My mother’s name was Alcmene, and she didn’t know that one night her husband was actually the God of the Skies, Zeus. Then I happened. A demigod. Half man, half God. Heracles.

Zeus had another wife, the queen of the skies and Goddess of marriage and family. Hera was jealous, me being a son of her husband and a mortal. I was proof that her husband cheated on her.

My name was originally Alcides, but it was changed to Heracles, in an attempt to please Hera, my new name translating to glory of Hera.

My first story was when Hera tried to have me killed, just a baby in my cot, or so she thought. I remember to this day. I was laying down, asleep, but I heard slithering. I opened my eyes, and my gaze fixed on the two snakes. I wasn’t alarmed. I reached my arms out, and held both of the snakes’ necks. I clenched, and they soon stopped moving. I let them rest in my arms, playing with them.

Years later, I had killed my music tutor with a lyre, and was sent to tend cattle on a mountain. Two nymphs by the names Pleasure and Virtue had visited me. They had offered me a choice of two lives. One of the lives promised me a comfortable and easy life, but the other promised me a life of glory and gore. I could suffer brutality, and glory was too hard to resist. I chose the second.

My first wife was Megara, and we lived happily. We had several children and were deeply in love. That was, until Hera had turned me into a crazed man. I killed my own family with my bare hands in a devilish frenzy.

Determined to rid myself of grief, I went to the Oracle of Delphi. What I didn’t know was that Hera had told the Oracle to tell me that I must serve the King Eurystheus for twelve years, and of that twelve years, I must complete twelve labours.

My first labour was to slay the Nemean Lion in all of its glory and bring back its fur. The lion’s skin was impenetrable, so any weapons I had owned lost its use against the creature. I approached the lion by jumping onto it, and clutching onto its neck, strangling it until the creature died. (In other stories it was told Heracles clutched two sides of its jaw and ripped it apart)

How to skin it? I couldn’t use a knife or a spear. I had asked the Goddess of Wisdom, Athena. She returned my prayer and told me to use its own claws, the only thing penetrable to the fur. After I had skinned the lion and washed the blood off, I wore it as armour.
My second labour was to slay the Lernaen Hydra, a vicious serpent with nine heads. The Hydra used its poisonous venom to its advantage. One of the heads of the beast was immortal, so this was not going to be an easy job.

I asked my nephew, Iolaus to come with me, and he accompanied me happily. We drove to Lerna and found the home of the monstrous beast. I encouraged the creature to come out of its den by shooting fiery arrows at it. Once the Hydra was in sight, I lunged for it. The Hydra did not give up, though. It twisted one of its coils around one of my feet, ensuring I cannot escape. I seized my olive tree club and smashed a head of the hydra as it thrashed me about. I watched in horror as two more heads grew in its place.

There were ten heads and two of us. “Iolaus!” I yelled. “Help!”

Iolaus soon came up with an idea. “Keep smashing the heads,” Iolaus yelled back. “I know how to help!”

Hercules did as Iolaus told him to, and watched as his nephew held his torch at every headless neck, and sure enough, it prevented the Hydra from growing another two heads.

When they had finished slaying all of the heads, with the final ninth one, he chopped it off and buried it at the side of the road from Lerna to Elaeus. Hercules cut the Hydra and dipped his arrows in its poisonous blood. King Eurytheus refused this to count as one of my tasks, however, because I had help from Iolaus.

Next I had to capture the Ceryneian Hind, a large deer that was sacred to the Huntress Goddess Artemis. It had antlers of gold and hooves of bronze it was so fast it could outrun an arrow. Hercules pursued it for an entire year and finally caught it with a non-poisoned arrow into its leg. King Eurystheus intended this to bring hatred upon me by Artemis, but I begged for forgiveness to Artemis, and the Goddess said she’d forgive him only if the deer had a safe return to the forest. The King wished to keep the deer but I refused. As soon as I let the animal go, it ran back to Artemis to assure my forgiveness and angering my King.

After that task, I had to complete my fourth; capturing the Erymanthian Boar. The powerful creature lived on Mount Erymanthos, a mountain that Artemis frequently visited. I sought for a centaur named Chiron’s help for this task. Chiron told me to force this beast into thick snow. I could then catch it and bring it back to King Eurystheus, who was terrified of it, and begged me to get it out of his sight.
My fifth task was to clean the Augean stables in but one day. Augeas was the king of Elis and was known for his great cattle, the greatest in the country, even. The king said that if I clean his stables in one day he’ll give me one eighth of his cattle. The cattle were completely immune to disease, so there was no need to clean the stables. I came up with an idea to run the rivers Alpheus and Peneus. Augeas, however, didn’t keep his promise, so I killed him, and handed the kingdom over to Phyleus, Augeas’ son who was shunned for believing in me. Despite this, King Eurystheus refused this to be one of my twelve labours because he claimed I didn’t do the cleaning, the rivers did.

My sixth task was to slay the Stymphalian Birds, man eating, poisonous birds and metallic feathers which could be fired as weapons. They hid in the dark forest of Stymphalia which made it impossible to find them in the darkness. I climbed a nearby mountain and used bronze clappers given to me by Athena, Goddess of wisdom and Hephaestus, God of Mechanics to use to get all of the birds out of the forest and flying. I then could shoot them down with arrows.

My seventh task was to capture the Cretan Bull. The beautiful animal had been sent by Poseidon, God of the Seas, to King Minos and was meant to be sacrificed in Poseidon’s honour, but King Minos thought it was too beautiful, so he sacrificed another bull. Poseidon was so infuriated that he turned the bull mad so it could terrorise King Minos’ kingdom. I strangled it, and took the bull back to King Eurystheus, who wanted to sacrifice it to Hera, but she refused, as it showed my strength and glory. The bull was then released into Marathon and became known as the Marathonian Bull.

For my next task I had to steal the Mares of Diomedes. The giant, Diomedes was king of Thrace owned four man eating horses. I brought a few men to help me steal the horses, including one of my eromenoi named Abderus. We stole the horses, and I left Abderus as I fought Diomedes and his men. Abderus was eaten by the horses, so, as revenge, I fed Diomedes to his own horses, and then established the town of Abdera in memory of my lover.

For my ninth task I needed to obtain Hippolyta’s girdle for King Eurystheus’ daughter Admete. Hippolyta was the queen of the Amazons, and owned a
magical girdle given to her by Ares, the God of War, who was also her father. She gave the girdle to me, as she admired my physical powers. But Hera spread rumours amongst the Amazons that I was kidnapping the queen, which caused an army to attack me. I fought them off, and believing that Hippolyta was behind the attack, so I killed her as well.

For my second last task, I needed to obtain the monster Geryons cattle. Geryon was a warrior with three heads, three bodies and two legs. He had a herd of glorious red cows which were guarded by the two headed dog named Orthrus (brother to Cerberus, the three headed dog guard of the underworld). I was assisted by Helios, the sun God, on the travel across the world. When I got there, I killed Orthus with my club, and then killed Geryon with poisoned arrows. The real problem was bringing the cattle back, now. When one of the cows escaped, I had to wrestle Eryx, a son of Poseidon, to death. Hera had sent a gadfly to distribute cattle into random places, causing me to spend a whole year in search for them. When I finally brought the cattle back to King Eurystheus, he sacrificed them to Hera.

My eleventh task was to find and steal the golden apples of the Hesperides, and it took me years to find where they grew. They were a wedding present from Hera to Zeus. They were guarded by a hundred-headed dragon named Ladon and nymphs called Hesperides, which were daughters of the titan Atlas (who was holding up the sky as a punishment for trying to take over Olympus). I found the sea god Nereus and forced him to tell me where the garden was, but he kept trying to escape by transforming into different shapes, but I caught him and didn’t let him go until he told me. After failed attempts, I sought out the help of the titan Atlas. I offered him to hold the sky whilst Atlas collected the apples for him. When Atlas came back, however, he didn’t want the sky back on his shoulders, and wanted to give Eurytheus the apples himself. I said okay, but I asked Atlas to hold the sky as I put padding on my shoulders. I didn’t put padding on, I just took the apples and ran.

My twelfth and final task was to capture the guard of the underworld, a three headed dog Cerberus. I travelled down into the underworld, meeting many monsters and ghosts along my way, but I survived with the aids of Athena and Hermes (god of messages, thievery and more). I went before Hades and his wife, Persephone, and asked permission to take Cerberus. They agreed, as long as I
don’t hurt the dog in any way. I was successful, and took it back to a terrified King Eurystheus. Cerberus returned safely back to the underworld, and my conscious was guilt free as I had done my twelve labours.

- Elif