I learned a lot from your strange Spartan ways, Erine. I hope to come visit you someday. I fear that I will be quite tame in comparison.” A tear welled up in her eye. “Take this bracelet. I weaved it from the yarn we made together. It will remind you of me.”

Astraea slipped the bracelet off of her own wrist and handed it to her dear friend. Erine smiled, gave her one last hug and then said brief goodbyes to Lykos and Iaso. She wished them well and joined Hanna on the journey back to the Kerameikos.
“Do you think,” Erine asked as she and Hanna entered the Pottery shop from where she had first emerged into Athens, “that Astraea will ever be able to visit me?”

“One never knows Erine Pershings. All things are possible.”
CHAPTER FOURTEEN: A SECRET HOMECOMING

When Erine’s feet touched the cold marble museum floor again, she was relieved to find her pants, boots, sweater, and backpack all where they had been when she left. Erine’s hand grasped at her wrist to see if her beautiful bracelet remained. As her hands felt the rough wool, a smile covered her face. It had not been a dream. She could always be sure.

Even more exciting, though, was that the pain from her head a shoulder were totally gone and her terrible haircut had seemingly disappeared as well. Everything was at it had been, except the time.

“Erine, there you are,” said Mr. Bogdanos as Erine reached the museum floor. “We’ve been looking for you. It is time to go back to school.”

“Apologies, Mr. Bogdanos, I was showing her the interactive portion of the traveling exhibit and I didn’t realize we’d been gone for an hour,” said Hanna, now back in her modern day garb.

“An hour? I have been gone for days!” Erine said unbelievingly.

Hanna laughed. “Was it so boring that it felt like days? I do have to work with my manner with children.” Mr. Bogdanos laughed heartily and herded Erine back to where her new classmates were waiting to go back to school. The rest of the day was a total blur as Erine waited patiently for dismissal when she could see her parents again.
When 3:00pm came around and the parents lined up outside of the school, Erine ran over to the Colonel and the Colonel Pershings and gave them a huge hug.

“Thank you for all that you’ve taught me. You wouldn’t believe what I’ve been through today.”

Mr. and Mrs. Colonel Pershings looked worriedly at each other, before Erine’s Mom finally said, “What happened Renny? Are you alright?”

“Was it the curse,” asked Erine’s Dad.

“No, I think I have finally beaten the curse,” she said smiling and gave her family one more hug.
A History of *Erine Pershings and the Golden Lyre*

*Erine Pershings and the golden lyre* is a combination of my two passions in life: Ancient Greek history and education. Before becoming a teacher, I majored in Classical Civilizations. The first class I took in college was *Liar Liar Homer's Odysseus* and from that first class I was hooked on Ancient Greek history and literature. The character Hanna in this story is named after the professor who taught this and who, in a much less literal way, opened the door for me to explore Ancient Athens and the City Dionysia.

After making the decision to become a teacher, my passion for the classics never waned and I wanted to find a way to share this love with the next generation of great American classicists. At the Bank Street College of Education, I studied museum education and elementary education, always searching for avenues to infuse my work with my love of antiquities. It was in a children’s literature class that an opportunity presented itself. I would write a children’s book about a young modern-day girl exploring Ancient Athens! The original draft of that picture book can be found in the appendix of this thesis. For the book, I traveled back to Maine to research at the library of my alma mater. I struggled with the format of a picture book for this story because there was so much more I wanted to say and share. This novel is my second, and much more ambitious, attempt at creating that world, this time for middle elementary aged children.
A New Main Character Emerges

One of the biggest challenges for me in creating this story was taking the original main character, Lucy Crackendale and fleshing her out for a chapter book. After 6 months of writing and deleting my work, I realized that Lucy Crackendale wasn't a three-dimensional and, I didn't know her. I didn't know why her journey was transformational or how she, as a character was contributing to the greater pantheon of young adult protagonists. As Lucy began to fade into my mind a new character emerged, Erine Pershings.

From the beginning of this process, I knew I wanted a female character to explore the life of the gunaikon, the women’s quarters, in Ancient Athens and to live through the gender inequality of the time. However, I also wanted a character that allowed children who may not always see themselves in literature to have someone relatable. After much time spent researching children in military families during my Masters studies, this seemed to be the route worth taking. It gave me a whole culture to pull from and excited me that I could bring this honorable way of life to my story. I was totally rejuvenated and could see the new path the story would take.
Deciphering Fact from Fiction: A Modern Girl’s Visit to Ancient Athens

*Erine Pershings and the golden lyre* is intended to be used to give children a sense of the world of Ancient Athens in 458 BC. While many of the people and places are real, this is a work of historical fiction and, as an author, I have taken some license to create a compelling story.

**Characters**

The characters in this story all have authentic jobs and live in an authentic environment. Some are actual people who were pulled from the pages of history, while others are complete fiction. Aeschylus and Sophocles are actual playwrights who competed in many City Dionysia Festivals. In the year 458 BC, they did compete in this grandest theater festival and Aeschylus did win with his Oresteia tragedies. His choregos, or producer, was Xenokles in that year. However, we know very little about Xenokles. His interactions with Momos are fictionalized for this book.

The characters Abderus and his cousin were created for this book, as the choregos for Sophocles in the year 458 BC is unknown (by all of the sources in my research). Breaking into the home of Momos in order to steal his lyre is actually based on an Athenian court case that I read with a professor during my undergraduate studies. In this case, a rival choregos was accused of sabotaging the City Dionysia festival by stealing elaborate costumes. This court case always resonated with me and became the basis for the character of Abderus.

Momos, his family, and their slaves were all created for this piece of literature. They represent the day to day life of Ancient Athens and allowed Erine
to explore women’s rights, slavery, and the home life of people in 458 BC in this area of the world.

**City Dionysia Festival**

The City Dionysia Festival is a true event that would happen annually in Ancient Athens. Just like in the story, people from all over the Attic region of what is now Greece would attend to celebrate. The festivities did began with a parade-like procession with a statue of the god Dionysus being carried to the theater. There was also a ritual sacrifice of bulls in order to mark a sacred beginning. Three tragedians would then each receive a day to present what is called a tetralogy, three tragic plays and one satyr play (a comedy, typically of the parody genre). Finally, there would be a day of comic plays.

Aeschylus’ Oresteia did win the festival in 458 BCE and is the only remaining tetralogy. We have no other playwright’s complete trilogy, sadly. It can be purchased in book stores across the country if you are interested in reading it!

There is some debate amongst scholars as to whether women, children, and slaves were allowed to attend the City Dionysia. Some say that it is unlikely, while others say that they came and had their own section. Still others believe that they could sit with the rest of their families. For this story, I took some creative license, allowing all of Momos’ family to both attend and sit in prominent seats.
Erine Pershings and the Golden Lyre and the Upper Elementary Aged Child

Erine Pershings is a relatable character to children ages 8-12 for a number of reasons. First, the era from which she comes make her experience accessible to modern children. Second, as a preadolescent, she embarks on a journey meant to test both her independence and her familial connections. Lastly, she is navigating the waters of what is morally acceptable and taking a stand against an adult authority. These themes are what make the story an exciting and appropriate choice for children in the upper elementary grades.

Dorothy H. Cohen in *The Learning Child* (1972) said of the upper elementary aged child that “for history to come alive, children must feel that they are living in the past” (p. 89). It is this need for concrete connections that became the reason why Erine Pershings is a modern child entering a foreign world rather than a child of a world foreign to readers of the story. Too many history stories apply modern lenses when studying the past without naming that perception. This book wanted upper elementary aged children who are beginning to develop a “historical sense” (p. 89) to have a familiar lens through which to view this world and make sense of it. Erine Pershings, as a child of the present era, carries the same perceptions around gender, slavery, familial relationships, education, and material possessions as those reading the story. This allows Erine to be the one to name what is similar to the life in 2013 and what is foreign, as a method of scaffolding these distinctions for children who are “not at all clear as to what binds men together across ages and across the world”
Erine is able to make the compare and contrast component necessary for engagement in historical fiction an explicit, rather than implicit, piece.

More subtle in the story, though certainly no less appealing to 8-12 year olds, is the theme of independence. According to Kathleen Stassen Berger’s *The Developing Person Through the Life Span* (2008) children in this age group start to embrace the “interplay between expanding freedom and guiding forces, between brave adventures and adult society, between valuing peers and needing parents” (p.333). This is certainly the case for Erine who has little choice but to embrace her independence as she embarks on a daring adventure through time.

Though Erine is thousands of years from her parents and nervous as to whether she will ever see her family again, she is never totally separated from them. As a mark of her secure attachment, she is always using them as a model for what she should do next. This is illustrated by the following passage from the story.

Erine wondered what her mother would say if she could see her now, spinning wool into yarn! Erine, the same girl who had given up knitting because nothing ever turned out the way she intended. “This is supposed to be relaxing,” she’d tell her parents, “but there is nothing relaxing about knots in the fabric and a hat that came out the size of a toilet seat cover.” Exasperated she would sit with her parents and listen to stories of failed projects from their childhoods. There would be no Colonel and Colonel Pershings to cry to if this didn’t work out, though. No story of her father’s exploding science project and her mother’s attempt at modern art. For all Erine knew, ancient Greece could be her
life now and girls in ancient Greece needed to know how to spin and weave. So, that meant that she had a new mission to accomplish.

Erine Pershings, born in the United States of America in 2003 was going to learn how to be a proper Athenian lady in 458 BCE (p. 43).

This passage is an example of how Erine is attaching even her independent adventure back to her familial connection. Erine, as a child in a military family, has grown up in a situation where constant disequilibrium from moves and deployments has trained her to always be ready for a parent to leave on a dangerous mission. Now, it is Erine who has left home on a mission and it is her parents whom, she assumes, must stay home and worry about her eventual return. It is her foray into adulthood and she is processing it using the framework that comes most naturally to her, the cycle of deployment.

Lastly, Erine is deeply involved in issues of social cognition and awareness. She is using her developing morality in order to question pre-existing societal frameworks and the decisions of adults around her. She is deciding independently what she believes is right and wrong, and acting upon it despite the pressure acting against it. In Kathleen Berger’s (2008) view, upper school-aged children are experiencing “the time for growth of the moral imagination, fueled constantly by the willingness, the eagerness of children to put themselves in the shoes of others” (pg 335). For the family of Momos, Ampelios’ death is a terrible tragedy, but one that does not seem to warrant immediate action. They are confined by the societal norms of the time. Erine, seeing a child so close to her own age brutally murdered, feels like that response is just not good enough. She insists on seeking justice, though everyone tells her it cannot be served. It is
both an act of rebellion and one of empathy. Through her actions, Erine shows that she has reached postconventional moral reasoning, according to Lawrence Kohlberg’s (1963) explanation of the cognitive stages of morality. She acknowledges what Kohlberg refers to as the “social contract,” that the laws and rules are there “because they benefit everyone” (p. 336). However, she also realizes that the murder of Ampelios means that someone is not living up to that contract and, therefore, disobeying the rules is the only way to truly be moral. She is also able to acknowledge that “ethical values are established by individual reflection and may contradict egocentric or social and community values” (p. 336). This idea of beginning to question the rules and why they even exist is an essential part of preadolescent developments.
Books for Children About Ancient Greece: How *Erine Pershings and the Golden Lyre* Contributes to Literature on the Subject

In researching this book, I found many wonderful non-fiction sources for children that helped me to create the world of Ancient Athens in a way accessible to children in the 8-12 age range. Looking for historical fiction on the subject was a trickier task. There is certainly no shortage of exposure to the pantheon of Mount Olympus or the mythologies of the ancient period and children in the 8-10 year old range may have many experiences with this prior to their accessing this story. However, one of the reasons that I wanted to write this book is that the day to day life of a people is often overshadowed by the fantastic mythologies associated with the culture.

For younger children (6-8), there is a popular series called “The Goddess Girls” (2010-2014) by Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams. These books follow best friends Athena, Persephone, Artemis, and Aphrodite as they navigate Mount Olympus Academy in their pre-teen/teen years. While set in Ancient Greek times, the majority of the action takes place on Mount Olympus and focuses primarily on social issues popular to children. The goddess girls must navigate friendships, bullying, crushes, being an outcast, and doing well in school. While these books work as an introduction to the names and dominions of the gods and goddesses of the pantheon, there is little to be learned about life for mere mortals in the world below.
As the children get a little older, they can enjoy Rick Riordan’s popular “Percy Jackson and the Olympians” (2006-2009) series and his “Heroes of Olympus” (2012-2013) series. These books also focus on the fantastic world of Greek (and Roman) mythology. Children from the modern era learn that they are demi-gods, children of powerful deities of legend, and must join together to train to use their newfound powers. As an adult passionate about classics, I am an avid fan of Rick Riordan’s work and think he masterfully bends mythologies in intelligent ways to frame the adventures that Percy Jackson embarks on. These series give children a much more robust sense of the mythologies, though distorted by being set in the modern era. Children are introduced, not just to the deities, but also to secondary players like heroes and creatures of Homeric myth. In some ways we are introduced to the lifestyles and value system of the Greeks, but in an implicit way.

For children in the 11-12 age range, there are many wonderful books making the Homeric myths accessible. Two such books are Troy by Adele Geras (2002) and The Adventures of Odysseus by Hugh Lupton, Daniel Morden, and Christina Balit (2010). These books are accessible versions of The Iliad and The Odyssey respectively and I know many teachers who use them in their studies of Ancient Greece. Given that much of what we know of the value system and mythologies of Greece we owe to the Homeric muse, this is wholly appropriate. However, these must be supplemented by non-fiction articles that can give children facts necessary to understand what life was like day to day. Those facts, that can seem mundane, are the way that children can latch on to
history and make connections through time. Including them in an exciting story can spark the imagination of children and allow them to walk through the demes of Ancient Athens along with Erine.
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Children’s Literature


Appendices
Appendix 1: Original Draft of the Story
Lucy Crackendale’s Adventure in the Agora

Written by: Kate Vasconi
Illustrated by: Jean Vasconi
Lucy Crackendale was bored. Not just a little bored, but EXTREMELY bored. Her parents had gone to a wedding and left Lucy with their very odd neighbor, Hanna.
Hanna was a professor at the local college. Lucy thought that being a professor meant liking artifacts more than people, always correcting your grammar, and using big words like “archaeology.”

Old Stuff with Hanna

“Archaeology is the study of people of the past through discovering the things, also known as artifacts, they left behind.”
The worst part was that Hanna always worked in her den and gave Lucy the same old book to read for entertainment. But, it wasn’t even in English! Her parents said that it was in Ancient Greek. They called it “a dead language.” Lucy often wondered how a language could be dead.

“Languages are considered ‘dead’ when there are no longer people that speak them. People can read Ancient Greek, though. Well, maybe not Lucy...”
Hanna told Lucy to NEVER bother her while she worked, but Lucy was so bored. So, she summoned all the courage her seven years allowed her and knocked on the door. When nobody answered, she opened it and walked inside.
But, when her foot hit the floor, Lucy wasn’t in the den. She wasn’t in the house. She wasn’t even in the same clothes! She looked up and saw a bright blue sky and a crowd full of people in strange clothes. Lucy had a feeling that she had traveled back in time and this place looked very much like the sketches in that book Hanna gave her.
Lucy saw a girl about her own age and stopped her. “Excuse me, but where am I?”

“You’re in the Agora,” she said and Lucy looked confused. “The great public space in Athens.” Oh no, Lucy thought. My parents are not going to be happy I left the country without telling them!

New Stuff with Kleio

“The Agora (Ah-gor-a) is the city center of Athens. Shopping, government, art, and military and religious ceremonies happen here.”
Where was Hanna and how was Lucy going to get home? She began to panic, looking around wildly. The young girl beside her noticed and said “Are you looking for someone?”

“Yes,” said Lucy. “My neighbor was watching me and I’ll never get home if I don’t find her.” The girl thought for a minute and then replied. “My name’s Kleio and I know the Agora quite well. I can help you find her. Lucy smiled and followed the girl into the crowd.
First Kleio took Lucy to a large gathering of men. “They are here to see if they will be selected to serve on a jury,” Kleio said. Lucy told her that in the United States people were also chosen to be on juries. Now, she could see where the idea came from. Hanna wasn’t with the men, though.

Old Stuff with Hanna

“In both Ancient Athens and the United States, people had to serve on a jury. However, only men were allowed to be chosen in Athens.”
Next, Kleio brought Lucy to a large building with lots of shops. It reminded Lucy of a shopping mall. “Maybe Hanna will come to purchase some olives. Athens has the best in all the world!” Hanna wasn’t there, but the girls ate lots of delicious olives!

“New Stuff with Kleio

“The city of Athens is named after our goddess, Athena (A-thee-nah), because she gave us the very first olive tree.”
Maybe, thought Kleio, Hanna went to see a chariot race in the square. The girls walked over and Lucy was amazed. Men in heavy armor were jumping on and off moving chariots while other men drove them in the race. The girls cheered and cheered, but didn’t find Hanna.
As for me, all I know is that I know nothing...

Since Hanna was a teacher, Lucy was sure they’d find her when Kleio took them to a school! She said it was run by someone named Socrates. Lucy was sure Hanna had mentioned him before. So, it was probably because she knew him! But Hanna wasn’t there, Socrates wasn’t helpful, and Lucy was beginning to wonder if she was in Athens all by herself.
I’ll bet she’s at the theater seeing a play,” Kleio cried. Lucy wasn’t so sure. The girls walked over, but all they found were actors in strange masks. No Hanna.

Old Stuff with Hanna

“Plays in Ancient Greece were usually performed by only two or three actors. So, the actors wore masks so that they could play 5 or 6 roles.”
The girls had been all over the Agora and it was getting dark. Lucy was amazed at everything there was to see, but couldn’t help wondering if her parents were home from the wedding and worried about where she was. They ‘d never find her here. She began to cry.
Just then, Hanna lumbered past. Without even looking at the girls she said: “Come along now Lucy. We can’t sit around all day. Your parents will be getting home any minute.” So, Lucy hugged her new friend Kleio goodbye, promised to visit the next time she was stuck at Hanna’s house and took the hand of her strange neighbor. Magically, they were back in her den and the doorbell was ringing.
Lucy’s parents walked through the door and each gave her a big hug. “We brought you some cake, pal,” Dad said. Mom smiled at her and walked over to Hanna. “I hope she wasn’t too much trouble, I know you had a lot of work to finish.” Hanna smiled. “The house was so quiet, you would not have even known she was here,” she replied.
And so quickly that Lucy could swear she was imagining it, Hanna winked at her.
Appendix 2: Permissions
PERMISSIONS

Erine Pershing and the Golden Lyre

December 12, 2015

I, JEAN VASCONI, hereby give permission for my illustrations to be included in this body of work.

Signature

Date

12/12/13