

School #1  
Preethi R.  
Age: 14

Damon Damonides, aged XL years, born in Corinth, in 27 A.D.

The man dropped the handkerchief, and I pulled back the reins and shouted, "Go horses, go!" My horses shot off, in the lead. With a burst of energy, the horses started galloping faster, and I advanced in front of all the other chariots. I had a feeling I was going to win. Each lap, another chariot would crash. On the last lap, there was only one more chariot besides mine on the track. At the turning point, I braced myself, ready for a crash, but thankfully, I turned safely. I quickly glanced behind me, and to my surprise, my opponent had crashed into the meta! I raced to the end and won! The crowd was shouting, "Damon! Damon! Damon! Damon!"...

"Wake up, Dad! You don't want to be late for the race!" my son Felix shouted, as I lay in bed, oblivious to what was going on. Suddenly it dawned on me; that had been a dream! It was the year 67, and today was the day of the chariot race at the Olympics! I was going to compete in the older men's division. I had probably been dreaming because of the Pegasus coin under my pillow, which I had there for good luck. My father had been a Greek charioteer, and at the Olympics some years ago, he had been killed during a chariot race. Although I worried about that happening to me, I wanted my father's legacy to live on. Right before the race, on my eighteenth birthday, he had given me this Pegasus coin and said, "Son, I love you. This coin is something that has been passed on from generation to generation. I received it on my eighteenth birthday from my father, so now I want you to have it. Keep it for good luck." Then he was gone. The coin was very special to me; it was the only memento I had left from my father.

The coin was silver and had Pegasus on the obverse. Pegasus was a very special creature to me because he was an extraordinary horse and was very beautiful and unique. Horses were very valuable to me. The coin was from Corinth, Greece, which was my birthplace. On the reverse was the helmeted head of Athena, a very important goddess. I loved the coin with all my heart. It was a memory of my father, and it seemed to bring me very good luck. I had probably dreamed about winning the race because the coin was under my pillow. I wanted to pass the coin on to my son on the day of his marriage. The coin was very rare, and it was first owned by my ancestors.

My ancestors were living in Corinth, Greece. After the Second Punic War, Italy was a wreck because many people had no jobs, and aristocrats had bought many slaves to work the land they had taken from the poor. Rome decided to conquer Greece, one of her main motivations being that Greece had sent ships to help Carthage during the Second Punic war. They advanced into Corinth, led by Lucius Mummius. He and the troops defeated the Achaean League, burned the city, killed as many inhabitants as he could, and sent all valuable works of art to Rome. Only a few of my ancestors had escaped. When they fled, they lost all their fortune, and the only items they salvaged were one horse and a handful of coins. This was the only one left. My great-great-great-uncle decided to breed horses to uplift the family from poverty and was very successful. He ended up regaining his fortunes. The horse I have today is a descendant of my great-great-great uncle's horse.

Snapping me out of my daydream about my coin and the past, my son reminded me again that we needed to go. I had been training for a month under the judges' watchful eyes and for nine excruciating months at home before that. I had been waiting for this day since I was a young boy, and this seemed like a dream come true. I quickly got out of bed, grabbed my gear and helmet, and left the house with my son.

When we got there, there was a huge crowd outside. The emperor Nero had come to Olympia to compete in the chariot race and was accompanied by 5,000 bodyguards and fans. That was why my son was able to come to the Olympics without skipping work. He was part of Nero's guard. Although he wanted to support me, he also had to show loyalty towards the emperor. Felix noticed me looking at Nero and said, "Father, I know you want to win this race very badly. Do not sacrifice all the work you have done just for me. Nero will not mind if you win the race." Although I wanted to believe that, in my heart I knew it was not true. Nero would be extremely angry if I won the race and might take it out on Felix. I had heard many stories about this emperor, none of them good. On the other hand, I had been waiting for this chance my whole life and had taken care of and trained my horses for so long. This was a very difficult situation, but I figured I would just need to let the race take its own course.

Felix and I walked over to the spectators' area. I rubbed and kissed my coin for good luck, which is what my father did before his race. Although his race ended tragically, I still believed in the tradition of good luck. Then, I handed my son the coin because I did not want to lose it while I was in the race. I knew it would give me good luck; after all, it gave my ancestors good luck through a war and with horse breeding; how hard could it be to give me good luck through a chariot race? I went over to my horses in the stables. Before a race I always talked to them and told them they would do well. Our relationship was like a human friendship, except the horses could speak to me only through their eyes. I took them out of the stables. I went over to the track and noticed Nero talking to the judges. He was smiling and seemed to be handing them something, but I could not tell what it was. I hoped it was not a bribe because I wanted the race to be completely fair. I looked over at the track and noticed he had brought a ten-horse team! I was disgusted because it was a complete disregard of the rules. The rules stated that all chariots needed to have the same number of horses, and all of the competitors and I had brought quadrigae. I could not do anything about it though because I did not want to put my son or myself in danger by complaining about Nero. I put on my helmet and gear and mentally prepared myself for anything.

It was almost time for the race to begin. I led my horses over to the hippodrome, where the emperor was standing; I could not believe I was going to race against him. He came up to me and said, "Good luck, my fellow competitor. May the best man win." I hoped I was the best man. I had a feeling he was just trying to be nice because he wanted me to let him win. I was not going to let that happen. I had been training and working too hard for too long to let this incredible chance slip away. I was ready. All of the competitors were placed on certain parts of the track with some on the inside lanes and some on the outside. I had originally thought there were going to be many more competitors, but there were only ten chariots in the race. I ended up being on the outside, but, of course, Nero was placed on the inside-most lane; I hated how the judges were accommodating his every whim and fancy. I wrapped my reins around my arms and waist. A

man came and stood in front of us. He held up the handkerchief, and with a stroke of his hand, he thrust it down. I nudged my horses and shouted, "Let's do this!" With great momentum, the horses galloped forward. I was determined to win this race. The meta was coming up, but I was prepared. I cut in front of one of my opponents to get closer to the inside. He was thrown off and ended up crashing into the meta. Sitting in the chariot, I kept cheering on the horses to encourage them. They seemed to hear it, for they suddenly gained speed. After each lap, I felt more and more adrenaline rushing through me. Although I was too caught up in the race to remember how many laps I had done, I could tell by the "eggs" in the spina that I was halfway through the race.

On the fifth lap, I noticed Nero was coming close behind me. Then I heard a boom! I glanced back and saw that he had fallen from the chariot! I could not contain my laughter, but I was also relieved that he had already lost. There was no chance that the race would just be between him and me, and I would be forced to decide whether to let him win and save my son, or win and accomplish my lifelong dream. I also realized there were only two competitors left besides me. I knew I had to give my all in the next two laps if I wanted to emerge victorious. If nothing else, I knew my coin would bring me enough luck to win. I hoped that my son was guarding it with his life, yet I also hoped that I still had my life at the end of the race. I remembered a prayer my father had taught me as a young boy and said it in my mind. On the sixth lap there were only three competitors left including me. As we drew closer to the meta, I realized I was too close to the spina and would crash into it if I didn't act fast. I quickly cut into the lane next to me. The charioteer behind me was going at such a speed that he could not slow down and make a rational decision about what his next move would be. He blindly swerved towards the inside and crashed into the meta. The race was now between one opponent and me. What was going on seemed like the dream I had had earlier, except now it was a reality. Right now, it seemed more like a battle than a race. With one lap to go, I prayed and raced with all my might. With a 100 meters left, I zoomed through the finish line and was the winner!

I was so excited! I got down from the chariot and raised a fist for victory! I ran over to my son and hugged him with all the strength I had left. I heard the announcer say, "The winner is the emperor Nero!" I was shocked! It felt as if a lightning bolt had gone through my body! I heard the people near me say, "Someone told me he bribed the judges so he would get a chance to compete and have a guaranteed win. The judges disqualified all the competitors before the race for various reasons. One of the competitors was disqualified because he had an affair. Another was disqualified for taking an oath that he would give money to the Temple of Apollo in exchange for blessings for the race, but he never paid the full amount. That man who seemed to have won the race was disqualified because he threw a party at a temple while he was drunk and also made fun of the priests." That was a complete lie! I had never done something like that and never planned on ever doing that either! This was my honor they were talking about! In my mind I had won the race fair and square, and I had no reason to be disqualified. I had been an honest man my whole life, and I was not about to let anyone tarnish my reputation. I started to walk over to the accusers to clear my name, and I also wanted to go complain to the judges about their unfair tactics. Then I saw Felix walking towards me, which made me change my mind. Although I had not won the race according to the judges, I knew I really had, but I also recognized that my son's future was saved. Emperor Nero would allow him to marry the woman of his dreams, and he would be able to keep his job with the Roman guard. The coin really had given me good luck; not winning the race worked in my favor because my son could now accomplish dreams of his

own. Maybe someday he would carry on the dream of winning the chariot race in the Olympics. There were more important things in my life than horses and winning chariot races. The most important thing in my life right now was my son.