

Finding Home (OLD VERSION)

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Finding Home (OLD VERSION)

by [TheGirlWhoSawImagination](#)

Summary

AU//When Percy is born two years earlier and Luke is born two years later, the prophecy foretelling an eighteen-year-old hero instead of a sixteen-year-old one isn't the only thing that changes – because the extent of their relationship does as well.//Aka, the Lukercy (Luke/Percy) rewrite that no one asked for, featuring slash and eventual mpreg. Rated 'M' for a reason!

THIS IS BEING REWRITTEN, THE REWRITE IS HERE:

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/37284325/chapters/93029389>

I Accidentally Vaporize My Pre-Algebra Teacher

Chapter Notes

OH MY GODDESS, HELLO EVERYONE! Long time, no see! Like, it's been literally years since I left you all, and I feel so incredibly guilty about that. Long story short, my life became overrun with my health problems, as my immune system basically crashed and died around 2016 and did not get better until late last year. Getting back into writing since then has been a bit of a challenge, but thanks to this whole social distancing thing, I've finally had the time to get my ass in gear and write something!

And by "something", I mean I actually started writing my first PJO fic. Yes, you read that correctly – my first PJO fic, aka something that I've had in the works since...2013? 2014? Doesn't matter. What does matter is that this fic is my baby, and after years upon years of perfecting its plot and stuff, I finally feel confident enough to share it with you!

But, before you read, please read this paragraph (that is, if you haven't already read the tags). This fanfiction is a MASSIVE AU that features not only an older!Percy and younger!Luke, but also several tweaks to canon. Like, for instance, in this story Percy does not get along with Annabeth (at least, not at first) and is not friends with Grover...because, well, Grover doesn't exist in this story. Hate on me for it all you want, but I honestly hate Grover with a burning passion and replacing him with Katie is actually very crucial to Katie's storyline in this story anyways. Additionally, I am using my own version of Greek mythology for this story, because I hate how Riordan not only used the blandest genealogy out there (there's dozens of them), but also made several deities OOC by discarding some of their domains, i.e. Demeter (and maybe Rhea? I don't know. I haven't read ToA and have no plans to do so). So, I'm reworking the gods' genealogy and some of their characterizations in order for this story to make sense. If you have a problem with any of this, you're most likely not going to like this story and should probably stop reading now.

Additionally, I'm just going to say this so I can say that I said it: updates are most likely going to be sporadic. Getting back into the groove of writing is not going to be an immediate process for me, and on top of that I may be out of internet range for some time in the future. (I'm doing my best to get internet there, but we shall see if I get my way or not.) Please, for the love of Goddess and all that's holy, understand this and don't spam me with "update soon" messages. Because, if there's one thing I learned with *Of the Night* (speaking of which, I'll update my profile in the next few days about the statuses of my previous stories), it's that these messages are the number one thing that stopped my motivation.

Now, all of that being said, if you're still here, great! I really hope that you like this story and I will try my best to get the next chapter up within the next two weeks.

Until then,
~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Look, as I'm sure you've heard me say before, I didn't ask to be a half-blood.

Being a half-blood – regardless as to whether or not you are a demigod, demi-titan, or fabled demi-primordial – is dangerous, and not just because of all of the monsters out there that would love to kill you in dozens upon dozens of painful, nasty ways. It's also dangerous because when you're a half-blood, the gods have a tendency to notice you, which can lead to you either becoming their new pet project or getting your ass smitten.

Now, of course, that's not to say that being a half-blood is a *total* drag and that nobody would ask to be one. I mean, while I've had plenty of bad experiences because of my half-godly status, I've also had a lot of experiences because of it that I would classify as the “times of my life” – such as gaining friends that I never would've had otherwise, falling in love, and becoming a mom.

(And besides, even if being a half-blood was a total drag, I'm pretty sure that there are people out there who would ask to be half-bloods anyways. Because that's just how life works.)

So, if you feel like you're recognizing yourself in these pages – if you feel something stirring deep inside – I want you to take a deep breath before you do anything else, because you may be a half-blood. And that's dangerous. But it's also an experience unlike any other, if you decide that you want to risk everything you thought you knew to have it. And if you do decide that, then I encourage you to read on – if not, then I urge you to take another deep breath before *closing this book and never opening it again*.

Don't say I didn't warn you.

My name is Percy Jackson, by the way. I turned eighteen years old (yes, I know, I'm a young mom, don't judge me) three months ago, aka August 18th, 2009, aka the day that the entire world went to shit. But that was just for a day and I'm pretty sure most of the mortals – people who aren't half-bloods – don't remember it anyways, which I'm relatively thankful for.

Now, I could tell you all about why that day happened – if you remember it, that is – right now, but I'm not going to. Because why that day went to shit is a very complicated thing, and I'm not going to do it justice by explaining it without explaining all of the stuff that makes it complicated.

Instead, I'm going to rewind time back to around three years ago, aka May of 2006. I was in the eighth grade at the time, attending a private boarding school for troubled kids called Yancy Academy in upstate New York.

Was I a troubled kid?

Yeah. You could say that.

On this particular day in May – of course, *of course* I forget the date – all twenty-seven of the mental-case kids in the eighth grade at Yancy Academy, along with two teachers, took a field trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to look at some cool ancient Greek and Roman stuff, courtesy of our Latin teacher, Mr. Brunner.

Now, if you didn't know Mr. Brunner very well, I'm sure this field trip would've seemed like the worst thing ever to you. I mean, not to diss on him or anything, but he looked like your stereotypical, middle-aged white guy, which are never fun teachers to have. The fact that he wore tweed jackets that always smelled like coffee and was in a motorized wheelchair only made first impressions of him even worse.

Yet, in all reality, Mr. Brunner was actually a pretty cool dude. He actually taught grammar to help us learn Latin – which was nice, because it helped me out with my problems in English due to my dyslexia – and told us fun stories and jokes as well. Plus, he had this awesome collection of Roman armor and weapons, which made the games that he also let us play in his class even better.

So, basically, I was pretty excited for this trip, which was a weird thing for me to think, much less say, because I didn't exactly have a good track record when it came to field trips. In fact, out of the eight schools I had been expelled from up to this point in time, five of them had kicked me out to something that I accidentally did or was said to do (in the case of my third grade school) while on a field trip.

But I didn't want that to happen this time. This time, I was determined to be good.

...Or, at least, as good as I could possibly be, because all the way into the city, I had to put up with Hudson Lake, aka the blonde-haired, whiny douchebag that had a tendency to hit on my best friend, Katie Gardner.

Which, don't get me wrong, was...not understandable, but unsurprising, I guess? Because Katie was (still is, honestly) *very* pretty. I mean, she had a very beautiful face, along with long, chocolate brown hair that fell in loose curls and probably the *greenest* eyes that I've ever seen. She was also very smart, to the point that I didn't really understand just why she was at Yancy Academy and not some other boarding school, regardless if she was "troubled" or not.

Still, despite her beauty and her smarts, the fact that Hudson hit on her when she *obviously* did not like him back was very much a shitty thing of him to do. And not only did him hitting on her irritate me to no end, but the way that Katie never directly told him to go fuck himself made me pretty angry, too.

For instance, when we were finally almost to the museum, Hudson turned around in his seat with a smirk that simultaneously made my blood boil in anger and my stomach churn in disgust, because dear gods was this guy *insufferable*. His voice was pretty nauseating, too, especially when he said, "*Katie*," in a tone that tried to come off as seductive yet only succeeded in making him sound more whiny.

"Hudson," Katie replied, not even looking up from the rose that she was drawing in her notebook as she sat next to me. "What do you want?"

“Well, there’s a lot of things I want,” he responded smugly, which increased the urge that I had to punch him in the face tenfold. “But you being my partner on this trip is something I want very, *very* much.”

Ah, yes. *Partners*. Because as if sending twenty-seven basket-case kids on a field trip wasn’t enough, we also had to fill out a worksheet with a partner about it. That was the only part of the field trip that I wasn’t looking forward to – and even then, it was only because Hudson was using it as an opportunity to flirt with Katie.

Unfortunately for him, though, Katie was his desperate attempts for what they were, as always. “I’m sorry, Hudson,” she said, still not looking up from her drawing, which was horribly amusing. “But I already decided to partner up with Percy.”

“You mean Prissy?” Hudson snorted as he glared at me.

That, if nothing else, caused Katie to look up with a frown on her face, while I clenched my fists and once again ignored the urge to punch him in the nose right there. Because ‘Prissy’ wasn’t just a nickname to bully me or whatever – I mean, it was used to bully me, but it was used to bully me specifically for the fact that I was gay. How Hudson had figured that out with his head so far up his own ass, I have no idea, but ever since he had he had used that nickname to belittle me for it to no end.

But, it seemed that Hudson finally got lucky, because before Katie could reprimand him and before I could punch him in the face, the bus pulled up to the museum and came to a stop. Immediately, all of the other kids around us scrambled to get off, but I just sat there because: one, I needed to cool down, and two, Katie was in the aisle seat and she wasn’t moving yet.

Instead, she was looking at me with a concerned expression on her face. “You okay?” she asked softly.

I shook my head, before mumbling, “I’m going to kill him – for real this time. I swear, I will.”

“No, you won’t,” she said. “Because you know who’ll get blamed if anything happens.”

Looking back on it, I really wish I would’ve ignored her and just punched Hudson as soon as we got off the bus. At least that way he would’ve gotten a taste of what he deserved for once in his life.

Ten minutes later, we were all in the museum, with Mr. Brunner leading the tour while the other teacher, Mrs. Dodds, walked behind us. We walked past big galleries full of marble statues and glass cases that contained black-and-orange pottery, which was all really cool – especially when you considered the fact that this stuff had survived for *three thousand years*.

Well, it was all really cool to me, anyways. Because nobody else thought it was cool (except for Katie, of course, but she was working on our worksheet), if the fact that they were talking just over Mr. Brunner was anything to go by. Their incessant noise was annoying and really gave me the desire to shout at them to shut up, but every time I opened my mouth Katie gave me a warning look and I felt Mrs. Dodds’s piercing gaze burn into the back of my neck.

You see, Mrs. Dodds *hated* me. I didn't really know why – I'd always tried my best to be a good student in pre-algebra – her class – but she seemed to have had a grudge against me ever since she came to the school halfway through the year, after our last math teacher had had a nervous breakdown.

Supposedly, she came from Georgia to teach troubled students out of “the goodness of her heart”, but I doubted that, what with how she treated me like devil spawn and yet treated Hudson like he was the best kid that had been born since Jesus. And the fact that she always wore a leather jacket and looked like she could ride a Harley into someone's locker only increased that doubt.

Finally, after walking our way through most of the exhibit, Mr. Brunner came to a stop in front of a thirteen foot tall column with a big sphinx on top, and started talking about how it was a *stele*, or grave marker, for a girl about our age. I did my best to try to listen to what he had to say, because it was really interesting, but everybody kept on talking and it was grating on my nerves.

After a few minutes, Hudson suddenly snickered something about the naked guy on the column, and his annoying ass voice was enough to make me turn around and snap as quietly as I could, “Will you please *shut up*?”

Apparently it wasn't that quiet, though, because in the next instant the whole group laughed and Mr. Brunner stopped telling his story.

“Mr. Jackson,” he said, in a tone that somehow reminded me of Professor McGonagall from the *Harry Potter* movies. “Do you have something that you want to share with the rest of the class?”

My face felt like it was on fire. “No, sir,” I replied.

Mr. Brunner then pointed to a certain picture on the stele that, *somehow*, looked vaguely familiar. “Well, here's the chance to. Do you know what this picture represents?”

I stared at it unblinking for a few moments, before it suddenly clicked in my brain just why the carving looked familiar. “That's Kronos eating his kids, right?”

Mr. Brunner nodded. “That's right. Now, can you tell us why he did this?”

“Well...” I began. “Kronos was the king god, and – ”

“God?” Mr. Brunner interjected.

“Titan,” I corrected myself. “It was his kids who were the gods. And he didn't trust them, because when he overthrew his own father, his father told him that one day his kids would do the same to him. So he ate them. But after Rhea, his wife, gave birth to their sixth kid, Zeus, she hid him in the wilderness and gave Kronos a rock instead. And later, when Zeus grew up, he tricked Kronos into barfing up all of his siblings – ”

“Gross!” one of the girls in our class shrieked.

“So that they could go to war with their father and all of the other titans who hadn’t done anything to help them. And they did. And the gods won,” I finished.

Some snickers broke out in the group, but nobody said anything – except for Hudson. Because it was precisely then that Hudson decided to open his big mouth and say, “Mr. Brunner, why is this important? I mean, when are we ever going to be required to know and explain just why Kronos ate his kids?”

As you can probably guess, Mr. Brunner turned to look at me again. “Mr. Lake has just made an excellent point,” he said. “Mr. Jackson, can you think of a reason why this might matter in real life?”

I pondered it for a moment, before saying, “Well, if I wanted to become a Latin teacher like you, Mr. Brunner, knowing what the Romans, the people who originally spoke Latin, believed in would be important in helping me and others understand their language, right?”

“A good answer,” he replied, and yet for some reason he seemed to be...*disappointed*? Was that it? “Full credit, Mr. Jackson. Zeus did indeed feed Kronos a mixture of mustard and wine, which caused him to disgorge his other five siblings – Hestia, Hades, Poseidon, Demeter, and Hera – who, of course, being immortal gods, had been living and growing up completely undigested in his stomach. The gods then went on to defeat their father, cut him up into pieces with his own scythe, and scattered his remains in Tartarus, the darkest part of the Underworld. And on that happy note, I believe it is time for lunch. Mrs. Dodds, would you lead us back outside?”

The class walked off, the girls talking about how disgusting the whole presentation was and the guys pushing each other around and laughing their asses off. Katie and I were about to follow them when I heard Mr. Brunner say, “Mr. Jackson.”

Katie looked at me, concerned, but I just shrugged and told her to keep going before turning to look at Mr. Brunner. “Sir?”

He looked at me with what I liked to call his “thousand year old stare”, because it was an intense look that made him look like he was incredibly ancient and had seen everything. “While your answer about why all of this might matter in real life was a good one, it wasn’t one, I think, that applies to you,” he said calmly. “In the future, I expect one that does. Because everything that I teach you, Mr. Jackson, is vitally important – and you should treat it as such.”

My eyes burned with tears then, and I *hated* that they did. Because while I tried fairly hard in Mr. Brunner’s class – in all of my classes, even – it just never seemed to be enough for him. He always expected me, and Katie to a lesser extent, to be better than everyone else, despite the fact that I had dyslexia and ADHD on top of it. And it wasn’t fair, especially when we both knew that I just couldn’t do it.

“Okay, Mr. Brunner,” I mumbled as I turned to walk away before he could get another word in.

The fact that he didn't even stop me for leaving before I was dismissed or whatever only made me feel worse.

Outside, the class had gathered on the front steps of the museum, while overhead a wicked storm was brewing. I found myself shuddering at it for no reason – but then again, the weather in the entirety of the state had been weird since Christmas, with back-to-back snowstorms, flooding, and wildfires from lightning strikes. In fact, I wouldn't have been surprised if this storm was a hurricane blowing in.

Nobody else seemed to notice the shitty weather, though. They were all busy with talking, pickpocketing, and pelting pigeons with food from their packed lunches. Typical.

I sat down next to Katie on the edge of the fountain, away from the others. "Detention?" she asked concernedly.

"Nah," I replied. "Not from Brunner. I just...I wish he'd lay off on me sometimes, you know? I mean, I'm not smart or anything – not like you."

Katie didn't say anything for a while, which I didn't mind, because I wasn't really in the mood to hear her tell me I was smart or something like that to make me feel better – because I wasn't.

Smart, I mean. I wasn't smart, and I knew it.

Wistfully, I watched the cabs streaming past us down Fifth Avenue, and thought about my mom's apartment, which was only a little ways uptown from where we were. In fact, the distance was probably short enough that I could walk there, and *gods*, did I want to. I hadn't seen my mom since Christmas, and I wanted to hug her and tell her about Katie, who had been my first friend in who knows how long.

But, of course, I knew what would follow that conversation. My mom would ask me why I wasn't at Yancy and I'd have to explain that I ran away from my field trip and she'd be – well, she would be disappointed. And if there was one thing that I didn't want to do, it was make my mom be disappointed in me.

Sometime during this daydreaming of mine, Mr. Brunner had come outside and parked his wheelchair at the base of the handicapped ramp. He ate celery while reading what, to me, looked like one of those trashy paperback novels, and I almost snickered at the thought.

'Almost' being the key word here. Because just as soon as I noticed him reading that novel, I also noticed that Hudson Lake was sauntering his way towards Katie and I, causing me to scowl. "Douchebag alert," I whispered snidely, causing my best friend to snort before she rolled her eyes.

"Very mature, Percy."

Now, looking back on it, that statement was kind of funny, because neither of us was prepared for Hudson to straight up *dump his half-eaten lunch on me* with a feral grin. I mean, outside of calling me "Prissy", he had never really bullied me before, but I guess the fact that

Katie chose me, the gay guy, as her partner had really struck a nerve with him or something like that.

“Oops,” Hudson said sarcastically. “Sorry, Prissy.”

I tried to stay cool. After all, as Katie said, I knew who would get blamed if anything happened on this field trip – *me*, that’s who. But I was so, so mad at all of the shit that Hudson had pulled on this field trip, that my mind went blank. A wave roared in my ears.

I don’t remember touching him, but the next thing I knew, Hudson was sitting on his ass in the middle of the fountain – with leaves in his hair, strangely enough – yelling, “Percy pushed me!”

In the next instant, Mrs. Dodds materialized next to us.

All around us, the other kids were whispering. “Did you see – ”

“ – the water – ”

“ – like it grabbed him – ”

“ – and those *vines* – ”

I didn’t know what they were talking about. All I knew was that, as Mrs. Dodds turned towards me with a sickly grin on her face, after having helped Hudson to his feet and made sure that he was alright, that I was in *deep ass shit*.

“Now, honey,” she crooned softly.

“I know, I know,” I grumbled. “Time for me to spend a month erasing workbooks.”

Obviously, that hadn’t been the right thing to say, if the way that Mrs. Dodds scowled and said, “Come with me,” was any indicator.

“Wait!” Katie suddenly yelped, and both of us turned to look at her. Much to my surprise, her face was pale and her eyes were wide, like she knew that something much more worse than a verbal talking to was going to happen. “It was me. I pushed her.”

I stared at her, stunned and a little touched. I couldn’t believe that Katie was trying to cover for me, because it wasn’t exactly a characteristic thing of her to do.

Mrs. Dodds, though, didn’t buy her lie, not even for a single second. “I do t think so, Ms. Gardner,” she said coldly.

“But – ”

“You. Will. Stay. Here.”

Katie looked at me desperately, as if she was trying to tell me something that she couldn’t explain with Mrs. Dodds right there. The thought made me uneasy, but I did my best to smile

as I told her, “It’s okay, Katie. Thanks for trying.”

“Honey,” Mrs. Dodds said impatiently. “*Now*.”

Hudson Lake smirked.

I gave him my deluxe kill-you-later glare, before I turned to face Mrs. Dodds – except, *she wasn’t there*. She was, instead, standing at the museum entrance, already at the top of the steps, and gesturing impatiently for me to come with her.

Suddenly, the hairs on the back of my neck stood on end, because I was so sure, ADHD or not, that she had just been standing right next to me. And if that was true, then how on earth did she manage to get there so fast?

Nevertheless, I followed after her, my heart hammering in my chest as I did.

Mrs. Dodds, much to my surprise, went back inside the museum instead of chewing me out right in front of it. I followed her through the entrance hall, thinking that she was going to make me go to the gift shop and buy Hudson a new shirt or something like that.

But apparently, that wasn’t part of the plan.

I followed her deeper into the museum, all the way back to the Greek and Roman section, in fact, until we were standing in front of the *stele* again. Well, more like *she* was standing in front of it, her arms crossed and a scowl on her face as she made this deep, throaty sound that made shivers go down my spine. I stood a good ten feet away from her, my eyes darting around the gallery nervously as I noted the fact that, except for us, the entire room was *empty*.

“You’ve been giving us problems, honey,” she said.

Not sure of what else to do, I replied, “Yes, ma’am.”

She tugged on the cuffs of her leather jacket. “Did you really think that you would get away with it, honey? That you could steal not one, but *two* symbols of power?”

Symbols of *what*? What was she talking about? “I-I don’t know what you mean, Mrs. Dodds,” I stammered out, both confused and terrified at the same time.

“We are not fools, Percy Jackson,” she growled. “It was only a matter of time before we found out – before we realized that the thief was *you*. Confess, and you will suffer less pain.”

I still didn’t know what she was talking about. As a powerful batch of thunder shook the building, all I realized that I could hope for was that this entire ordeal was a dream, because otherwise it was reality and none of it made any sense *at all*.

“Well?” she demanded.

“Ma’am, I really don’t – ”

And that was when shit *really* hit the fan. Because, in the next instant, Mrs. Dodds's eyes began to glow like barbecue coals. Her fingers stretched, turning into talons. And her leathery jacket melted into large, leathery wings. She wasn't human. She was a shriveled bag with bat wings and claws and a mouth full of yellow fangs, and I was pretty sure that she was just itching to slice me into ribbons.

Then, if at all possible, things got even stranger.

Mr. Brunner, who'd been out in front of the museum before, wheeled his chair into the doorway of the gallery, while holding a strange, fancy pen in his hand. You know, like one of those designer types or whatever.

"What ho, Percy!" he shouted, before tossing the pen in the air.

Mrs. Dodds lunged at me.

With instincts that I didn't even know that I had, I dodged her as best as I could and vaguely felt talons slash the air next to my ear. Then, I snatched the fancy, bronze-colored pen, except when it hit my hand, it suddenly wasn't a pen anymore. Instead, it was a sword – Mr. Brunner's bronze sword, which he had showed to us once after my team won a game on one of his tournament days.

Mrs. Dodds lunged towards me with a murderous look in her eyes.

My knees were jelly. My hands were shaking so bad that I almost dropped the sword.

The monster – because that was what Mrs. Dodds was, what she *had to be* – snarled, "Die, honey!"

And then she flew straight towards me.

Absolute terror ran through my body. But so did a thousand tiny voices of instinct, all screaming at me to swing the sword.

So I did.

The metal blade hit her shoulder, before passing clean through her body like she was made of butter. A distinctive hissing sound rang out in the air as the blade moved through her, and I could see her face just enough out of the corner of my eye to see the utter shock that spread across it, before...

...*Before*...

...Before she exploded into a yellow powder and vaporized on the spot, leaving nothing but the smell of sulfur and a dying screech and a chill in the air, as if those two glowing, coal-like eyes were still watching me.

I was alone.

The sword was still, somehow, in my hands, but Mr. Brunner wasn't there. In fact, nobody was there but me.

With shaky hands, I lifted up the sword, looking for signs of blood or anything like that. But there was nothing of notice, and all I managed to see was the cap of the pen in the reflection of the bronze metal.

Not knowing what else to do, I grabbed the cap and held it next to the sword. A strange, magnetic pull pulled the cap – and my hand along with it – to the tip of the sword, before the cap settled on it and the sword somehow *transformed back into the pen*.

“What the fuck?” I whispered as I held the pen-sword in my hands.

Knowing that the pen was now the only proof I had that something had happened here – because something had *definitely* happened, of that I had no doubt – I shoved the pen into my pocket before scrambling to my feet and walking out of the museum.

Outside, it had started to rain.

Katie was still sitting by the fountain and her face was still pale as well, but when she saw me she did her best to give me a smile. At the same time, Hudson Lake was standing not too far away from her, still soaked from the water fountain with leaves in his hair. When he saw me, he smirked and said, “I hope Ms. Kerr whooped your ass.”

I blinked. “*Who?*”

“Our teacher, Prissy. Who else?”

An uneasy feeling formed in the pit of my stomach. We had no teacher named Ms. Kerr. I asked Hudson what he was talking about.

He just rolled his eyes and turned away.

I asked Katie where Mrs. Dodds was.

At first, she opened her mouth to say something, but then she closed it, before leaning in so that I could feel her hot, shaky breaths on my ear. In a trembling voice, she whispered, “I can't tell you. For now, act normal. Everything will make sense...*eventually*.”

After she pulled away, I looked at her apprehensively, before I nodded, grateful for the fact that at least my best friend believed me and wasn't lying or whatever.

Then I turned to look at Mr. Brunner. He was back to sitting at the end of the handicapped ramp, trashy paperback novel still in his hands, as if he had never moved. For a moment, I thought about going up there and giving him the pen back, before I realized that it was the only piece of evidence that I had – besides Katie's words – that whatever had happened had, well, *happened*.

So I kept the pen in my pocket and didn't move.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: Necessity Pays Me A Visit

Necessity Pays Me A Visit

Chapter Notes

Surprise! New update – and it's only Wednesday! I know I said I needed time to get back into the groove of writing, but apparently my muse had other plans because I've been writing like crazy ever since I uploaded this story on Monday lol. In fact, I've been so busy the next chapter will be posted this Friday (April 24th) and the chapter after that will be posted this Monday (April 27th)! (I hesitate to call this a schedule, but if I keep writing as much as I currently am, then that is what it will probably be ^-^)

Also, I just want to thank you all for your responses so far. It really means a lot to me! And if you have any questions about this chapter or the previous one, feel free to ask, because I'll answer them as best as I can!

See you on Friday,
~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Now, contrary to what you might think, I didn't freak out or do anything rash following the whole Mrs. Dodds debacle. Don't get me wrong, a large part of me wanted to, but I realized that *something* was going on to make everyone except me, Katie, and maybe Mr. Brunner forget that Mrs. Dodds had even existed, and doing anything to try to force them to remember would only make me seem like a bigger basket-case than I already was.

Plus, I still had the pen-sword, and I wasn't going to give it up anytime soon. And not just because it was tangible proof that pretty much everybody else had forgotten the truth – I also kept it because one, Mr. Brunner (and Katie, to a lesser extent) wanted me to give it back and it was humorous to see his failed attempts at taking it from me, and two, I was determined to find out what was going on.

Because obviously, *obviously* there was something more going on than just math teachers turning into demons for no apparent reason. I mean, there was also the freak weather to consider, too, especially since it had somehow gotten even worse since I had vaporized Mrs. Dodds and I was pretty sure that that wasn't a coincidence. I just couldn't figure out how the two things were connected, outside of the *Harry Potter* movies actually being real or something like that.

Unfortunately – or perhaps fortunately, depending on how you look at it – for me, though, I still must have done something to piss off the headmaster, because not long after the field trip he sent a letter home to my mom, telling her that I would not be welcome back at Yancy Academy the following year.

Which was fine. Really. I was homesick, anyways. I still desperately wanted to be with my mom in our little apartment on the Upper East Side, even if I had to go to a shitty public school and put up with my douchebag of a stepfather and his stupid poker parties.

...Although, that wasn't to say that I wouldn't miss Yancy. Or, at least, certain things of it. I'd miss the view of the woods out my dorm window, the Hudson River in the distance, and the smell of pine trees. I'd also miss Katie, who despite still refusing to tell me what was going on with the whole Mrs. Dodds outside of "*you'll understand eventually*", was a pretty awesome best friend all around.

And I'd miss Latin class too, because despite his pushing, Mr. Brunner was a good teacher and he always had faith in me – even when I didn't have faith in myself. And that was a strange, but also good thing to know.

As exam week got closer, I busied myself with studying for my tests, although that wound up proving to be a frustrating endeavor. Because due to my ADHD and dyslexia, I couldn't sit for very long and when I did, the words started swimming off the pages of the books and study guides that I was using.

In fact, one night – the night before my Latin final – I got frustrated enough that I wound up throwing the *Cambridge Guide to Greek Mythology* across my dorm room. I stared at it for a few moments, my chest heaving from anger, as I knew that there was just no way that I was going to be pass this test. I mean, I couldn't even remember the difference between Chiron and Charon, much less how to conjugate Latin verbs!

After those few moments, though, I let out a deep sigh and ran a hand through my hair before walking across the room and picking up the book. I could do this. Granted, I probably couldn't do it on my own, but if I had some help from Mr. Brunner...then I probably could. Especially with his mnemonics and shit.

With that thought in mind, I walked downstairs to the faculty offices. Most of them were dark and empty, but Mr. Brunner's door was ajar, and the light from his room was stretching across the hallway floor. Great.

I was three steps from the door handle, though, when I paused, because I could hear voices coming from inside his office. Mr. Brunner asked a question. And a voice that was undoubtedly Katie's said in response, "It's just...I'm worried about Percy, sir."

I stiffened.

Now, I'm not usually an eavesdropper, but I don't think *anyone*, especially me, could just walk away when they hear their best friend talking about them from behind their back. Especially when an adult is involved.

Shakily, I inched closer to see if I could hear what they were saying better.

"He already suspects, sir," she said. "It's only a matter of time before he figures it out...especially since he has the sword..."

“Rushing him will only make matters worse,” Mr. Brunner replied in a placating tone. “He needs to be more ready, especially with the way things are now.”

“But he – *we* – may not have that kind of time,” Katie argued. “The summer solstice deadline –”

“Will have to be resolved without him,” Mr. Brunner interjected calmly.

“Not if you-know-who is dead certain that he’s the thief – no pun intended.”

For a moment, neither of them said anything, but then Mr. Brunner sighed. “You remind me so much of your mother,” he finally said. “And you’re right. But he should be able to enjoy his ignorance for at least a little longer. It’s the least that he deserves.”

The mythology book dropped out of my hand and hit the floor with a *thud*.

“*Shit*,” I mouthed, before I hurriedly picked up the book and backed down the hall, my heart hammering in my chest as I did so.

A shadow slid across the light that was pouring out from Mr. Brunner’s office – the shadow of something that was much, much taller than my teacher could be, what with him being wheelchair-bound and all that. And it was holding something that looked a lot like an archer’s bow.

I opened the nearest door and slipped inside.

A few seconds later, I heard a slow, *clop-clop-clop* noise, then a sound almost like an animal snuffling right outside my door. A large, dark shape paused in front of the glass, then moved on.

A bead of ice cold sweat trickled down my neck.

Somewhere in the hallway, Mr. Brunner spoke. “Nothing,” he murmured. “My nerves haven’t been right since the winter solstice.”

“I doubt anybody’s have,” Katie replied. “But I could have sworn...”

“Go back to your dorm,” Mr. Brunner said. “You’ve got a long day of exams tomorrow.”

“Don’t remind me.”

The lights went out in Mr. Brunner’s office.

For what seemed like an eternity, I waited in the dark. Finally, though, after I was relatively certain that no one else was around, I slipped out into the hallway and made my way back up to the dorms. All the while, though, I couldn’t help but think: *what I deserve? What does that even mean? And just how does Katie know about the sword?*

~~~

The next morning, as I was leaving the three-hour Latin exam, my eyes swimming with all of the Greek and Roman names that I knew I must've misspelled, Mr. Brunner called me back inside.

For a moment, I was worried that he'd somehow found out about my eavesdropping the night before, or that he was going to try to get the pen-sword back from me again, but neither of those things seemed to be the problem. Perhaps he had given up on the latter.

"Percy," he said. "Don't be discouraged about leaving Yancy. It's...it's for the best."

His tone was kind, but the words still embarrassed me, as they struck a chord within me that I constantly tried to bury and ignore. Plus, there were a few students that were still finishing up the test from behind me, and I could practically feel Hudson Lake smirking as he stared a hole into the back of my head.

"What do you mean, sir?" I asked as my face burned something hot.

"I mean..." Mr. Brunner wheeled his chair back and forth, like he wasn't sure of what to say. "This isn't the right place for you. It was only a matter of time."

My eyes stung.

I mean, here was my favorite teacher, in front of the class, telling me I couldn't handle it. After saying that he had believed in me all year, he was now telling me that I had been destined to get kicked out.

"Right," I said, trembling.

"No, no," he said. "That's not what I meant. What I'm trying to say...you're not normal, Percy. Now, that's nothing to be –"

"Thanks," I managed to blurt out, although my voice cracked as I said it. "Thank you, sir, for reminding me."

"Percy –"

But I was already gone.

~~~

On the last day of term, I shoved my clothes into my suitcase with a ferocity that they definitely didn't deserve.

The other guys were joking around, talking about their vacation plans and other shit like that. One of them was going on a hiking trip in Switzerland. Another was going to be cruising the Caribbean for a month. They were juvenile delinquents, like me, but they were *rich* juvenile delinquents. Their daddies were executives, or ambassadors, or celebrities.

I didn't even have a father.

At some point, one of them asked me what I'd be doing this summer. I told him that I was going back to the city, and left out the fact that I'd have to get a summer job somewhere while spending my free time either worrying about where I'd go to school in the fall or staying out of my stepdad's way.

"Oh," the guy said. "That's cool."

Then he went back to talking with the other guys as if I had never existed.

The only person that I dreaded saying goodbye to was Katie, but as it turned out, I didn't have to. She'd booked a ticket to Manhattan on the same Greyhound I had (something about spending time with family...although I didn't really know what that was about, considering the fact that she said her father was dead and she lived with other relatives upstate), so there we were, together again, heading into the city.

During the whole bus ride, Katie kept glancing nervously down the aisle, watching the other passengers. It occurred to me at some point that this had never really happened before – Katie was generally pretty good at keeping her calm. So, the fact that she wasn't right now not only made me nervous, but fidgety as well, to the point where I finally couldn't stand it anymore.

"Looking for Mrs. Dodds?" I asked, whilst trying to sound as casual as possible.

Katie immediately turned to look at me, her green eyes wide as she did. "What do you mean?" she questioned back nervously.

"You've been on the edge of your seat this entire trip," I replied. "And it's making me nervous, especially since I supposedly deserve the opportunity to be in ignorance a little while longer."

Katie's eye twitched. "I *knew* that someone was eavesdropping that night! Percy, tell me...how much did you hear?"

"Oh...not much. Just that you know that I have a sword on me and something about the summer solstice deadline."

She winced. "Look, Percy...there's a lot going on right now that you don't know about...that you *can't* know about. At least, not yet, anyways. But I promise you, it'll all make sense – "

"Eventually," I finished for her.

She winced again. "Yes. But, in the meantime, just take this, okay? In case you need me this summer."

From her pants pocket, she fished out a crisp business card. Nervously, I took it, and tried to read what it said, but the fancy script was murder on my dyslexic eyes. After a few moments, though, I was able to make out:

Half-Blood Hill

Long Island, New York

“What’s Half– ”

“Don’t say it out loud!” she hissed. “That’s...well, that’s my summer address.”

My heart sank. Of course, Katie had a summer home. I’d never considered that her family might be as rich as the others at Yancy, but it made sense, all things considered.

“Okay,” I said glumly. “So, like, if I want to come visit your summer mansion, I can?”

She nodded. “Or...or if you need me, you know?”

“Why would I need you?”

The question came out harder than I meant it to.

Katie blushed. “Look, Percy, the truth is – ”

Whatever she was going to say, though, was cut off in that moment by a huge grinding noise from underneath our feet. Black smoke poured from the dashboard and the whole bus started to smell like rotten eggs. The driver cursed and limped the Greyhound over to the side of the highway.

After a few moments of clanking around in the engine compartment, the driver announced that we’d all have to get off, much to the frustration of everyone on the bus. Nevertheless, Katie and I filed out with everybody else.

We were on a stretch of country road – basically, no place that you’d notice unless you broke down there. On our side of the highway was nothing but maple trees and litter from passing cars, which caused Katie to upturn her nose in disgust. On the other side, though, across four lanes of asphalt shimmering with afternoon heat, was an old-fashioned fruit stand.

The stuff on sale looked really good: heaping boxes of blood red cherries and apples and pomegranates, with walnuts and apricots as well. There were also jugs of cider in a claw-foot tub of ice. But none of these things caught my eye as much as the lady sitting next to them did.

I mean, this lady was *beautiful*. She looked to be in her mid-thirties or something along those lines, with long, brown hair that curled in the same way that Katie’s did. She also had these strange, silvery eyes that I could somehow see despite the distance, and they were both piercing and mesmerizing at the same time. And she was wearing this white, flowing summer dress that reminded me a bit of the dresses that the Ancient Greek and Roman women wore in my Latin books.

But none of that was really interesting – at least, not when compared to the fact that this lady was crocheting what had to be one of the biggest blankets that I’ve ever seen. I mean, it was *massive*, big enough to probably fit on two king-sized beds put together. But it was also beautiful, as the light blue yarn that made up the base of the blanket was intertwined with other colors of yarn, too – gold, sea green, stormy grey, and electric blue, just to name a few.

I looked over at Katie to make a comment about how beautiful the blanket was, but I paused when I saw that all of the color had drained from her face.

“Katie?” I asked nervously. “What’s wrong?”

“Tell me she’s not looking at you.”

I turned back to look at the lady. “Uh, I think she is.”

Katie moaned in response.

At the same time, the lady pulled out a huge pair of bronze-and-silver-colored scissors that were also long-bladed, almost like shears.

Next to me, Katie moaned again before she told me, “We’re getting on the bus. Come on.”

“What?” I said. “It’s a thousand degrees in there, Katie!”

“Come on!” she hissed before prying open the door and climbing inside.

I didn’t follow her. Instead, I stayed back, and looked at the lady, who was still staring at me with those piercing eyes of hers, even as she cut the yarn that she was crocheting from.

I swear, I heard that *snip* all the across the four lanes of traffic, although it should’ve been possible. And that sound sent shivers down my spine in a way that nothing had before, or come close to since.

At the rear of the bus, the driver wrenched a big chunk of smoking metal out of the engine compartment. The bus shuddered at first, but then roared back to life.

The passengers cheered.

“Damn right!” the driver yelled, before he slapped the bus with his hat. “Everybody back on board!”

Once we got going, I started feeling feverish, as if I’d caught the flu.

Katie didn’t look much better. She was shivering and her teeth were chattering.

“Katie?”

“Yeah?”

“What are you not telling me?”

She rubbed her hands together then, like she was trying to get warmth in them. “Percy, what did you see back at the fruit stand?”

“You mean the crocheting lady? She’s not...she’s not like Mrs. Dodds, is she?”

“Yes,” she replied, before shaking her head. “No. Just tell me what you saw, Percy.”

“She...well, she took out her scissors and she cut the yarn.”

Katie closed her eyes then, before she made a gesture with her fingers that might’ve been crossing herself, but it wasn’t. It was something else...something that I had a feeling was *much* older than Jesus himself.

“You saw her snip the cord,” she said blankly. “You saw Necessity snip the cord...*damn it!*”

I blinked in response. Katie was not one to usually curse, not like me and my unfiltered mouth, so the fact that she just did was more than just a little unnerving. So was the fact that apparently she knew that lady’s name – although it also made me wonder just what kind of parent named their kid something like *Necessity*. I mean, that was just asking for your kid to get bullied.

After a few moments, Katie looked at me with wide eyes and said, “Let me walk you home from the bus station. Please.”

This seemed like a strange request to me, but nevertheless I told her that she could.

“Is this like a superstition or something?” I asked.

No answer.

“Katie, that...that snipping of the yarn. Do you think that it means that someone is going to die?”

The guilty look that she gave me in response made me think that not only was the answer to that yes, but that she was also already picking out the flowers she thought would look best on my coffin.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: My Best Friend Turns Out To Be My #1 Stalker

My Best Friend Turns Out To Be My #1 Stalker

Chapter Notes

Y'all, I'm going to be honest here: I don't think I've ever written anything, fiction and nonfiction alike, as fast as I've been writing this story. Like, I've been writing so much since Sunday that my hands are sore! Every time I try to take a break, though, my mind starts to itch and I have to get back at it again haha!

All of that is basically my way of saying that, for now, the Monday/Wednesday/Friday schedule will be, well, a schedule. I have enough chapters written to post for the next two weeks on that schedule, and still a little more left over in case I actually wind up writing myself out. Two weeks from now (maybe sooner – depends on how I write lol), we'll assess the schedule and see if it needs changing, but like I said, for now it's all good.

Oh, and before I forget, I'd just like to thank you all again for your responses! They have been my fuel over the past few days, along with caffeine and a hefty desire to procrastinate on everything else I have to do lol

See you on Monday,
~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Confession time: I ditched Katie as soon as we got to the bus terminal.

I know, I know. It was rude. Probably even one of the rudest things I could ever do, even. But Katie was freaking me out, what with how she was looking at me like I was a dead man walking whilst murmuring, “Why him?” and “This can't just happen again.”

So, when we got off the bus and Katie went to the use the restroom – after making me promise that I was going to stay put and wait for her – I waited for a few moments, before I grabbed my suitcase, slipped outside, and caught the first taxi that was going uptown.

“East One-hundred-and-Fourth and first, please,” I told the driver.

Now, a word about my mother, before you meet her.

Her name is Sally Jackson and she's the best person in the world, which just proves my theory that the best people have the rottenest luck. Her own parents died in a plane crash when she was seven, and her uncle was a busy doctor that didn't really have the time or patience to care for her. Which was kind of ironic, considering the fact that when he got cancer, my mom dropped everything – high school, college, and her dreams of becoming a

novelist – to take care of him. Because of this, after he died, she was left with no money, no family, and no diploma.

The only good break she ever got was meeting my dad.

I don't have any memories of him, because he left a few days after I was born – if that. My mom doesn't like to talk about him because it makes her sad. She has no pictures.

See, they weren't married. She told me he was rich and important, and their relationship was a secret, especially because he was already married – twice over. Then, one day, he set sail across the Atlantic on some important journey or whatever, and he never came back.

Lost at sea, my mom always told me. Not dead. Just lost.

After I was born, my mom not only raised me, but also worked odd jobs took night classes to get her diploma on top of that. And she never complained or got mad – not once, despite the fact that I was far from being an easy kid.

Not long after my fifth birthday, though, she married this guy called Gabe Ugliano, who was nice for about the first thirty seconds after I met him before showing his true colors as a world-class asshole. When I was young, I nicknamed him Smelly Gabe, because the guy reeked like moldy, garlicky pizza wrapped in gym shorts.

Between the two of us, I knew we must've made my mom's life a living hell – especially with how he treated both of us. Me coming home from the bus terminal was a good example of this.

Because when I walked into our little apartment, hoping my mom would be home from work, Smelly Gabe was there in the living room, playing poker with his buddies. The television was blaring ESPN, while chips and beer cans were strewn all over the carpet.

Without even looking up, Gabe said around his cigar, "So, you're home."

"Yeah," I replied apprehensively. "Where's my mom?"

"Working," he said. "You got any cash?"

That was it. No "*welcome back*", or "*good to see you*", or even "*how has your life been the last six months?*"

At least he didn't seem to be in a bad mood. *Yet*.

Idly, I noticed that Gabe had put on weight. Again. He looked like a tusk-less walrus in thrift store clothes. He had about three hairs on his head, and all of them were combed over his bald scalp, as if that made him handsome or something.

Supposedly, he managed the Electronics Mega-Mart in Queens, but with how often he stayed home, I doubted that, because *surely* he would've been fired a long time ago for it. But I guess it doesn't really matter where he got his money from, because he always spent it on the same two things: nauseating cigars and beer. Lots of beer.

He also spent my money on it, too, whenever I was home. That, and his gambling funds and whatever. He called it our “guy secret”, but really that was just code word for “*don’t tell your mom unless you want to wake up with bruises tomorrow morning*”.

“I don’t have any cash,” I told him, the lie slipping off of my tongue easily.

He didn’t believe it, though. Not for a single second. Instead, he raised a single eyebrow, before saying, “You took a taxi from the bus station. Probably paid with a twenty. Got six, seven bucks in change. Somebody expects to live under my roof, then he ought to carry his own weight. Am I right, Eddie?”

Eddie, the super of the apartment building, gave me a look that was twinged with just the littlest bit of sympathy. “Come on, Gabe,” he said. “The kid just got here.”

“Am I right?” Gabe repeated.

Eddie just scowled into his bowl of pretzels. The other two guys snickered, but didn’t say anything else.

“Fine,” I said with a roll of my eyes. Then, I dug my wad of dollars out of pocket and threw the money on the table. “I hope you lose.”

“I wouldn’t act so snooty, *boy*,” he sneered. “I saw your report card on the table.”

Without another word, I walked to my room and slammed the door. Well, I should say that I walked to the room that was supposed to be mine but, in all actuality, *wasn’t*. Because whenever I was at boarding school, Gabe used it for his “study”. Of course, he didn’t study anything in there except for old car magazines, but it was a good enough excuse for him to shove my stuff in the closet, leave his muddy boots on the windowsill, and make the room smell just as bad as the rest of the apartment did.

I dropped my suitcase on the bed. *Home sweet home*.

For a second, I thought about leaving the apartment and going out to do something, if only to just get away from Gabe. But then, I remembered how I left Katie and the lady at the fruit stand, and my stomach started to churn with a combination of guilt and fear. The feeling only amplified when I heard footsteps walking down the hallway, because if they belonged to Gabe that could only mean one thing...

Then, I heard my mom’s voice, just on the other side of the door, ask, “Percy?”

And my anxiety melted.

My mother can make me feel good just by walking into the room, which is exactly what she did a moment later. Her eyes have this tendency to sparkle and change color in the light, kind of like mine, except hers change in varying shades of blue instead of varying shades of green. Her smile is as warm as a quilt. She’s also got a few grey streaks mixed in with her long, brown hair, but I’ve never thought of her as old – especially because my grandfather was already greying by the time that he and my grandmother died.

But enough about them. Back to my mom. When she looks at me, it's like she's seeing all of the good things about me, none of the bad. And I've never heard her raise her voice or say an unkind word to anyone, Gabe included.

"Oh, Percy," my mom breathed, before she pulled me into a hug. "I can't believe it. You've grown since Christmas!"

Her red-and-white Sweet on America uniform smelled like some of the best things in the world: chocolate, licorice, and all of the other stuff she sold at the candy shop in Grand Central. She'd brought me a huge bag of "free samples" like she always did when I came home, which I attacked with a ferocity that came with having not really eaten all day.

While I did so, the two of us sat together on the edge of the bed, with her running a hand through my hair as I told her about everything that I hadn't managed to put in my letters, per her request.

Well, *almost* everything, anyways. Because I had a feeling that my mom wouldn't like the fact that my math teacher had turned into a demon and tried to kill me, much less the fact that I was hiding a pen that could turn into a sword in one of my pockets.

Not long after my mom walked into my room, Gabe decided that it was prime time for her to wait on him hand and foot. "Hey, Sally," he yelled from the other room. "How about some bean dip, huh?"

I gritted my teeth.

"Don't mind him," my mom said soothingly. "Because I have a surprise for you – we're going to the beach."

My eyes widened. "Montauk?"

She hummed in confirmation. "Three nights at the cabin, like always."

"When?"

She smiled. "As soon as I get changed."

I couldn't believe it. My mom and I hadn't been to Montauk the last two summers, because Gabe had said there hadn't been enough money – he presumed that my mom rented the cabin, and she didn't want to tell him otherwise because of the blowout that would immediately ensue.

Speaking of the devil, Gabe appeared in the doorway and growled, "Bean dip, Sally? Didn't you hear me?"

I wanted to punch him, but I met my mom's eyes and understood that she could handle it from here, just until she was ready to leave for Montauk.

"I was on my way, honey," my mom told Gabe in the same soothing tone that she had previously used on me. "We were just talking about the trip, that's all."

Gabe's eyes narrowed. "The trip? You mean you were serious about that?"

"I knew it," I couldn't help but mutter. "He's not going to let us go."

"Of course he will," my mom said evenly. "Your step-father is just worried about money, that's all. Besides," she added. "Gabriel won't have to settle for bean dip. I'll make him enough seven-layer dip for the whole weekend. Guacamole. Sour cream. The works."

Gabe softened a bit. "So, this money for the trip...it comes out of your clothes budget, right?"

"Yes, honey," my mom replied.

"And you won't take my car anywhere but there and back."

"We'll be very careful."

Gabe scratched at his double chin. "Alright. But only if you hurry up with that seven-layer dip...and if the kid apologizes for interrupting my poker game."

Only if you apologize for beating my ass all the time, I thought angrily.

But my mom's eyes warned me not to make him mad.

"I'm sorry," I finally muttered. "I'm really sorry I interrupted your incredibly important poker game. Please, by all means, go back to it right now."

Gabe frowned and stared at me for several long moments, probably trying to detect the blatant sarcasm that he couldn't pick up, what with his tiny brain and all.

"Yeah, whatever," he decided, before he went back in the living room to finish up his game.

"Thank you, Percy," my mom said after he left. "Now, I'll be right back."

~~~

An hour later, we were ready to leave.

Gabe took a break from his poker game long enough to watch me pack up the car. All the while, he kept griping and groaning about losing my mom's cooking and, more importantly, his '78 Camaro for the whole weekend.

"Not a scratch on this car, boy," he warned me in a way that was extremely reminiscent of Harry Potter's uncle – Vernon, I think his name was? – as I loaded the last bag. "Not one little scratch."

"Of course, Gabe," I gritted out, knowing better than to remind him of the fact that I was only fourteen – soon to be fifteen – and couldn't even get a temporary permit because of it.

Because just as soon as I would say it, he would go on a lecture about how I was a man and was in charge and all that bullshit, and I really didn't feel like staying around him for longer

than I had to.

After I closed the trunk, Gabe lumbered back towards the apartment building. As he did, I suddenly remembered that hand gesture that Katie had done on the bus and I got an idea. With a grin, I clawed my hand over my heart like she had, before shoving it towards Gabe. The screen door then suddenly slammed shut so hard it whacked him in the butt and sent him flying up the staircase as if he'd been shot from a cannon.

Nervously, I turned to look if anyone had noticed, but nobody had. And even if they did, I told myself as I got into the Camaro, they'd probably blame it on the wind or a freak accident with the hinges or something like that. Not on a kid who had secretly killed a demon math teacher and knew that there was something going on that was much more magical than mundane life because of it.

Nevertheless, I told my mom to step on it.

Our cabin was on the south shore, way out at the tip of Long Island. It was a little pastel box with faded curtains, half-sunken into the dunes. There was always sand in the sheets and spiders in the cabinets, and most of the time the sea was too cold to swim in.

I loved the place.

We'd been going there since I was a baby. Apparently, my grandparents had been given it as a wedding present, and my mom didn't have the heart to sell it when her uncle died – which was a good thing for me, because although she never said it, I knew that this was the beach where she had met my dad almost sixteen years ago.

As we got closer to Montauk, my mom seemed to grow younger, years of worry and work disappearing from her face. Her eyes turned a mesmerizing ocean blue – the same color as the Long Island Sound.

We got there at sunset, opened all of the cabin's windows, and went through our usual cleaning routine. We walked on the beach, fed blue corn chips to the seagulls, and munched on all of the blue candy that my mom had gotten as “free samples” from work.

I guess this is probably where I should explain the blue food.

You see, during one of their arguments, Gabe had told my mom that there was no such thing. To me, it had seemed like a silly thing to argue at the time, but now I kind of wonder how silly it was, because ever since, my mom went out of her way to eat blue. She baked blue birthday cakes and blue chocolate chip cookies. She bought blue corn tortilla chips and brought home blue candy from the shop. She even put blue food dye in Gabe's mayonnaise jar once (he was the only one in our “family” that like it), much to his displeasure.

All of this, along with the fact that she had refused to take his name when they got married, was proof to me that not only was she not totally suckered by Gabe and his abusive tendencies, but that she also had a rebellious streak, too. Like me.

When it got dark, we made a fire and roasted hot dogs and marshmallows. Mom told me stories about when she was a kid, back before her parents died in the plane crash. She told me about her own mom, who spoke Icelandic, and how she regretted that she never knew the language well enough to teach me it, too. And she told me about the books that she wanted to write someday, when she finally had enough money to quit the candy shop.

As she did, I became struck with the desire to tell her about Mrs. Dodds and the pen-sword – but once again, I had a feeling that my mom wouldn't like hearing about and, even worse, that it would most likely cut our trip short. So I didn't.

Instead, I asked about my dad.

My mom's eyes went misty at the mere mention of him, just like they always did. I figured she would tell me the same thing about him that she always did, but I didn't mind...at least, not this time, anyways.

"He was kind, Percy," my mom said. "Tall, handsome, and powerful. But gentle, too. You have his black hair, you know, and his green eyes."

She paused, before turning to look out at the sea. "I wish he could see you, Percy. He would be so proud."

*"Proud about what?" I wanted to ask. "Proud about the fact that I have ADHD and dyslexia? About the fact that I've been kicked out of nine schools in nine years, now? Or about the fact that I let Gabe beat me to a pulp and never tell you about it?"*

I felt anger at my father then – an anger that bubbled hot and thick in my stomach, along with disgust and semi-resentment. Maybe it was stupid, but I hated the fact that he not only cheated on his wives and whatever, but also cheated with my mom of all people before leaving her mere days after I was born. Yeah, I know that my mom wasn't blameless in all of that, but that didn't stop the fact that he had left us for no good reason, and now we were stuck with Smelly Gabe.

"Are you going to send me away again?" I asked after a while. "To another boarding school?"

My mom pulled a marshmallow from the fire.

"I don't know," she answered honestly, her voice heavy. "I...we'll have to do something, sweetie. I'm just not sure what that 'something' is, yet. Or...or what it should be."

"So there's other options?" I asked, having picked up on what she was telling me without actually saying it, and when she nodded, I added, "Like what?"

"Your father...he wanted you to go to this place, when you were old enough. Technically, I should've sent you there a long time ago, but Percy..." she trailed off, before shaking her head and sighing.

"What?"

“It’s dangerous,” she said. “Maybe not in the way that you’re in danger with me, but that doesn’t make it any less dangerous. And it doesn’t ignore the fact that I...that I might have to send you away for *good* if I send you there.”

My head was spinning. Why would my dad want to send me to a place that could be dangerous? And why was I in danger with my mom, the nicest and most caring person in the entire world?

*Because*, a small voice in the back of my mind said. *Because Mrs. Dodds wasn’t the only monster that you’ve faced before.*

Instantly, I called to mind all of the strange and scary things that had happened to me over the course of my life. Like that one time in the third grade when a man in a black trench coat had stalked me on the playground. When the teachers had threatened to call the police on him, he went away *growling*, and yet no one believed me when I told them that, under his broad-brimmed hat, the man had had only one eye, right in the middle of his head.

And there was that one time when I had been in preschool, too, when a teacher had accidentally put me down for a nap in a cot that a snake had slithered into. My mom had screamed like a banshee when she came to pick me up and found me playing with a limp, scaly rope I’d somehow managed to strangle to death with my meaty toddler hands.

Everything was adding up – that I knew. Everything had to be *connected*, somehow, somehow. But the more I thought about it, the more it seemed that the answer strayed away from my grasp, and it was frustrating beyond belief.

If only I had a hint, a nudge in the right direction, I could figure it out. I had to – for my own sanity, if nothing else.

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That night, I had a vivid dream.

It was storming on the beach, and three beautiful animals – a white horse, a golden eagle, and a black wolf – were trying to kill each other at the edge of the surf. The eagle swooped down and slashed the horse’s muzzle with its talons. The horse reared up and kicked the eagle’s wings. And the wolf was attacking the horse’s hind legs with its huge, bloodied mouth.

As they fought, the ground rumbled, and a monstrous voice chuckled from somewhere beneath the earth, goading the animals to fight harder.

I wanted to run towards them, to stop them from killing each other with all of my might. But something – no, not something, a *hand* was holding me back, in a death grip that I couldn’t escape from. Angrily, I looked up to fight off whoever it was that was holding me back, but when I looked up, all I saw was a pair of blue eyes, colored with the same shade that that blanket that the lady called Necessity had been crocheting.

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I woke up with a start.

Outside, it was storming something awful. Rain was pelting the roof of the house like hail, while lightning was making false daylight and twenty-foot tall waves pounded the dunes like artillery.

I got out of bed to go wake up my mom, but it didn't matter, because with the next thunderclap, she immediately sat up with wide eyes and whispered, "Hurricane."

I knew that was crazy. Long Island had never seen hurricanes this early in the summer. But the ocean seemed to have forgotten that. Over the roar of the wind, I heard a distant bellow – an angry, tortured sound that made my hair stand on end.

Suddenly, there was a pounding on our cabin door.

My mother sprang out of bed in her nightgown and threw open the lock.

On the other side of the doorway, Katie stood there, drenched from head to toe, against a backdrop of rain. Her eyes were wide as she looked at the two of us, but that wasn't what I was focusing on.

"I've been searching all day," she breathed out raggedly. "What were you thinking?"

My mother looked at me in terror – not scared of Katie, but of why she'd come.

"Percy," she said, shouting to be heard over the rain. "What happened at school? What didn't you tell me?"

I stammered something about Mrs. Dodds, the pen-sword, and the lady called Necessity, which caused my mom to stare at me, her face deathly pale in the flashes of lightning.

Without immediately saying anything, she grabbed her purse and tossed me my rain jacket. Then, she ran a hand through her hair and said, "Get to the car. Both of you. Go!"

Katie grabbed my wrist and pulled me towards the car, but I didn't look to see in front of me to make sure I wouldn't trip or something like that. I couldn't.

Instead, all I could do was stare at the vines that were wrapped around Katie's legs and arms in a way that made it obvious that they were *part of her own body*.

## Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: I Teach Myself Bullfighting

Also, some additional Author's Notes. You won't see these additional notes all that often from me, but I just felt like I needed to explain something: Sally's mom. I've had this headcanon for a while now that Sally's mom (who is not named Laura or Estelle in this

fanfiction) was Icelandic, among other things (which you will find out about later!), and that she tried teaching Sally her mother language. However, due to her lessons suddenly stopping when she was seven and Icelandic being a notoriously hard language (I've tried learning it, myself – it ain't easy, let me tell you), Sally isn't a fluent speaker, hence why she was never able to teach it to Percy.

All of this is important for reasons that will be explained later, along with Sally's mom's backstory and other fun stuff. Remember, I've been planning this story for years, so I pretty much got it all figured out when it comes to what's going to happen and when it'll happen ;)



# I Teach Myself Bullfighting

## Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Today's chapter is going to be just a tad bit shorter than the other ones that I've posted so far – you'll see why. The next chapter will be posted on Wednesday, though, as planned, and it's a little bit longer than this one, so don't freak out. ;)

Once again, thank you all so much for your responses. They mean so much to me! Each one has brought a smile to my face and made my days so much better. In fact, I think the only other thing that has come close to the joy that they've brought me is rewatching season 1 House, but like I said, it's only come close haha!

Well, anyways, I'll see you all on Wednesday,  
~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

**We tore through the night along dark country roads.** Wind slammed against the Camaro. Rain lashed the windshield. I don't know how my mom could see anything – because *I* definitely couldn't – but nevertheless, she kept her foot on the gas.

Every time there was a flash of lightning, I looked at Katie sitting next to me in the backseat with something akin to numbed shock. Because not only were the vines still wrapped around her legs and arms, but they were *moving*, too. Like, every time she breathed, the leaves on the vines cluttered of their own accord, and it was tripping me the fuck out.

All I could think to say was, “So...how long have those been around?”

In the next flash of lightning, I saw Katie blush. “I'm sorry,” she said quickly. “It just...it happens when I get stressed. Comes with being a daughter of...with being my mom's daughter and all.”

“You don't have to apologize, dear,” my mom said from the front. “It happens to the best of us.”

“Wait...” I said, recognizing that tone that was in my mom's voice, the one she only used if...“You guys know each other?”

Katie bit her lip nervously. “Not exactly,” she replied. “I mean, we've never met in person. But Chi – *Mr. Brunner* told her that I would be coming to watch you before the beginning of the school year.”

“*Mr. Brunner*? What does he have to do with this? And what do you mean, watching me?”

“Keeping tabs on you,” Katie said, and I didn’t know whether to be angry or annoyed at the fact that she ignored my first two questions. “Making sure you were okay. But I wasn’t faking being your friend, Percy. I am your friend. Promise.”

I didn’t know what to say in response to that, so instead, I asked, “What’s your mother got to do with all of this? I mean, you told me that she wasn’t in the picture and that you’d been living with other relatives ever since your father died.”

“I am,” Katie said. “I...Percy...oh, *fine*. I’m a daughter of Demeter. You happy?”

“Demeter? Like the Greek goddess?”

“The one and only.”

“But she’s a myth! She isn’t real!”

Suddenly, Katie started to laugh. Hysterically. “Percy, you fought with a monster, stole a sword that could transform into a pen, and met Ananke, the primordial goddess of fate herself! What else could possibly explain all of that?”

“Then why – ”

“Did we hide it from you? To protect you. Because the less you knew, the fewer monsters you’d attract.”

The weird bellowing noise rose up again from somewhere behind us, closer than before. Blankly, I realized that whatever was making that noise was following us, and it was running after us a *lot* faster than could ever be possible.

“Percy,” my mom said. “There’s too much to explain and not enough time. We have to get you to safety.”

“Safety from what? Who’s after me?”

“Oh, nobody much,” Katie said. “Just the Lord of the Dead and a few of his bloodthirstiest minions.”

“Katie!”

“Sorry, Ms. Jackson. Could you drive faster please?”

I tried to wrap my mind around what was happening, but I couldn’t do it. I knew this wasn’t a dream. I didn’t have enough of an imagination for it to be.

“Wait,” I said as my mom made a hard left, swerving us onto a narrower road. “Why isn’t it after you, Katie?”

“Percy, this isn’t the time for – ” my mom began, but Katie stopped her.

“No, it’s fine Ms. Jackson,” she said, before she pulled out a strange, bulky locket from underneath her shirt. “You see this, Percy? This is a *bullā*. It acts as a semi-good form of protection. Some kids make them at the place where we’re going.”

“And just where are we going?”

“The place that I told you about,” my mom suddenly said, her voice tight – like she was trying not to be scared, for my sake. “The place your father wanted to send you to.”

“Aka, the place that you didn’t want me to go to?”

“Please, Percy,” my mother begged. “This is hard enough. Try to understand. You’re in grave danger.”

My mom then pulled the wheel hard to the right, which allowed me to get a glimpse of the figure that she’d swerved to avoid – a dark, fluttering shape now lost behind us in the storm.

“What was that?” I asked.

“We’re almost there,” my mom whispered, ignoring my question. “Just another mile. Please. Please. Please.”

I didn’t really know where this place that my dad wanted to send me was – *wait, if Katie had been sent to this place and she really was a daughter of Demeter, did that mean that my dad was a –* but I found myself leaning forward in the car, anticipating, wanting us to arrive.

“Mom,” I said after a moment, because inside my brain was screaming *does all this really mean what I think it means?* and I just *had* to know the answer, regardless of what the answer would do to me. “If Dad wanted me to go to this place, does that mean that he’s a –”

**BOOM!**

The sound of the car exploding, along with the blinding flash that accompanied it, stopped me from finishing my sentence.

It was like my brain had reset in that instance, because not only did I stop thinking about my dad and what had to be the truth about him, but I stopped thinking at all *period*. The only thing that I could think about, could recognize, was the fact that I felt weightless – like I was being crushed, fried, and hosed down all at the same time.

A few moments later, I peeled my forehead off the back of the driver’s seat and said, “Ow.”

“Percy!” my mom shouted.

“I’m okay...”

I tried to shake off the daze. I wasn’t dead. The car hadn’t really exploded – although it sure as hell came close to, if the fact that the roof had cracked open like an eggshell was anything to go by.

*Lightning*, I belatedly realized. That was the only explanation for the roof. It was also the only explanation for why we'd swerved into the ditch and why the driver's-side doors were wedged into the mud.

Next to me, Katie groaned. "I'm okay too, Ms. Jackson," she said, although I knew just from the tone of her voice that she really wasn't and was just lying her ass off about it.

"Percy," my mom said. "We have to..." Her voice faltered.

I looked back. In a flash of lightning, through the mud-splattered windshield, I saw something that made the hair on the back of my neck stand on end and my skin crawl. It was a figure lumbering towards us on the shoulder of the road – a huge, dark silhouette of a guy, like a football player. Except, he seemed to be holding a blanket over his head, and his top half was bulky and fuzzy. His upraised hands made it look like he had horns.

I swallowed hard. "Mom, who is – "

"Percy, Katie, get out of the car," my mother said, her voice deadly serious. "*Now.*"

Next to me, Katie groggily opened the passenger door, before she climbed out. Well, more like *fell* out. She fell to her knees before she stood up and, swayingly, gestured for me to follow her.

Just before I did, though, my mom grabbed my arm. "Percy," she said. "Do you see that big tree?"

"*What?*"

Another flash of lightning occurred and, through the open car door, I saw what she meant: there was a huge, White House Christmas tree-sized pine at the crest of the nearest hill.

"That's the property line," my mom said. "Get over that hill and you'll see a big farmhouse down in the valley. Take Katie with you. Run and don't look back. Don't stop until you reach the door."

"Mom, what are you saying? You're coming with us!"

Her face was pale, her eyes as sad as when she looked at the ocean. "Percy," she said. "Someone has to distract him so that you can get to safety, and Katie is in no condition to do so. Besides, I can't cross the property line."

"But..."

"We don't have time to argue, Percy. Go. Please."

I got mad then – mad at my mom, at my dad, and at the thing with horns that was lumbering towards us slowly and deliberately, like...*like a bull*.

But I also knew that my mom was right. So, with a grimace, I climbed out of the car before grabbing Katie around the waist, because I wasn't sure if she could walk on her own and

didn't want to risk it. Together, we started stumbling uphill through wet, waist-high grass.

Glancing back, I couldn't see what my mom was doing – it was too dark out – but I was able to get my first clear look at the monster. He was seven feet tall, easy, and he looked like something from the cover of *Muscle Man* magazine, what with his bulging biceps, triceps, and all the other 'ceps on his arms and legs. He also wore no clothes besides a pair of bright white, *Fruit of the Loom* briefs – which would've looked funny, save for the fact that the top half of his body was so scary. Because the coarse, brown hair that started at his bellybutton got thicker and thicker as it reached his shoulders...

...Until it reached his neck, which was a thick mass of muscle and fur that led up to his enormous, *bull-shaped* head, complete with a snout that was about as long as my forearm, snotty nostrils with a gleaming brass ring, cruel black eyes, gigantic black-and-white horns that had points I doubted you could get from an electric pencil sharpener.

I recognized the monster, all right. He had been in one of the first stories that Mr. Brunner had told us.

"Holy shit," I whispered, as terror clawed the walls of my stomach. "That's the –"

"Shh," Katie whispered back, before she let out a short giggle – yeah, she definitely *wasn't* okay. "Don't say his name, Percy. Names have power."

The pine tree was still too far away, I realized – like, a hundred yards up hill *at least*.

I glanced behind me again.

Much to my horror, the bull-man was hunched over our car, looking in the windows. Well, not looking exactly. More like snuffling, or nuzzling. Whatever. It doesn't really matter.

What *did* matter was the fact that I couldn't see my mom anywhere. She wasn't running towards us, or even standing several feet away from the car. Which meant...

As if on cue, the bull-man bellowed in rage. He grabbed the damaged roof of Gabe's Camaro – *not a scratch*, I couldn't help but remind myself – and completely tore it off, before reaching down into the car and pulling out my mom.

"No!" I shouted.

But the bull-man didn't hear me. I watched him squeeze her, and just as she started to struggle, kicking and pummeling the air, she *vanished*. Like, straight up disappeared as if she was never there, with no trace of her left.

"No!" I screamed again.

At that moment, the anger that I had felt just a few minutes before returned – only this time, it was ten times more powerful. I could barely think as it hit me, wave after wave of violent rage crashing against the shores of my mind and burying any and all other emotions in their wake.

I knew what I had to do.

“Katie,” I said, before gently sitting her down in the grass. “Stay here. I’ll be right back.”

She looked up at me, with dazed, glassy eyes. “Percy, what – ”

“Stay. Here,” I repeated myself, more firmly this time.

Then, I turned around to face the bull-man, who had gone back to snuffling the car – probably trying to sniff around for me, I couldn’t help but think. Angrily, I stripped off my red jacket, before reaching into my jeans’ pocket and pulling out the pen-sword. I uncapped it, causing the pen to transform into the bronze sword that had killed Mrs. Dodds not even a month ago.

The glittering of it must’ve caught the bull-man’s eye, because he turned towards me and roared.

But I wasn’t afraid. Fuck, I couldn’t even feel anything at all, except for that intense, burning rage.

“Hey, Meathead!” I shouted as I marched towards him. “You think you can kill my mom and get away with it? Huh? Huh?”

“Raaaaarrrr!” the monster said in response, shaking his meaty fists, before he did just the thing that I wanted him to:

He began to charge.

I shook my red jacket with my left hand to goad him on, while I tightened the grip that I had on the sword with my right. I watched as he ran towards me, his black eyes alight with his own rage, and despite myself, I couldn’t help but grin.

In the next moment, time seemed to slow down.

Because just as the bull-man was upon me, I dropped my jacket and ducked underneath him. At the same time, I lifted up my sword, which ran through his torso – yeah, I know. *Ouch*. – like it was butter, just like Mrs. Dodds.

I came to a sliding halt on the other side of the bull-man, shocked. I couldn’t believe that that had gone just like I had planned.

The bull-man roared in agony, causing me to turn around. I watched him flail and claw at his chest desperately, before he began to disintegrate like Mrs. Dodds had – crumbling like sand, only for the sand to be blown away by the wind.

The monster was gone.

All of the sudden, the adrenaline that I must’ve been experiencing ever since Katie had arrived at our cabin door earlier that night came crashing down. I felt exhausted, perhaps

more exhausted than I had ever felt before in my life, with a weakness in my bones that I wasn't expecting.

After a few moments of catching my breath, I stood on jelly-like legs and walked back over to Katie, capping my sword and putting the resulting pen in my pocket in the process. She must've passed out sometime while I was fighting the monster, because she was now laying in the grass with her eyes closed.

"Fuck," I breathed.

At least the rain had stopped.

Carefully, I grabbed Katie first by the torso, then by the legs, so that I was carrying her bridal-style. Thankfully, she wasn't all that heavy, because otherwise I don't think I could've carried her up the hill and down into the valley.

The lights of the farmhouse that my mom had been talking about were on. I trudged towards it, weary with both exhaustion and numbed grief, because I had just seen my mother die right before my eyes and I was too tired to even dwell on the fact, much less cry about it.

The last thing that I remember was a tall, blonde-haired guy running out of the farmhouse towards me, with a blonde-haired trailing behind him. "Hey," he said, his voice deep, but also...*caring*? I don't know. "Are you alright?"

"No," I managed to croak out.

"Well, you are now," the guy said as he slowly pulled Katie out of my grasp and – much to my surprise – handed her off to the girl walking behind him, who carried her off like it wasn't a problem at all. "Can you tell me your name?"

Blurily, I looked up at him. Squinted. I couldn't really make out his features – it was too dark, even with the light from the farmhouse – but I recognized his eyes. They were the same eyes that I had seen earlier that night in my dream, I knew. They had to be. They were colored with the same, icy blue shade.

"M Percy. Percy Jackson," I said, before I added, "Your eyes are really blue, did you know that?"

And then the world turned black.

## Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: Heaven Is A Place On Earth

Edit: The chapter turned out funky format-wise so I had to edit it lol. My bad.

# Heaven Is A Place On Earth

## Chapter Notes

Something that I forgot to explain (silly me!) at the end of last chapter: the bulla. As far as I know, the bulla is something that is completely Roman, not Greek. But, I put it in here anyways, because Katie needed to have a reason why monsters weren't attracting her and that was the first thing that came to mind ;)

Next chapter will be posted on Monday, so, I will see you then,  
~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

**You know that song by Belinda Castle, called *Heaven Is A Place On Earth* or something like that?**

For some reason, in my dreams – which didn't really make sense, anyways – that was all I could hear. And it was annoying. Like, *really* annoying. In fact, it was annoying enough that I woke up several times to complain about it, but what I heard and saw made no sense, so I just passed out again.

At one point, though, I must've been coherent enough to actually stay awake for longer than a minute or two, because I remember the same blonde-haired guy from before hovering over me, a gentle smile on his face as he spoon-fed me something that tasted like buttered popcorn, only it was pudding.

When he saw that my eyes were open, his smile widened. "How are you feeling?" he asked, and if I had been more coherent, I would've blushed at the way that his deep voice washed over me like the incoming tide.

"Like shit," I croaked. "Hey, can you stop the music...?"

He raised an eyebrow in an amused, but befuddled way. "What music?" he asked.

"That song," I mumbled in response. "You know..."

Before I could make even more of an idiot of myself by mumbling out the song lyrics, somebody knocked on the door, and the guy quickly filled my mouth with pudding. Rude, I thought mildly, before I passed out again.

Of course, the next time I woke up, the guy was gone.

A husky blonde dude, like a surfer, stood in the corner of the bedroom, keeping watch over me. He had blue eyes – at least a dozen of them – on his cheeks, his forehead, and even the



backs of his hands.

Vaguely, I remember screaming as soon as I saw him. But I don't remember much else outside of that.

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When I finally came around for good, there was nothing weird or scream-inducing about my surroundings, although they were a lot nicer than what I was used to. I was sitting in a deck chair on a huge porch, gazing across a meadow at green hills in the distance. The breeze smelled like strawberries. There was a blanket over my legs, and a pillow was situated nicely behind my neck.

The only thing that was wrong with the entire situation was that my mouth felt like it had been stung by a scorpion. My tongue was dry and nasty and every one of my teeth hurt.

On the table next to me was a tall drink. It kind of looked like iced apple juice or cider, with a green straw and a paper parasol stuck through a maraschino cherry.

I reached out for it and grabbed it, but my arm was so weak that I almost dropped the glass once I did.

"Careful," a familiar voice said, before chuckling softly.

Katie was leaning against the porch railing, looking like she typically did – and by that, I mean that no vines were snaking their way around her arms and legs or anything like that. She was wearing blue denim shorts, Converse hi-tops, and a bright orange T-shirt that had a black pegasus on it with black lettering that said *Camp Half-Blood*.

"You...you gave me quite a scare," she said, as she fiddled with a thread on her shorts. "I'm not sure how much you remember, but after the – well, after what happened to your mom, you left me on the hill and I thought you were...I thought you were..."

She thought I was going to die.

"How...how long have I been out?" I asked.

"Two days," she answered quietly.

I stared out across the meadow as the memories of what had happened flashed through my mind – Katie arriving at our cabin door, my mom driving like a maniac, my mom disappearing without a trace, etc., etc.

"Is she – is my mom really dead?" I asked.

Katie sniffled. "I don't know," she replied. "I didn't really see..."

But of course, we both knew that she was lying.

I was alone. An orphan. I would have to live with...well, I'd have to live *somewhere*. Not with Smelly Gabe, though, if I could help it. I would live on the streets first. I'd even pretend to be seventeen and join the army, if it boiled down to it.

"Don't strain yourself," Katie suddenly said. "Here." She walked over helped me hold my glass and put the straw to my lips.

At first, I recoiled at the taste, because I had been expecting apple juice, and it didn't taste like that at all. Instead, it tasted like chocolate-chip cookies, and not just any kind of chocolate-chip cookies, either – it tasted like my mom's homemade chocolate-chip cookies, all buttery and hot, with the chips still melting. Drinking it, my whole body began to feel warm and good, full of energy. My grief didn't go away, but I felt as if my mom had just brushed her hand against my cheek and given me a cookie the way that she used to when I was small, and told me that everything was going to be okay.

Before I knew it, I had drained the entire glass. I stared into it, because I was so sure that I had just had a warm drink, but the ice cubes had barely even melted.

"Was it good?" Katie asked softly.

I nodded.

"What did it taste like?"

"I'm sorry," I said. "I should've let you have some."

She laughed in response. "That's okay. I already had some today and you're not really supposed to drink that much of it, anyways, unless you want to spontaneously combust. I just...I was just wondering, that's all."

"Oh," I said lamely, not really sure what to say in response to that. "It tasted...it tasted like my mom's chocolate-chip cookies. Homemade."

She hummed in acknowledgement. "And how do you feel?"

I grinned. "Like I could kick Hudson Lake a thousand yards."

Katie laughed again, before she took the empty glass from me gingerly and set it back on the table. "That's good. Now, come on. Chiron and Mr. D are waiting."

I walked with her across the porch, which wrapped all the way around the farmhouse. My legs felt wobbly, trying to walk that far. But I didn't complain or anything like that, and when we came around to the opposite end of the house, I caught my breath.

We must've been on the north shore of the Sound, because on this side of the house, the valley marched all the way up to the water, which glittered about a mile in the distance. Between here and there, there was so much to see that I simply couldn't process everything. The landscape was dotted with buildings that looked like Ancient Greek architecture – an open-air pavilion, an amphitheater, and a circular-arena. And they all looked brand new, too, with white marble columns that sparkled in the sun.

In a nearby sandpit, a dozen or so kids around my age were playing volleyball, while canoes glided across a small lake. Kids in bright orange T-shirts like Katie's were chasing each other around a cluster of cabins nestled in the woods. Some shot targets at an archery range. Others rode *winged* horses – I had to do a double take at that one – down a wooded trail that looked worn down and well-used.

Overall, this place almost, *almost* looked like –

No. I shook my head. I just had that song stuck in my head for two days and I wasn't anxious to have it stuck in my head again for two more.

Down at the end of the porch, two men sat across from each other at the care table. The blonde-haired girl – who I vaguely remembered from the other night – was leaning on the porch rail next to them.

The man facing me was small and porky, with a red nose, big watery eyes, and wavy hair that was so black it was almost purple. He kind of looked like those paintings of baby angels – called cherubs, I think – except he was wearing a tiger-pattern Hawaiian shirt and he didn't look as nearly as happy as those cherubs usually do. For some reason, I had the feeling that he would've fit right in at one of Gabe's poker parties. Maybe he could've even out-gambled my stepfather.

"That's Mr. D," Katie murmured to me. "He's the camp director. Be polite. And the girl, that's Annabeth Chase. She's just a camper, but she's been here almost as long as I have. And, of course, you know Chiron..."

She pointed at the guy whose back was to me.

First, I realized that the guy was sitting in a wheelchair. Then, I recognized the tweed jacket, and relief washed over me as I realized who the guy was.

"Mr. Brunner!" I cried.

The Latin teacher turned and smiled at me. His eyes had this mischievous glint to them, like he was going to spring a pop quiz on me again and all of the multiple choice answers would be 'B'.

"Ah, good, Percy," he said. "Now we have four for pinochle."

He gestured for me to take the chair to the right of Mr. D, who looked at me with bloodshot eyes and heaved a great sigh. "Oh, I suppose I'm going to have to say it, aren't I? Welcome to Camp Half-Blood. There. Now, don't expect me to be glad to see you."

"Uh, thanks, I guess?" I said, before I scooted away just a little bit, because there was *no way* that this guy wasn't an alcoholic and I didn't want to deal with the possibility that his drunken lashing outs could be even badder than Gabe's.

"Annabeth?" Mr. Brunner called out to the blonde-haired girl.

She came forward and Mr. Brunner introduced us. “Percy, this is Annabeth. She was one of the two people that helped you and Katie the other night. Annabeth, my dear, why don’t you go and check on Percy’s bunk? We’ll be putting him in Cabin Eleven for now, I think.”

Annabeth said, “Sure, Chiron.”

She was probably around two years younger than me, I thought, although she was around my height and a lot more athletic-looking. With her deep tan and loosely-curled blonde hair, she was almost exactly what I thought a stereotypical Californian girl would look like, except her eyes were a deep, stormy grey rather than a light, ocean blue. They kind of looked like Necess – *Ananke*’s, I corrected myself. They kind of looked like Ananke’s.

She turned to look at me then, with an expression that was carefully blank, like she was trying to be intimidating or something. Oh. So that’s how it was. I did my best to give her a nice smile, but all she did in response was huff and sprint down the lawn, her blonde hair flying behind her.

Katie snorted. Loudly.

Mr. Brunner sighed. “Well, I suppose that was too much to ask for,” he said. “Now, Percy, tell me: how much have you figured out so far? Because Katie has told me you figured out quite a bit before everything, well...*happened*.”

I swallowed nervously. “Well,” I said, as I watched Mr. D shuffle the cards. “I know that the Greek myths have to exist, because Mrs. Dodds was obviously a monster and the Mino –”

“Pasiphaë’s son,” Mr. Brunner supplied. “Remember, Percy names have power.”

“And Pasiphaë’s son exists,” I corrected myself. “Also, Katie said she was a daughter of Demeter and everyone is calling you Chiron, which was the name of the trainer of heroes in the Greek myths.”

“Oh, I like this one,” Mr. D said giddily before he doled out the cards. “Smart. And not in a way that’s obnoxious, like my dear half-sister’s children.”

“I must say, Percy,” Mr. Brunner – *Chiron* broke in. “I’m glad to see that you’re alive. It’s been a long time since I’ve made a house call to a potential camper, or since a camper has been called in to watch over a potential one. I’d hate to think that we’d wasted our time.”

“House call, sir?”

“Our year at Yancy Academy,” he said. “Usually, campers find their way here because they’ve either been sent by their mortal parent, or because they received a vision from their godly one. But Katie, here...”

“I received a message from my mother telling me to find you,” Katie interrupted. “So I did. Then, when I realized that there was something special about you, I told Chiron to come upstate.”

“Wait,” I said. “Hold on. *Demeter* told you to come find me? Why? What makes me so special?”

Mr. D snorted. Chiron glanced at him, almost in a warning way, before he turned to look back at me. “One thing you must understand, Percy,” he said. “Is that the gods can be...secretive. Sometimes, they know things that no one else – not even other gods – knows.”

“That’s one way of putting it,” Mr. D muttered. “Peter, you do know how to play pinochle, right?”

I stared at him, unblinking for several moments, before I realized that he must have been referring to me when he said that, and that it must’ve been my turn and I hadn’t done anything yet. “It’s Percy, sir,” I said. “And I’m afraid I don’t.”

“Sir,” he repeated humorously. “Well, *Peter*, pinochle is, along with gladiator fighting and Pac-Man, one of the greatest games ever invented by humans. I would expect all civilized young men to know it.”

“I’m sure the boy can learn,” Chiron said.

“No matter,” Mr. D replied, before snapping his fingers. In an instant, all of the pinochle cards disappeared, causing Katie to give him an irritated look. I’m sure he must’ve seen it, but he ignored it and instead turned to me. “What else do you know? You know the obvious but you’re not telling it. Speak.”

“Mr. D,” Chiron warned.

Now, it probably would’ve been interesting to see just how Chiron could’ve chewed out Mr. D – because I had a feeling that the guy was a *lot* more powerful than my Latin teacher – but I didn’t let him do that. Because as much as I wanted him to, there was an itch at the back of my mind that had to be scratched, and I’d been ignoring it ever since Katie had first revealed that she was a daughter of Demeter.

“I’m a demigod, aren’t I?” I asked.

“That’s debatable,” Mr. D said, before he waved his hand. A goblet suddenly appeared on the table and filled itself with red wine.

Chiron barely even looked at it. “Mr. D,” he said. “Your restrictions.”

Mr. D looked at the wine and feigned surprise. “Dear me,” he said, before looking up at the sky and yelling, “Old habits! Sorry!”

Despite the clear day, thunder rumbled somewhere in the distance.

Mr. D waved his hand again, except this time, the goblet changed into a fresh can of Diet Coke. He sighed unhappily, popped the top off of the soda, and looked out at the valley with a frown on his face.

Chiron winked at me. “Mr. D offended his father a while back – took fancy to a wood nymph who had been declared off-limits.”

“A wood nymph,” I repeated, while I may or may not have stared at the Diet Coke as if it had come from outer space (although, to be fair, for all I knew it probably had).

“Yes!” Mr. D confessed. “Father loves to punish me. The first time, Prohibition. Ghastly! What an absolutely horrid ten years! The second time – well, she was really pretty and I couldn’t stay away – the second time he sent me here. Half-Blood Hill. A place for brats like you and Kathleen here. ‘Be a better influence,’ he told me. ‘Work with youths rather than tearing them down.’ Ha! Absolutely unfair – not to mention hypocritical.”

I stared at him unfathomably for a few moments, before something in my head finally *clicked*. “You’re Dionysus, aren’t you?” I asked. “The god of wine.”

Mr. D rolled his eyes. “What do the kids say these days, Kathleen? Do they say, ‘Well, duh!’?”

“Yes, sir,” Katie said, whilst wrinkling her nose at the name that he had called her.

“Then, well, duh! Did you think that I was Aphrodite, perhaps?”

I ignored his jab. “Wait,” I said. “What did you mean when you said ‘that’s debatable’?”

“Hmm,” Mr. D replied. “Not as smart as I thought. I’m surprised. What I meant, boy, was that obviously *someone* up there finds you special, and that could be for a number of reasons. Maybe because you’re their kid, or maybe because you’re the kid of someone else. Like, say, a titan. Probably not a primordial, though.” He paused and squinted at me. “You don’t have the symptoms of one, anyways.”

I was about to ask him what he meant by that, but then he yawned and stood up. “I’m tired,” he said. “I believe I’ll take a nap before the sing-along tonight.”

And with that, he swept into the farmhouse.

I turned back to face Chiron and Katie. “So, is that it?” I asked. “Am I really a...”

“Half-blood?” Chiron said. When I nodded, he continued, “Yes, Percy. For now, though, don’t dwell on that. Because right now, we should get you a bunk in Cabin Eleven. There will be new friends to meet. And plenty of time for lessons tomorrow. Besides, there will be s’mores at the campfire tonight, and I simply adore chocolate.”

And then, much to my surprise, Chiron rose from his wheelchair. But there was something odd about the way he did it, because while the blankets fell away from his legs, they didn’t move. Instead, his waist kept getting longer and longer, rising above his belt. Belatedly, I realized that his waist was not a human waist, but an *animal* one – specifically that of a white horse. Which made sense, I also realized, because in the myths Chiron *was* a centaur.

Nevertheless, I couldn’t help but stare as he finished getting out of the wheelchair, which must’ve been charmed with magic or something like that, like Katie’s bulla. I’m pretty sure

my mouth even dropped open.

“What a relief,” he said. “I’d been cooped up in there so long, my fetlocks had fallen asleep. Now, come, Percy Jackson. Let’s meet the other campers.”

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: Does Love At Third Sight Exist? ;)

Does Love At Third Sight Exist?

Chapter Notes

So, I had a slight brain malfunction Wednesday morning and thought that it had been Friday! My bad lol. Here's your Friday update as promised. ;)

I don't really have anything left to say other than that, other than thank you so much for all of your feedback so far and I'll see you on Monday,
~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Katie left me and Chiron not very long after he started his tour.

I understood why, especially after she explained her reasoning and whatever. You see, Katie was something of a “year-rounder” – most people only stayed at camp for the summer, apparently – and after having spent the entire school year with me, sans Christmas, she wanted to talk with her old friends and check out her cabin and whatnot.

Which was fine with me. Really. I mean, my only concern at this point was making sure that I did not walk behind Chiron, because despite the fact that he was the trainer of heroes and a good guy and all that, I did *not* trust his back end the way that I trusted his front.

We passed the volleyball pit early on in the tour. Several of the campers there turned to look at me and nudged each other. One of them even pointed at me and muttered, “That’s *him*.”

I didn’t really know what to think about that.

I mean, most of the campers here were my age, if not a little bit older. I’d never really had my own age outside of Katie he impressed at me and something that I’d done, so the fact that everyone was in awe of me now for killing the Minotaur – names don’t have power when you just think of them, right? – was a little weird, to say the least.

While we were walking away from the volleyball pit, I turned and looked back at the farmhouse. It was a lot bigger than I’d realized – four stories tall, sky blue with white trim, like an upscale sea resort. I was checking out the brass eagle weather vane on top when a flicker of movement in the uppermost window of the attic gable caught my eye. It was like something had moved the curtain, just for a second, and I had the distinct impression that I was being watched.

“What’s up there?” I asked Chiron.

He looked to where I was pointing, and his smile faded a little. “Just the attic.”

“Does somebody live there?”

“No,” he said with finality. “Not a single living thing.”

I got the feeling that he was being truthful. But, at the same time, I was also sure that something had moved the curtain.

“Come along, Percy,” Chiron said, his lighthearted tone a little forced. “Lots to see.”

After that, we walked through the strawberry fields, where two campers – Castor and Pollux, were their names – were picking bushels of berries. Chiron told me while we watched them work that the camp grew a nice crop to export to New York restaurants and Mount Olympus – which was apparently resting above New York, now. Something about “*the gods move with the spirit of the West*” and all that.

He also said that Mr. D had this effect on fruit-bearing plants: they just went crazy when he was around. It worked best with wine grapes – something which Castor and Pollux snickered at – but Mr. D was restricted from growing those, so they grew strawberries instead.

We went to the woods, next, which took up *at least* a quarter of the valley, with trees that were so tall and thick that I imagined that they had been there since before the colonization of the Americas. Chiron told me that they were also stocked with monsters, just in case “*I wanted to try my luck*” (yeah, right. I’d already had enough experience with Mrs. Dodds and the Minotaur to last me a lifetime), and that Capture the Flag would also take place there Friday night.

I kind of wanted to ask just how productive capturing the flag could be with monsters trying to chase after me on top of trying to beat the other team, but I kept my mouth shut and didn’t press my luck.

Then we went to the archery range, the canoeing lake, the stables (which Chiron didn’t seem to like very much), the javelin range, the sing-along amphitheater, and the arena where Chiron said they held sword and spear fights – which also seemed kind of *off* to me at first, but the more I thought about it, the more that I realized it made sense.

Chiron pointed out the outdoor pavilion while we were walking towards the cabins. It was on a hill overlooking the sea, and the dozen stone picnic tables that were there were framed in white Grecian columns. There was no roof, nor were there any walls.

This was the one thing that I couldn’t help but question. “What do you do when it rains?” I asked.

In response, Chiron looked at me as if I’d gone a little weird. *Rude*. “We still have to eat, don’t we?” he replied, as if it was the most obvious answer in the world.

Wisely, I decided to drop the subject.

Just like how there had been a dozen picnic tables at the pavilion, there were a dozen cabins, nestled in the woods by the lake. They were arranged in a ‘U’, with two at the base and five

in a row on either side. And they were, without a doubt, the most bizarre collection of cabins that I'd ever seen.

...I mean, *none* of these cabins looked alike, save for the fact that each had a large brass number above the door (odds on the left, evens on the right). Number nine had smokestacks, like it was a tiny factory or something like that. Number four looked exactly like a hobbit house from *The Lord of the Rings*, complete with a circular door and a grass roof and everything. Seven seemed to be solid gold, which was funny, because eight seemed to be the exact same in that regards, except it looked like it was made of silver, not gold.

All of the cabins, though, were facing a commons area about the size of a soccer field that was dotted with Greek statues, fountains, flower beds, and a couple of basketball hoops. There was also a huge, stone-lined fire pit in the center of the field, and it was alight with a fire that was being tended by a girl who couldn't have been more than nine- or ten-years-old.

Chiron led me around the cabins, starting off with the evens side first. When we got to the pair of cabins at the head of the field, I couldn't help but notice that they stood out like a pair of sore thumbs. Because while all of the other cabins seemed to be individual and personalized, these two...were not. In fact, if anything they looked like big, white mausoleums, with bronze doors and white columns. Only the second of the cabins seemed to be a little personalized, with slimmer columns garlanded with pomegranates and flowers and peacock carvings on its walls.

"Zeus and Hera?" I guessed.

"Correct," Chiron said.

"Their cabins look empty."

"Several of the cabins are," Chiron admitted. "That's true. No one ever stays in one or two."

Okay, I thought. So each cabin for a different god – err, Olympian, since there's only twelve of them. That makes sense. But why would some be empty?

For some reason that I couldn't explain, I came to a stop in front of the first cabin on the left. Cabin Three.

It wasn't high and mighty like the first two cabins were, but long and low and solid. The outer walls were made of rough grey stone studded with pieces of seashell and coral, as if the slabs had been hewn straight from the bottom of the ocean floor. I peeked inside the open doorway and Chiron said, "Oh, I wouldn't do that!"

But before he could pull me back, I got a good glimpse of the interior. The walls inside glowed like abalone, and there were six bunk beds with ocean blue silk sheets that were turned down – as if nobody had ever slept there. Despite that, though, there was a salty scent in the air, like the wind on the shore at Montauk.

I felt Chiron place a hand on my shoulder. "Come along, Percy," he said.

Most of the other cabins were crowded with campers.

Number five was bright red – a real nasty paint job, as if the color had been splashed on with buckets and fists. The roof was lined with barbed wire and a stuffed boar’s head hung over the doorway, with eyes that seemed to follow me. Inside, I could see a bunch of mean-looking kids, both girls and boys, arm-wrestling and arguing with each other while rock music blared. The loudest was a girl my age, with a camouflage jacket over her Camp Half-Blood T-shirt. When she saw that I was watching her, she gave me a wicked-looking smirk, but otherwise didn’t say or do anything else.

Nevertheless, I kept walking, trying to stay clear of Chiron’s hooves. “We haven’t seen any other centaurs,” I observed.

“No,” Chiron said sadly. “Most of my kinsmen are a wild and barbaric folk, I’m afraid. You might encounter them in the wilderness, or at major sporting events. But you won’t see any here.”

I couldn’t help but notice how he said *most* of his kinsmen. Not all. But the way he didn’t elaborate on that led me to believe that it was a touchy subject, so I didn’t say anything at all.

Besides, we’d reached the end of the cabins on the left, anyways. To my surprise, the girl I’d met at the Big House – Annabeth, I reminded myself – was sitting on the steps of Cabin Eleven, the last cabin, reading a book. I tried to see what the title of the book was, but I couldn’t make out the title because it looked Greek to me. Like, *actual* Greek. But there were pictures of temples and statues and different kinds of columns and things like that, so I figured it must’ve been some sort of architecture book.

“Annabeth,” Chiron greeted her. “I have a masters’ archery class at noon. Would you take Percy from here?”

She looked up, then over at me critically. She had that look on her face again, that carefully blank one, but nonetheless she replied politely, “Yes, sir.”

Chiron nodded, obviously pleased. “Cabin Eleven,” he told me as he gestured towards the doorway. “Make yourself at home.”

Out of all of the cabins, Cabin Eleven looked the most like a regular old summer cabin, with the emphasis on *old*. The threshold was worn down, the brown paint peeling. Over the doorway was one of those doctor’s symbols – the one that was a winged pole with two snakes wrapped around it. *A caduceus*, I thought.

Inside, it was *packed* with people, both boys and girls. In fact, I was relatively certain that there were way more people than there were bunk beds. The sleeping bags spread all over the floor only cemented that idea.

Chiron didn’t go in. The door was too low for him. But when the campers saw him they all stood and bowed respectfully.

“Well then,” he said. “Good luck, Percy. I’ll see you at dinner.”

He galloped away towards the archery range.

I stood in the doorway, looking at the kids. They weren't bowing anymore. They were staring at me, sizing me up. I knew this routine. It was one I was all too familiar with, given how many schools I'd gone to over the years.

"Well?" Annabeth prompted, her voice annoyed. "Go on."

I walked in, making sure not to trip over the doorway, with Annabeth following right behind me. When we were both inside, she announced, "Percy Jackson, meet Cabin Eleven."

"Regular or undetermined?" a lanky boy with black hair and an eyepatch – yes, an *actual* pirate-y eyepatch, I shit you not – towards the front asked.

I didn't know what to say, but that was fine, because Annabeth spoke for me.
"Undetermined."

Everybody groaned.

"Now, now, campers," a familiar voice said. "That's what we're here for. Welcome, Percy. You can have that spot on the floor, right over there."

I looked up in surprise, because the same blonde-haired guy that had taken Katie out of my arms the other night and spoon-fed me that popcorn pudding was speaking. And, now that I could see his features in full light and without the hinderance of illness, I couldn't help but admit that *damn*, was he *hot*.

He looked to be around seventeen or so, and he was tall (the tallest guy at camp, probably – Chiron excluded of course) with short-cropped hair and a friendly smile. He wore an orange tank top with cutoffs, sandals, and a leather necklace with five different clay-colored beads. The only thing that may have been off-putting about his appearance was the fact that he had a long, thick white scar from just beneath his right eye to his jaw, like an old knife slash.

But to me it just made him look all the more handsome.

Nervously, I looked at him, keenly aware of the fact that my face was beginning to burn something hot. But all he did was smile, and his icy blue eyes were warm and comforting.

"This is Luke," Annabeth said, oblivious to the fact that I was about to spontaneously combust from a mixture of attraction and embarrassment. "He's going to be your counselor for now."

I blinked, before forcing myself to look at her. "For now?" I asked.

"You're undetermined," Luke explained, and somehow I found myself blushing even harder. "They don't know what cabin to put you in, so you're here. Cabin Eleven takes all newcomers, all visitors. Naturally, we would. Hermes, our patron god, is the god of travelers, after all."

“And thieves,” a guy about the same age as Luke with brown hair and hazel-blue eyes pointed out with a grin.

“And trade,” the guy next to him, who I presumed was his identical twin, said.

“And just about everything else you can imagine,” Luke finished with a roll of his eyes. “Yes, thank you, Travis, Connor. Annabeth, I know that Chiron probably told you to help Percy with the rest of his introduction, but I think we can take it from here now.”

Annabeth looked like she wanted to say something, but after quickly glancing at me, she nodded and walked out. Good. I wasn’t really in the mood to deal with her anyways.

When she left, it was kind of awkward for a few moments, as everybody was looking at me and I was looking at them, doing the best to wish away my blush. No one said anything.

Finally, though, somebody let out a snicker, and everyone started to laugh. Not sure of what else to do, I smiled as best as I could, while Luke chuckled and bumped me with his arm. “Not bad,” he said. “Not has at all. For a newbie, anyways.”

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Over the next few hours, most of the other kids in the cabin eagerly acquainted themselves with me.

Travis and Connor Stoll, the two guys that I had thought were identical twins from before, actually weren’t identical twins. They were Irish twins, though, as Connor was apparently born two weeks from Travis’s first birthday. They were sons of Hermes, though, and that combined with their similar feature was enough to make me convinced that they were the real life versions of Fred and George Weasley from *Harry Potter*.

Chris Rodriguez, Ceryx Lane, and Cecil Rogers were all sons of Hermes, too. In fact they, along with the Stolls and Luke, were the only children of Hermes in the entire cabin. Apparently the only daughters that Hermes had ever had were all goddesses, so the only children of his that had ever stayed at Camp Half-Blood were, obviously, sons.

Then there was Ethan Nakamura, the guy with the eyepatch from before. He was a son of Nemesis. His best friend, a guy named Alabaster Torrington, was a son of Hecate, and his half-sister was a girl called Lou Ellen. (And she was a little terrifying, not gonna lie.)

And those were just the first few people who introduced themselves to me. There were so many more people in the cabin that I just couldn’t keep track of their faces, much less their names. In fact, by the time that everybody had seemingly had enough with me, my mind was swimming with all of the knowledge it had just acquired.

That was how Luke found me on my tiny section of floor, sleeping bag already splayed out. I had the palms of my hands pressed against my eyes as I tried to take it all in, when I heard him ask me, “Hey, you alright?”

Blearily, I looked up. “Yeah,” I replied, before I shook my head. “No. I don’t know.”

He laughed softly, before sitting down next to me. “I know the feeling,” he said. “Is there anything you wanna talk about? Anything you wanna ask me?”

*Yeah, I thought. I wanna know just why you were in my dream the other night. Among other things. Like –*

“Uh, how long am I gonna stay here?” I asked.

“Good question,” he said. “Until you’re determined, which can take – well, it depends. For some people, it happens relatively fast. Others...” he trailed off and shrugged.

I didn’t really know what to say in response to that, so instead I just nodded mutely. That seemed to bother him, though, because in the next moment Luke patted my arm and gave me a grin. “Don’t worry about that, though,” he said. “‘Cause I think you should be worried about other things.”

“Like what?”

He hummed. “Like...maybe the fact that you talk in your sleep?”

My eyes widened. He laughed. But before I could ask just what he meant by that, he got up and walked away, hands in his pockets as he went to go check on some of our cabin mates.

*Fuck, I thought as my eyes trailed after him, I am so screwed.*

## Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: I Sacrifice Brisket For The Gods

# I Sacrifice Brisket For The Gods

## Chapter Notes

Hello, my lovelies! Another shorter chapter for today. Wednesday's chapter is longer, though, at a whopping 4.6k, so I think that more than makes up for this one ;)

The next two weeks are gonna get a little hectic in terms of scheduling. I got important stuff to do on May 13th, May 20th, and May 21st, so I may wind up not updating at all on any of those days for either of my current fics. I don't know. Just wish me luck with my important stuff, because let's just say I'm going to be really upset if I wind up screwing up somehow when doing them!

See you on Wednesday,  
~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

**A few hours later, Luke rounded up the entire cabin and we headed outside for dinner.**

We lined up in seniority – so, of course, I was all the way in the back. Campers came out from the other cabins, too, except for the three cabins at the end, and cabin eight, which was starting to glow in the moonlight.

We started to march up the hill and into the mess pavilion when, all of the sudden, the guy in front of me – Alabaster, the son of Hecate – groaned. “You just *had* to attract her, didn't you?” he mumbled towards me.

I looked to see what he was talking about. A girl about our age was walking towards us, with a trail of four campers walking behind her. She had long, black hair and a face that could've probably rivaled Helen of Troy's in terms of beauty. And her eyes were ever-changing, like a kaleidoscope's, which were somehow complimented by the orange T-shirt and denim shorts that she was wearing.

In fact, if I wasn't one-hundred-percent gay, I probably would've fallen in love with her right then and there.

“Hello! Percy, isn't it?” she said as a greeting. “My name is Silena, Silena Beauregard. I'm the head of Cabin 10, aka Aphrodite's Cabin. And these are my half-siblings: Drew, Laurel, Mitchell, and Lacy.”

Silena's half-siblings said hello. I said hi back.

“What do you want, Silena?” Alabaster asked as we trudged along, a scowl on his face, with a *very* noticeable pink tinge to his cheeks. “Trying to play matchmaker again, are you?”

“Please, Ally,” she said in a tone that was both offended and playful. “You know me better than that! I just wanted to get to know our newest camper!”

“Yeah, so you can set him up,” Alabaster mumbled.

She ignored him. “Are you settling in fine with Cabin Eleven?” she asked me. “I know finding out that you’re a demigod can be quite a shock and all.”

“Uh, yeah,” I said lamely. “Cabin Eleven’s great.”

As soon as I said that, her smile widened. “Excellent!” she exclaimed. “Well, if you ever need anything, just know that Cabin Ten’s door is always open for you! Right, guys?”

“Right,” her half-siblings repeated, although the black-haired girl – Drew – didn’t really sound all that excited about it.

“Uh, okay,” I said.

“Ta-ta, now!” Silena smiled, before she and her somewhat-merry troop of half-siblings walked away.

I turned to Alabaster. “What was that about?” I asked.

His scowl deepened. “I’ll tell you later,” he said, his voice irritated.

But I had a feeling that he had no intentions of doing so.

At the pavilion, torches blazed around the marble columns. A central fire burned in a bronze brazier the size of a bathtub. Each cabin had its own table, which may not have been a problem for some cabins, but certainly was for ours. Not knowing what else to do, I moved to sit at the edge of the bench, but before I could the seat was taken.

“Can’t find a seat?” Luke asked as he spontaneously appeared behind me. When I nodded, he said, “Well...can’t say that we won’t get in trouble for it, but I have an idea.”

I opened my mouth to ask what exactly he meant by that, but before I could even get a word out, he grabbed me by the waist and sat us down in the middle of one of the benches, so that I was sitting on top of him. Immediately, everyone at our table started snickering – Alabaster and Ethan especially.

I think it goes without saying that my face turned redder than a tomato.

Anxiously, I looked around, trying to see if anyone had noticed. Katie was sitting at table four all by herself, looking rather bored – she must’ve been the only person in her cabin, I realized. *That must suck.* Mr. D and the two boys from the strawberry fields, Pollux and Castor, sat at table twelve with Chiron standing off to the side, and I didn’t know whether to be amused at the fact that the twins were Mr. D’s kids or at the fact that the picnic tables were obviously way too small for a centaur.



Annabeth sat at table six with a bunch of serious-looking athletic kids, all with the same grey eyes and golden-blond hair. Idly, I wondered what god or goddess was their godly parent. They kind of reminded me of Apollo, but I was pretty sure that the dozen or so kids sitting at table seven were. Why I thought that, though, well...your guess is as good as mine.

When I looked at table ten, though, I felt myself freeze, ever so slightly. Because while no one else had seemed to notice what had just happened, Silena Beauregard most certainly *had*. And a large smile was slowly spreading its way across her face.

Suddenly, I didn't need to ask Alabaster about why he had been throwing such a fuss earlier.

The sound of Chiron pounding one of his hooves against the marble floor of the pavilion snapped me out of my worrying. Everybody fell silent as they turned to look at him. He raised a glass. "To the gods!" he shouted.

We all copied him. "To the gods!"

A bunch of girls with loosely-curved hair and green-tinted pointed ears suddenly walked forward with platters of food: apples, strawberries, cherries, fresh bread, and yes, barbecue! My glass was empty, but Luke whispered into my ear, "Speak to it. Whatever you want – nonalcoholic, of course."

With a blush, I said, "Cherry Coke."

Immediately, the glass filled with sparkling caramel liquid.

I got an idea. "*Blue* Cherry Coke," I said, speaking a little firmer this time, just in case.

The soda turned a violent shade of cobalt.

Nervously, I took a sip. *Perfect*.

I drank a toast to my mother.

*She's not gone*, I thought to myself. *She can't be. I mean, people don't just straight up vanish when they die. There has to be a reasonable explanation for this – even in this world of gods, demigods, and monsters...*

"Here you go, Percy," Luke said as he loaded up my plate.

It all looked *so* good. Maybe even better than that cider stuff that I had had earlier that day. But before I could dig in, I noticed everybody getting up and carrying their plates towards the fire in the center of the pavilion. I wondered if they were going for dessert or something.

"Come on," Luke told me.

As I got closer, I saw that everyone was taking a portion of their meal and dropping it into the fire – things like the ripest strawberry, or the juiciest slice of beef, or the warmest, most buttery roll.

Luke murmured into my ear, “Burnt offerings for the gods. They like the smell.”

“You’re kidding.”

His look warned me not to take this lightly, but even so, I couldn’t help but wonder why an immortal, all-powerful being would like the smell of burning food.

Luke approached the fire, bowed his head, and tossed in a cluster of red fat grapes.

“Hermes.”

I was next.

I wished I knew what god’s name to say.

But then, an idea struck me.

As I scrapped a big slice of brisket into the flames, I whispered, “Hermes. And Dad.”

When I caught a whiff of the smoke, I didn’t gag.

It smelled nothing like burnt food. Instead, it smelled like my mom’s chocolate-chip cookies, like hot chocolate and brownies and hamburgers on the grill and wildflowers, and all sorts of other heavenly things. In fact, smelling it, I could almost believe that the gods could live off of it.

When everybody had returned to their seats (or, in my case, Luke’s lap) and finished eating their meals, Chiron pounded his hoof again for our attention. Then, Mr. D got up with a huge sigh. “Yes, alright,” he said. “I suppose I must say hello to all of you brats. Well, hello. Our activities director, Chiron, says the next capture the flag game is this Friday. Cabin Five presently holds the laurels.”

A bunch of ugly cheering rose from table five. I figured they were Ares’s kids.

“Personally,” Mr. D continued. “I couldn’t care less, but congratulations. Also, I should tell you that we have a new camper today. Peter Johnson.”

Chiron murmured something.

“Err, Percy Jackson,” Mr. D corrected himself. “That’s right. Hurrah, and all that. Now run along to your silly campfire. Go on.”

Everybody cheered. We all headed down towards the amphitheater, where Apollo’s cabin – the table seven kids. I was right about that – led a sing-along. We sang camp songs about the gods and ate s’mores and joked around, and the funny thing was, nobody was staring at me like they had earlier that day.

I felt that I was home.

Later in the evening, when the sparks from the campfire were curling into the sky, a conch horn blew, and we all filed back to our cabins. I didn’t realize how exhausted I was until I

collapsed on my sleeping bag.

My fingers curled around the pen-sword, which was now in my shorts' pocket. It was a miracle that the Stolls hadn't stolen it yet.

I thought about my mom, but I had good thoughts: her smile, the bedtime stories she would read to me when I was a kid, and the way she would tell me not to let the bed bugs bite.

With a smile, I closed my eyes and prepared to fall asleep.

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What must've been hours later, I opened my eyes with a grimace.

Despite my exhaustion, I couldn't fall asleep. My mind was racing too fast, still in disbelief about everything that I'd experienced over the past few days. And I knew from experience that there was no point in trying to sleep now, because I wouldn't be able to until my brain settled down, at least somewhat.

I sat up and looked around. Everybody was sleeping – the Hermes kids in four of the bunks (Travis and Connor shared a bunk, as did Ceryx and Cecil), while everyone else slept in either the remaining two bunks (as was the case with Ethan and Alabaster, along with Lou and an undetermined girl I couldn't remember the name of) or in one of the sleeping bags strewn out across the floor.

As quietly as I could, I slipped out of my sleeping bag and walked across the floor. I'd learned a few tricks from living with Gabe over the years, so I was pretty damn quiet – quiet enough, even, that I was able to slip out the door with not even one person stirring.

Earlier that day, while on the tour with Chiron, I had noticed a tree at the back of the cabin that looked relatively close to the wall, so I went to go check it out. True to my calculations, it was pretty darn close to the wall, with branches that made for easy climbing. Within a matter of minutes, I had climbed up the tree and onto the roof, which I quietly tip-toed on before finding a nice place to sit near the front of the cabin.

Silently, I looked up at the stars and did my best to pick out the constellations, because if there was one thing that my mom had made sure that I knew, it was them. Without fail, I picked out Perseus – my namesake, and *gods* didn't the reason for that make sense now – and then Andromeda and Orion. Cygnus was up, too, along with Hercules and Lyra and Ophiuchus.

I was so lost in my stargazing, that when I heard Luke say from behind me, "You do know that sneaking out of your cabin isn't allowed here, right?", I almost jumped out of my skin.

I turned to glare at him. "You know, it isn't nice to sneak up on people," I accused.

He snorted, before walking across the roof and sitting down next to me. "Just like it's not nice to give your counselor a heart attack by slipping out of the cabin?" he said, before he

paused. “I’m sorry. I really should be complimenting you. It’s not often that somebody who isn’t a child of Hermes manages to sneak out without me instantly knowing.”

“How do you know that I’m not a child of Hermes?” I blurted out, before I found myself blushing. Again.

I really needed to teach myself how to not do that.

Thankfully, though, Luke didn’t notice – perhaps because it was too dark out to. “Well,” he said. “For one, you don’t have the sneakiness for it, no offense. I’m pretty sure that you successfully sneaking out tonight was a fluke. And you don’t really have the coloring of a child of Hermes, either. Most of the ones that I’ve met, save for Chris, have some sort of blonde or brown hair and blue eyes. You don’t.”

“And I’m important,” I added when he stopped talking. “I...I’m sorry. That was probably uncalled for. It’s just...I don’t understand. Why me? What’s so important about me that Katie’s mom sent her to find me? I’m just a...”

Suddenly, Luke grabbed my arm – not hard. Just enough to jolt me ever so slightly. “Don’t you dare say that you’re ‘just a nobody’,” he warned, and despite the darkness I could see his icy blue eyes flash dangerously. “Nobody is just a nobody, regardless of who their parents are. Or how important they are. Although,” he continued, his voice softening quite a bit as he did so, “You are right. Children of Hermes...we aren’t particularly important. At least, not when compared to others.”

“Like who?”

He hesitated, as if he wanted to tell me something that he knew he probably shouldn’t. “Like children of Demeter,” he finally said, but I could tell that it wasn’t the answer that he really wanted to tell me. “I know she probably doesn’t seem like it, but Katie is...*powerful*. It comes with being a child of one of the original gods. In fact, I’m pretty sure that she could probably whoop everybody’s ass in this entire camp if she really wanted to.”

“Even yours?” I asked as I began to laugh at the imagery, unable to help myself.

He chuckled, too. “Even mine. In fact, I rue the day that I get on her nerves. Travis did once, though. It wasn’t pretty. He had flowers growing out of his ears for a week.”

If anything, all that did was make me laugh even harder. I didn’t even think about the fact that Luke had just most likely given me a nudge towards figuring out who my dad actually was, or about the fact that that first part of the speech he had told me was obviously rehearsed, or at least said many times over.

After a few minutes of chuckling amongst ourselves, Luke and I both finally calmed down to the point that he obviously felt good about us going back inside. “Better?” he asked me as he stood up, before reaching down and offering me a hand.

“Better,” I said honestly.

“That’s good,” he said. “That’s good. We should probably be heading back inside, anyways. Wouldn’t want the harpies to eat us.”

I started to giggle again, even if the serious look on Luke’s face told me that he (most likely) wasn’t joking.

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So, yeah, that was how my first day at Camp Half-Blood went.

I only wish I’d known how briefly I would get to enjoy my new home.

## Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: We Capture A Flag

# We Capture A Flag

## Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Here is the big chapter I was telling you all about haha. It's honestly a bit of a whirlwind, but I'm sure that you will all enjoy it a lot – especially one scene in particular, although I shan't say which one that is for fear of spoiling it. ;)

We're approaching the end of the 12 or so chapters that I speed-wrote in the first two weeks of publishing this story. Never fear, though; I have plenty of free time on my hands right now (don't we all, for the most part?), so I'm sure that I can write up several more chapters fairly quickly – especially when I'm itching so bad to get back to this story! The only reason why I haven't is because the other story I'm writing needed a bit of TLC, but I think it's staying on track fairly well, all things being said.

Like always, the next chapter will be uploaded on Friday, so I will see you then,  
~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

**Over the course of the next few days, I settled into a routine that almost felt normal, if you don't count the fact that I was getting lessons from nymphs (aka the girls with green-tinged pointed ears) and a centaur.**

Each morning I took Ancient Greek from Annabeth – who still didn't seem to like me for some unfathomable reason – and we talked about gods and goddesses, which was kind of weird because one, we talked about them in the *present tense*, and two, we talked about how different the “modern myths” were from reality. For instance, apparently Aphrodite was married to *Hermes*, not Hephaestus or Ares, and Apollo, Artemis, and Persephone were all the children of Poseidon and Demeter, along with a goddess called Despoina and a horse (I shit you not) called Arion. And that wasn't even mentioning the fact that Athena, despite being a *maiden goddess*, had children, of which Annabeth was one.

Ironically, the Ancient Greek itself wasn't all that confusing, at least not when compared to the genealogies that she was having me memorize. In fact, it was about as hard to read as English was, and after a few mornings I could stumble through a few lines of Homer without too much headache.

The rest of the day, I'd rotate through outdoor activities, looking for something that I was good at. Chiron tried to teach me archery, but we found out pretty quick I wasn't any good with a bow and arrow. He didn't complain, though, not even when he had to fetch a stray arrow out of his tail.

Foot racing? I wasn't any good at that, either. The wood nymph instructors left me in the dust. They told me not to worry about it – apparently, they'd had centuries of practice running away from lovesick gods. But still, it was a little humiliating to be slower than a tree.

And growing strawberries? Forget it. Every time I tried tending to the plants, they wilted. Katie said it was probably because I had too much salt (or something like that) on my hands. And Castor and Pollux shrugged and told me not to worry about it, because “*if you were our half-brother, Dad would've already claimed you*”.

The only thing I really excelled at was canoeing, and that wasn't the kind of heroic skill that people expected to see from the kid who had beaten the Minotaur.

Nevertheless, I knew that the senior campers and cabin counselors were watching me, trying to decide who my dad was, but they weren't having an easy time of it. I wasn't as strong as the Ares kids (as I found out when their counselor, aka the girl who had smirked at me that one day, Clarisse la Rue, pummeled me into the wrestling mat, no problem), or as good at archery as the Apollo kids. I didn't have Hephaestus's skill with metalwork or – gods forbid – Dionysus's way with vine plants.

Luke seemed to have some idea about my parentage, though. Although he never said anything, there had been this glint in his eyes when I had beat him and the rest of the cabin in a canoe race – a glint of *knowing*. And although I wanted to go and talk to him and demand that he tell me what he knew, I knew that this was going to probably be another thing that he kept a secret, because apparently it was “rude” to tell a kid who their godly parent was before said godly parent did.

Despite all of that, though, I really did like camp. I got used to the morning fog over the beach, the smell of hot strawberry fields in the afternoon, and even the weird noises from the monsters in the woods at night. I would eat dinner with Cabin Eleven – still on Luke's lap, because apparently not getting caught the first time was a good indicator that Mr. D didn't give a shit and Chiron wouldn't press the issue – and scrape part of my meal into the fire, always sacrificing to the same two gods: Hermes and Dad.

At one point, I guess Ethan, of all people, had gotten curious enough at my sacrificial habits to inquire about it one night. His question had caused the entire cabin to quiet down, and I suddenly found nineteen pairs of eyes looking at me with genuine curiosity.

“Well,” I said hesitantly after a few moments of being an idiot and turning red at all of the sudden attention. “I think we've made it abundantly clear that I'm not a kid of Hermes –”

“You got that right,” Travis snorted.

“– so I sacrifice to my dad, whoever he is,” I continued while shooting a glare at him. “But I also sacrifice to Hermes, too, because even if he is the god of travelers, he's still...I don't know...letting me stay in his cabin. Right?”

Everyone seemed to ponder that idea for a few moments, before they all nodded and said something along the lines of “*okay, that makes sense*” and went back to their food.

Except for Luke. Luke leaned in close, so that his breath was hot against my ear, and whispered, “You really are an enigma, you know that?”

By this point, I’m pretty sure you know what I did in response.

When Thursday, three days after I’d woken up and officially arrived at Camp Half-Blood, came around, it was time for another outdoor activity: sword-fighting. Everybody from Cabin Eleven gathered in the big circular arena, where Luke would be our instructor.

We started with basic stabbing and slashing, using some straw-stuffed dummies in Greek armor. Or, that’s what *everyone else* did, anyways. Because when I went to go find my own dummy, my fingers clasp around my pen-sword as I did, Luke pulled me aside and winked. “Just watch them, for now,” he said. “Wouldn’t want you to get banged up too bad on your first day sword-fighting.”

At that, I didn’t know whether to be charmed or annoyed.

We moved on to dueling pairs. Luke suddenly announced that he would be my partner, since this would be my first time, much to the humor of everyone else.

“Good luck,” Chris told me. “Luke’s the best swordsman in three hundred years.”

“Maybe he’ll go easy on me, then,” I said.

Chris only snorted in response.

“Come on, Percy,” Luke suddenly said, ending the chitchat that was going on between me and Chris. “Choose a sword and get over here.”

I looked at him skeptically, but he only grinned and winked again. *Oh. So that’s how it was.*

With a grin of my own, I grabbed the pen-sword from out of my pocket and uncapped it, causing it change shape. Instantly, everyone around me gasped. “How did you get your own sword?” one of the campers, who I didn’t remember the name of but knew he was a son of Enyo, asked.

“Uh...I stole it?” I replied hesitantly.

At first, I thought that I would get chastised and everyone would demand that I return the sword back to Chiron. But, of course, this is *Cabin Eleven* we’re talking about. From all around the group, snickers and cheers broke out, while Travis and Connor both wolf-whistled, impressed.

“Alright, alright, that’s enough,” Luke said, which was a good thing, too, because the Stolls’ antics had made my face heat up again. “Come on, Percy. Show me what you got.”

After that, the real lesson began. Luke showed me thrusts and parries and shield blocks the *hard* way. With every swipe, I got a little more battered and bruised. But Luke wasn’t having any of it.



“Keep your guard up, Percy,” he’d say, then whack me in the ribs with the flat of his blade. “No, not that far up!” Whack! “Lunge!” Whack! “Now, back!” Whack!

By the time that he called break, I was panting and soaked in sweat. Everybody swarmed the drinks cooler. Luke poured ice water over his head, and I thought that that looked like a good idea, so I did the same.

Instantly, I felt better. Strength surged back into my arms.

“Okay, everybody circle up!” Luke ordered. “If Percy doesn’t mind, I want to give you a little demo.”

“I don’t mind,” I said quickly – a little *too* quickly.

Travis and Connor both wolf-whistled again.

Luke ignored them. “The technique that I am about to show you is difficult,” he stressed, before telling us what the technique was: a disarming technique that involved twisting the enemy’s sword with the flat of your own blade so that he had no choice but to drop the weapon. “I’ve had it used against me. No laughing at Percy, now. Most swordsmen have to work *years* to master this technique.”

He demonstrated the move on me in slow motion. Sure enough, the sword clattered out of my hand.

“Now, in real time,” he said, after I’d retrieved my weapon. “We keep sparring until one of us pulls it off. Ready, Percy?”

I nodded, and Luke came after me. Somehow, I kept him from getting a shot at the hilt of my sword. My senses opened up. I saw his attacks coming. I countered. I stepped forward and tried a thrust of my own. Luke deflected it easily, but I saw a change in his face. His eyes narrowed, and he started to press forward with more force.

The sword started to grow heavy in my hand. I was starting to tire out. I knew it was only a matter of seconds before Luke took me down, so I figured, *what the hell?*

I tried the disarming maneuver.

My blade hit the base of Luke’s and I twisted, putting my whole weight into a downward thrust.

The blade clattered out of his hands. And the tip of my blade was an inch away from his undefended chest.

Immediately, the other campers fell silent.

I lowered my sword. “Um, sorry.”

For a moment, Luke was too stunned to speak. But then, a grin spread across his face. ““Sorry?”” he repeated. “By the gods, Percy, why are you sorry? Show me that again!”

I didn't want to. I was tired and weak and hungry. But Luke insisted.

This time, there was no contest. The moment our swords connected, Luke hit my hilt and sent my weapon skidding across the floor.

After a long pause, I heard Ethan say, "Beginner's luck?"

Luke wiped the sweat off his brow. He appraised me with entirely new interest – an interest that made my face burn all over again. "Maybe," he said. "I don't know. But it's almost time for lunch. Everyone, get to the showers and clean up – except you, Percy. I want you to stay back."

At his command, everyone besides us filtered out of the arena – the Stolls were laughing, Ethan and Alabaster were talking, and I was pretty sure that Lou and Cecil were plotting something.

When they had all left, Luke turned towards me. "Is that sword working out for you alright?" he asked. "A sword needs to be balanced in order for you to learn properly..."

"Yeah," I replied quickly. "It's fine. Great, even."

Luke nodded thoughtfully. I could tell that he wanted to say something else, and the very thought of what he could possibly want to say caused my heart to start beating painfully in my chest. My initial attraction to him hadn't died down *at all*, and while I knew better than to expect him to suddenly like me and want to date me (probable flirting aside), it didn't stop me from having at least a small bit of hope.

"Well, we should probably be following after the others," Luke finally said after a few moments, much to my disappointment. "Don't want Travis and Connor to somehow destroy the pipes again, after all."

Not knowing what else to do, I nodded, and the two of us made our way out of the arena in relative silence.

~~~

Friday afternoon, I was sitting with Katie at the lake, resting from a near-death experience on the climbing wall. Somehow, Katie had climbed all the way to the top without a problem, but the lava had almost gotten me. My shirt had smoking holes in it. The hairs had been singed off of my forearms.

We sat on the pier, watching the naiads – goddesses with black hair, gold eyes, and blue-tinged ears – do underwater basket-weaving, until Katie finally decided to say something. "So, how's things at Cabin Eleven going?" she asked.

"Good, good," I replied, before I realized that there had been a teasing note in her voice. "Why? What do you know, Katie?"

"Just that Silena's taken an interest in you, and the only time that she does that is when there's *'love in the air'*," Katie quoted with her fingers. "And you've been blushing *a lot*

when Luke is around.”

“Oh no,” I groaned, before running a hand through my hair. “Am I really that obvious?”

“Yes,” she said with a grin. “Don’t worry, I think it’s cute. It’s been...well, let’s just say that it’s been a while since anybody was interested in Luke that way – besides Annabeth, that is, but she doesn’t really count.”

I coughed. “*Annabeth* has a crush on Luke?”

Katie blinked. “Uh, yeah? She’s even more obvious than you are. How have you not noticed?”

“Uh, I don’t know,” I said, suddenly feeling very stupid. Of course that was why Annabeth didn’t like me. I had a crush on her crush. Deciding that a change in subject was needed because of that, I proceeded to ask Katie a question that had been on my mind for a while: the empty cabins.

“Well, I’m sure you’ve figured out by now that number eight belongs to Artemis,” she said in response. “Her cabin is kind of honorary, in the sense that it’s only occupied whenever the Hunt decides to come visit, which isn’t often. As for the others, Cabin Two is completely honorary, because Hera refuses to cheat on Zeus out of principle and whatever.”

“But what about Cabins One and Three?” I pressed. “Why are they empty?”

Katie suddenly looked down at her lap. “Cabin One is for Zeus, while Three is for Poseidon,” she answered. “Along with Hades, they make up the Big Three – the three sons of Kronos, the eldest gods. Their cabins are empty because...well, about sixty years ago, after World War II, the Big Three agreed that they wouldn’t sire anymore children, because their children were too powerful. I mean, I don’t know if anyone told you this, but Hitler and Mussolini were sons of Hades, Churchill was a son of Poseidon, and Eisenhower was a son of Zeus. So you basically had the sons of Hades on one side, and the sons of Poseidon and Zeus on the other. And there was a lot of carnage because of that. So, at the end of the war, the three brothers made an oath to never sire another mortal child. They even swore it on the River Styx.”

Thunder boomed.

“That’s the most powerful oath you can make, right?” I asked.

She nodded.

“And they all kept their word – no kids?”

Katie hesitated. “Seventeen years ago, Zeus fell off the wagon,” she finally said. “I don’t really know all of the details, but what I do know is that he had a daughter named Thalia. Thalia Grace. And...well, Styx is serious about promises, Percy. And though Zeus got himself off easy because he’s immortal, he brought a terrible fate on his daughter.”

“But that isn’t fair,” I protested. “It wasn’t her fault.”

Katie laughed. “Percy, has no one ever told you just how powerful the children of the eldest gods are?” she asked. “They’re powerful, scarily so – myself included. And they have a strong scent that attracts monsters from all over. So, when Hades found out about the girl – about Thalia – he let the worst monsters out of Tartarus as revenge. It didn’t matter that she had two other demigods with her that didn’t deserve it. He just wanted to see her die. And she did.”

Katie pointed to the giant pine tree on the top of the hill, the one that my mom has said we had to get past. “Five years ago, Thalia sacrificed her life right there for the two demigods that were with her. She died alone, on top of that hill. But Zeus took pity on her...he turned her into a pine tree just as she let out her last breath. Since then, her spirit has helped protect the borders of the valley, keeping us all safe from harm. That’s why that hill is called Half-Blood Hill.”

I stared at the pine tree in the distance.

The story made me feel hollow – and guilty. A girl, presumably around my age, had sacrificed herself to save her friends. Next to that, my victory over the Minotaur didn’t seem like much.

Especially not when I had lost my mother in the process.

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That night, after dinner, there was lot more excitement than usual.

At last, it was time for capture the flag.

When the plates were cleared away, the conch horn sounded and we all stood at our tables.

Campers yelled and cheered as Annabeth and two of her siblings ran into the pavilion carrying a silk banner. It was about ten feet long, glistening grey, with a painting of a barn owl above an olive tree. From the opposite side of the pavilion, Clarisse la Rue and some of her cabin-mates ran in with another banner of identical size, but theirs was gaudy red with a painting of a boar’s head and a bloody spear.

I turned to Luke and yelled over the noise, “Those are the flags?”

“Yeah.”

“Ares and Athena always lead the teams?”

“Not always,” he said. “But often.”

“So, if another cabin captures one, what do you do – repaint the flag?”

He grinned. “You’ll see. First we have to get one.”

“Whose side are we on?”

He gave me a sly look, as if he knew something I didn't. "We've made a temporary alliance with Athena. Tonight, we get the flag from Ares. And you are going to help."

The teams were announced. Athena had made an alliance with Apollo and Hermes, the two biggest cabins, and Demeter. Apparently, privileges had been traded – shower times, chore schedules, and the best slots for activities, among other things – in order to win support.

Ares had allied themselves with everybody else: Dionysus, Aphrodite, and Hephaestus. From what I had seen, Castor and Pollux were actually good athletes, but they were the only children of Dionysus at camp. Aphrodite's five kids weren't very threatening – at least, Drew, Laurel, Mitchell, and Lacy weren't. Silena was a possible threat, though, if only because I had the feeling that she was something of a wild card. Hephaestus's kids were probably the most concerning out of the three cabins, given their tinkering abilities, but there were only four of them.

Ares's cabin, of course, pulled the biggest muscle out of the group, both in the size of their cabin – there were over a dozen of them – and in how strong they were. They were also probably extremely skilled at combat, if my experience with Clarisse on the wrestling mat was any indicator.

Chiron hammered his hoof on the marble.

"Heroes!" he announced. "You know the rules. The creek is the boundary line. The entire forest is fair game. All magical items are allowed. The banner must be prominently displayed, and have no more than two guards. Prisoners may be disarmed, but may not be bound or gagged. No killing or maiming is allowed. I will serve as referee and battlefield medic. Arm yourselves!"

He spread his hands, and the tables were suddenly covered in equipment: helmets, bronze swords, spears, oxhide shields coated in metal, and just about every other kind of weapon or protection that would be useful.

Luke gave me a shield and a helmet with a blue horsehair plume on top, like all of the helmets on Athena's side. He assessed me for a moment after I had uncapped my sword, before he grinned and nodded. "That'll do, Percy. That'll do."

Not even a second later, Annabeth yelled, "Blue team, forward!"

We cheered and shook our swords and followed her down the path to the south of the woods. The red team yelled taunts at us as they headed off towards the north.

"Alright, Eleven," Luke shouted. "You know the drill. Alabaster, you're guarding our banner along with Ethan, Katie, and Malcolm. Lou, you're on defensive duty," here, the daughter of Hecate grinned evilly, "along with Ceryx and Cecil. Everybody else is on offensive duty – except for you, Percy. I want you on border patrol near the creek."

I blinked. "What? Why?"

He winked. "Just trust me, will you?"

Not sure of what else to do, I nodded and agreed.

It was a warm, sticky night. The woods were dark, with fireflies popping in and out of view. Luke stationed me next to a little creek that gurgled over some rocks, then he and the rest of the team scattered into the trees.

Standing there alone, I felt like an idiot. Why did I have to be on border patrol when everyone else – sans Alabaster, Ethan, Katie, and that son of Athena named Malcolm – got to have all of the fun? I didn't get it.

Not like that mattered, though, because at that moment the conch horn blew somewhere far away. Instantly, I heard whoops and yells in the woods and the clanking of metal. A blue-plumed ally from Apollo – I think it was the cabin counselor, Lee Fletcher – raced past me like a deer, leaped through the creek, and disappeared into enemy territory.

*Great*, I couldn't help but think snidely.

For a few moments, I just stood there, waiting, but I didn't need to wait any longer than that. Because on the other side of the creek, the underbrush suddenly exploded ferociously as five Ares warriors came yelling and screaming out of the dark.

"Well, well, well," Clarisse sneered. "The newbie's on border patrol. Not a particularly smart tactic of Athena to do, if you ask me."

I shuffled. "Uh, hi?" I tried, not sure exactly what she wanted me to say or do in response to that.

It must've not been what she was looking for, though, because she brandished a five-foot-long spear with a barbed metal tip that was flickering with red light, before she and her siblings charged at me from across the stream.

There was no help in sight. *I could run*, I thought to myself. *Or...I could defend myself against half of the Ares cabin.*

I managed to side-step the first kid's swing, but unfortunately the other ones all surrounded me, and Clarisse thrust at me with her spear. My shield deflected the point, but I felt a painful tingling all over my body. My hair stood on end. My shield arm went numb, and the air burned.

Electricity. Her stupid spear was electric.

I tried to call back, but another Ares guy slammed me in the chest with the butt of his sword and I hit the dirt.

"Come on, Percy – or should I say *Prissy*?" Clarisse laughed with the rest of her siblings. "You've got to be better than that!"

*Prissy*. Hot, unadulterated anger pooled into my stomach at the nickname, because I'd thought I'd left it behind me when I left Yancy Academy and, by extension, Hudson Lake.

But here somebody was again, calling me it, even if she had no idea what the nickname really meant to me.

With a grunt and a push of adrenaline, I stood up. “Don’t. Call. Me. *That*,” I hissed.

“Oh, yeah?” Clarisse cackled. “What are you gonna do, *Prissy*? Stab me with your sword?”

I moved to do just that, when there was suddenly a tug at my navel, unlike anything that I had ever experienced before, except for maybe that one time where Hudson had somehow gotten pushed into the fountain.

From behind Clarisse and her siblings, the creek started to bubble profusely. With wide, disbelieving eyes, I watched as the water from it started to churn violently, before *six tendrils of it rose out and wrapped themselves around the six children of Ares*.

“What the fuck!” Clarisse screamed as the tendrils pulled her and her siblings off the ground. “What the hell are you doing?”

“I – I don’t know!” I spluttered. The tug from behind my navel was only getting stronger and stronger, but for some reason, I couldn’t stop it.

I didn’t know how to.

Then I heard yelling and elated screams, and I saw Luke racing toward the boundary line with the red team’s banner lifted high. He was flanked by Travis, Connor, and Chris, who were all covering his retreat, along with a few Apollo kids who were fighting off the Hephaestus kids from behind them.

Watching him, I felt the tug behind my navel quickly decrease until I couldn’t feel it anymore.

The water that had taken hold of the Ares kids suddenly let go of them, causing them all to crash to the ground.

I heard cheers as everybody converged on the creek just as Luke ran across our side and into friendly territory. Vaguely, I watched as the red banner shimmered and turned a light blue, and as the spear and boar’s head were replaced with a huge caduceus, the symbol of Cabin Eleven. Everybody on the blue team picked up Luke and started carrying him around on their shoulders. Chiron cantered out from the woods and blew the conch horn.

The game was over. We’d won.

I swayed. Something didn’t feel right – I felt like all of the energy had just been drained out of me, never to return again.

Just as my legs gave out from beneath me, somebody grabbed me. It must’ve been Clarisse or one of her siblings.

“*Holy shit*,” I heard Clarisse breathe from right above me.

*Ah*, I thought mildly. *So it is Clarisse*.

“Put him in the creek,” I heard Annabeth say – since when did she get over here. “Now! He’s about to pass out from exhaustion!”

Clarisse complied, although she dropped me in the creek a bit harder than I was expecting. With a grunt, I fell in it, but as soon as I did, I felt much better – like I had just had five coffees on top of one of those energy pills, even.

By that point, everyone had noticed the commotion going on from around us. They all walked over, Chiron included. “What’s going on?” he asked.

“He controlled the water!” Clarisse shouted as she pointed at me.

“*What?*” several campers gasped.

“But that can’t be!” one of the Athena kids yelled.

“They made an oath!” another one shouted.

“Look,” I said, trying to apologize as I watched the blood drain from everyone’s faces. “I’m sorry...”

But they weren’t looking at me.

They were staring at something above my head.

Nervously, I looked up. Directly above me was a hologram of green light, spinning and gleaming. A three-tipped spear. A trident.

“Oh no,” Annabeth groaned.

“It is determined,” Chiron announced.

All around me, campers started to kneel. I stared at them, bewildered.

“All hail Perseus Jackson,” Chiron said, his expression grave. “Son of Poseidon, the God of Seas, Storms, Earthquakes, Soil, and Horses.”

## Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: I’m Forced Into A Quest



# I'm Forced Into A Quest

## Chapter Notes

Hello, again! Here is Friday's update! This will actually be the last update in a while, because I got to thinking about my important stuff (aka critical exams, if you didn't realize that), and I realized that I was kinda trapping myself into a corner (aka cooking myself to have problems due to my health problems) with posting updates over the next two weeks. So, I've decided that the next update will be two-ish weeks from now on Monday, May 25th, instead of this coming Monday. Please don't hate me for this! The plan is to actually get caught up on writing while I'm not taking these exams, so hopefully I can get another six or so chapters at least cranked out for this story in the meantime.

So with that being said, I will see you all in two-ish weeks (excluding comments, of course – I will still be around for those :P). Please stay safe in the meantime, though! Seriously. Don't do what I wouldn't do ;)

Sincerely,  
~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### **You know what sucks?**

Almost all of your friends ditching you because you're a son of Poseidon, that's what.

The morning after I had been claimed, Chiron moved me into Cabin Three. I was the only person in the cabin, so I had plenty of room for all of my stuff...which only amounted to one set of spare clothes and a toiletry bag that Luke had stolen for me, but still. I got to sit at my own dinner table, pick all my own activities, call "lights out" whenever I felt like it, and not listen to anybody else.

And I was absolutely miserable.

Just when I'd started to feel accepted, to feel like I had a home in Cabin Eleven and I could be a normal kid – at least, as normal as a half-blood could be, anyways – I'd been separated out as if I had some rare disease.

And yeah, most of my friends ditched me because of it. Oh, sure, nobody mentioned the fact that I had controlled water and levitated a bunch of Ares kids off the ground with it, but I could tell that was the main reason why almost everybody started leaving me alone.

Ethan, Alabaster, Travis, Connor...all of them steered clear from me as if I had the plague. And it hurt.

The only people that didn't treat me any different were Luke and Katie. In fact, if anything Katie started to hang out with me more, saying that we were basically step-siblings and that that meant we had to stick together. It made me feel incredibly grateful for the fact that I had her as a best friend, and I told her as much over and over again, to the point that it was almost obnoxious.

As for Luke, he went out of his way to help me, too. Our sword lessons became one-on-one – because none of the kids from Cabin Eleven wanted to sword fight with me now – and he pushed me harder than ever, and wasn't afraid to bruise me up in the process.

“You're going to need all the training you can get,” he said once, while we were working with swords and flaming torches. “Now let's try that viper-beheading strike again. Fifty more repetitions.”

Now, you might be thinking at this point that working alone with Luke would've lessened my crush – but if anything, it made it worse. Because he was not only a really excellent teacher, but also an amazing teammate on top of that, and when I thought about that, my mind went to places it really shouldn't have gone to.

I thought about saying something about it once or twice – because I remembered how Katie had said no one had been interested in him in a while, and I couldn't help but think that *maybe*, just maybe he was interested in me, too – but I never did. Mainly because every time I tried, I found myself blushing and I couldn't even get the words out of my mouth.

Which was perhaps for the best, anyways. Because, now that I was revealed to be the son of her mom's nemesis, Annabeth was more bitchy than ever, especially during my Ancient Greek lessons in the mornings. Every time I said something, she scowled at me, as if I'd poked her right between the eyes.

After lessons, she would walk away muttering to herself: “Quest...Poseidon?...Dirty rotten...Got to make a plan...”

Things just seemed to spiral from there, because one night I came into my cabin and found a mortal newspaper dropped inside the doorway. It was a copy of the *New York Daily News*, opened to the *Metro* Page. The article took me almost an hour to read, because the more I read, the angrier I got, and the more that the words floated around the page.

### ***BOY AND MOTHER STILL MISSING AFTER FREAK CAR ACCIDENT***

*By Eileen Smythe*

*A woman named Sally Jackson (34) and her son, Perseus Jackson (14) are still missing one week after their mysterious disappearance. The family's badly burned 1978 Camaro was discovered last Saturday in a ditch a north Long Island road with the roof ripped off and the front axle broken. The roof was found several feet away, with an indication that the car had been struck by lightning.*

*The mother and son had gone for a weekend vacation to Montauk, but left hastily, under mysterious circumstances. Small traces of blood were found in the car and near the scene of*

*the wreck, but there were no other signs of the missing Jacksons. Residents in the rural area reported seeing nothing unusual around the time of the accident.*

*Ms. Jackson's husband, Gabe Ugliano, claims that his stepson, Perseus – known affectionately as Percy – is a troubled child who has been kicked out of numerous boarding schools and has expressed violent tendencies in the past.*

*Police would not say whether Percy is a suspect in his mother's disappearance, but they have not ruled out foul play. Below are recent pictures of Sally Jackson and Percy. Police urge anyone with information to call the following toll-free crime-stoppers hotline.*

The phone number was circled in black marker.

My hands shook. I wanted to do something – punch something, kick something, etc., etc. But, when I felt the tug from behind my navel start up again, I forced myself to take a breath and calm down.

Now was not the time to destroy something with my freaky water powers.

I wadded up the paper and threw it away, then flopped down on my bunk bed in the middle of my empty cabin.

“Lights out,” I told myself miserably.

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That night, I had the worst dream yet.

I dreamed I was in a deep, underground cavern – the kind that went down and down and stretched out for miles, like Mammoth Cave or something like that. It was dark, hot, and damp; the only light source came from a shimmer of golden light, that dimmed and brightened sporadically, almost like it was breathing.

“*You were supposed to set the hellhound on him,*” I heard a deep, bellowing voice say in Ancient Greek.

Shivers went down my spine when I heard the voice. Instinctively, I turned to see where it was coming from, but then I realized that there was no point, because it sounded like it was coming from everywhere.

“I’m sorry,” a new voice said, this one familiar and soothing and coming from just behind me.

I turned and, in the dim light, saw Luke. His face was carefully blank and I had a feeling that he couldn’t see me, much less hear me, but nevertheless and I reached out and whispered, “Luke?”

“*Why didn’t you do as you were told?*” the all-encompassing voice asked. “*Are you gaining feelings for the boy? You know what happened to the last one.*”

“Don’t talk about that!” Luke snapped, before he winced. “I...I’m sorry. Just...just give me some time. I’m sure I can convince him to come over to our side.”

“Are you sure you can do that, demigod?” the voice questioned.

Luke hesitated, but only for a split second. “Yes. I’m sure of it. Just give me until the end of August. Please.”

“Very well,” the voice said. *“But don’t think that you will escape punishment for disobeying one of my orders.”*

Suddenly, Luke fell to the ground. I rushed forward to help him, but my fingers fell through his body, like he was a ghost or something. “Luke?” I whispered. “Luke, what’s wrong? Talk to me!”

But he didn’t say anything. Instead, he looked up at me – no, *through* me – and opened his mouth and *screamed*.

~~~

I woke up with a start.

I was still in bed at Cabin Three. My body told me it was morning, but it was dark outside, and thunder rolled across the hills.

A storm was brewing, I could tell that much.

Suddenly, there was a frantic knocking at the door.

“Come in,” I said, although my voice faltered halfway through.

Katie opened the door, her eyes wide and her hair blown all around her. “Mr. D wants to see you.”

“Why?”

She shook her head. “I’d better let him tell you,” she said.

Nervously, I pulled on my shirt, pair of shorts, and shoes before I followed after her, sure that I was in huge trouble.

For days, I’d been expecting a summons to the Big House. Now that I was declared a son of Poseidon, who wasn’t supposed to have any mortal children at all, I figured that my entire existence was some sort of crime. The other gods had probably been debating the best way to punish me for even being born, and now Mr. D was ready to deliver the verdict.

Over the Sound, the sky looked like ink soup coming to a boil. A hazy curtain of rain was coming in our direction, but I didn’t ask Katie if we needed an umbrella, because Alabaster had told me about how the children of Hecate warded off bad weather a few days ago – before he had ditched me as a friend.

My mood soured even more at the thought.

At the volleyball pit, the kids from the Apollo cabin were playing a morning game against the Athena cabin. Annabeth was noticeably missing from the game, but I didn't give her anymore thought.

Castor and Pollux were in the strawberry fields, walking around, making the plants grow. Like them, everybody was going about their normal business, but they looked tense, looking up at the storm every once in a while with wide, fearful eyes.

Katie and I walked up to the front porch of the Big House. Mr. D and Chiron were sitting at the pinochle table – Mr. D was wearing a tiger-striped Hawaiian shirt with a Diet Coke and Chiron was in his fake wheelchair, just as both of them had been on my first day. This time, though, they were playing against invisible opponents – ones that obviously knew a lot more about the game than I did.

“Well, well, well,” Mr. D said without looking up. “Our little celebrity.”

I waited.

“Come closer,” he said. “But don't expect me to bow down to you just because old Barnacle-Beard is your father. I didn't do it with Kathleen here when dear old Auntie claimed her, and I'm not going to do it now.”

A net of lightning flashed across the clouds. Thunder shook the windows of the house.

Mr. D merely rolled his eyes. “Typical,” he said.

Chiron feigned interest in his pinochle cards, while Katie crossed her arms and leaned against the railing.

“If I had it my way,” Mr. D said. “I would cause your molecules to erupt into flames and we'd sweep up the ashes and be done with a lot of trouble. But Chiron seems to feel this would be against my mission at this cursed camp: to keep you little brats safe from harm.”

“Spontaneous combustion is a form of harm, Mr. D,” Chiron reminded him.

“Nonsense! The boy wouldn't feel a thing!” Mr. D exclaimed. “Nevertheless, I've agreed to restrain myself – I'm thinking of turning you into a dolphin instead and sending you back to your father.”

“Mr. D – ” Chiron warned.

“Oh, all right,” Mr. D sighed. “There's one more option. But it's deadly foolishness.” He stood up then, and the invisible players' cards dropped to the table. “I'm off to Olympus for the emergency meeting – which I'm sure will be just as fun as the previous one was. Bah. But if the boy is still here when I get back, I'll turn him into an Atlantic bottlenose. Goodness knows that it'd be more merciful than what you want him to do, Chiron.”

Dionysus picked up a playing card and twisted it, causing it to turn into a plastic rectangle. A credit card? No. A security card.

He snapped his fingers, and then he was gone, as the air seemed to fold and around him, causing him to vanish so that only a lingering smell of fresh-pressed grapes remained.

Chiron smiled at me, but he looked tired and strained. “Sit, Percy. Please. And you too, Katie.”

We did.

Chiron laid his cards on the table, revealing a winning hand that he hadn’t gotten to use.

“Tell me, Percy,” he said. “How much do you know about the summer solstice deadline?”

I stiffened. I hadn’t really thought about that entire thing since I had arrived at Camp Half-Blood – there had been too many things going on to really do so. But, now that he mentioned it, I remembered the conversation that he and Katie had had at Yancy Academy, the one where Katie had said that somebody believed that I was a *thief*. And I remembered Mrs. Dodds accusing me of stealing not one, but two symbols of power – whatever that meant.

I told him about all of that, per his request.

As I spoke, Chiron seemed to get wearier and wearier. “Percy,” he said. “You have to understand that what is going on here – it is much bigger than yourself. But nevertheless, you are still at the center of it, due to your parentage.”

I stared at him for a few moments. “And what is going on, sir?” I asked.

“At the last winter solstice meeting on Olympus, two symbols of power – something that a god is represented by – were stolen,” he explained. “One was Zeus’s master Lightning bolt. The other was Hades’s helm of darkness, as despite him not being an Olympian, he is allowed to attend each solstice meeting as he pleases.

“When Zeus and Hades realized that their symbols of power were stolen, they looked for the perpetrator. Both initially thought that it may have been one of our campers, as the year-rounders had been visiting that day, but then they remembered that Demeter had sent Katie to you. And they grew suspicious.”

“Because Demeter is married to my dad, right?”

Chiron nodded. “Precisely. And while they could not outright accuse you before you were claimed – because your parentage was not certain – now that you have been, they, well have. Because, and this is what you must understand, Percy, *the gods cannot take each other’s symbols of power*. Only a mortal can. And you are very much a mortal.”

I felt my mouth run dry at what he was saying. Nervously, I wet my lips. “But I didn’t steal it!” I protested. “How could I? I didn’t even know that the gods existed back then! This is crazy!”

Thunder rolled across the valley.

“Careful, Percy,” Katie warned from behind me.

“Nevertheless, Percy,” Chiron said. “That is what is going on. And what’s more, both Zeus and Hades are demanding that you return them their symbols of power, regardless of your role in all of this. They want you to return them by June twenty-first, ten days from now. And Poseidon wants an apology for being accused of being a thief by the same date. And knowing all of them, if neither of these things occur...”

“...It’ll get ugly, won’t it?” I said.

He nodded.

“But how am I supposed to find these things?” I asked with a huff. “I mean, if the gods don’t know where they are, then how am I supposed to know?”

“I believe I have an idea,” Chiron replied. “But before I can say more, you must officially take up the quest. And you must seek out the counsel of the Oracle.”

“Fine,” I said. “I’ll take the quest – if only to make sure that I don’t get turned into a dolphin.”

“Then it’s time you consulted the Oracle,” Chiron said. “Go upstairs, Percy, to the attic. And when you come back down, assuming you are still sane, we will talk more.”

I nodded firmly before walking into the Big House and up the stairs.

Four flights up, the stairs ended under a green trap-door. I pulled the cord, only to cough, because as the door swung down and a wooden ladder clattered into place, a bunch of dust flew directly into my face.

The warm air from above smelled like mildew and rotten wood and something else...I vaguely recognized it as something my science class.

Reptiles, I realized with a pang. The smell of snakes.

I held my breath and climbed.

The attic was filled with all sorts of kinds of junk, covered in cobwebs: once-bright shields pitted with rust, and old leather steamer trunks plastered with stickers saying *ITHACA*, *CIRCE’S ISLE*, and *LAND OF THE AMAZONS*. One long table was stacked with glass jars filled with pickled things, like hairy claws, huge yellow eyes, and various other parts of monsters. A dusty mounted trophy on the wall looked like a giant snake’s head, but with horns and a full set of shark’s teeth. The plaque read *HYDRA HEAD #1, WOODSTOCK, N.Y., 1969*.

By the window, sitting on a wooden tripod stool, was the most gruesome memento of all, though: a mummy. And not the wrapped-in-cloth kind, either. The mummy was a human female body, shriveled to a husk. She wore a tie-dyed sundress, with lots of beaded

necklaces, and a headband over long black hair. The skin of her face was thin and leathery over her skull, and her eyes were glassy white slits, as if the real eyes had been replaced by marbles.

I could tell that she had been dead for a long, *long* time.

Looking at her sent chills down my spine. And that was before she sat up on her stool and opened her mouth. A green mist poured from it, cooling over the floor in thick tendrils, hissing like twenty thousand snakes.

I stumbled over myself trying to get to the trap-door, but it slammed shut.

“*Fuck!*” I couldn’t help but scream.

Inside my head, I heard a voice, slithering into one ear and coiling around my brain. “*I am the spirit of Delphi,*” the voice hissed, which only made me scream again. “*Speaker of the prophecies of Phoebus Apollo, slayer of the mighty Python. Approach, seeker, and ask.*”

I didn’t want to ask her anything. In fact, I had half the mind to scream again until someone would come for me. But I forced myself to take a deep breath.

The mummy wasn’t alive, after all. She was some kind of gruesome receptacle for something else, which was now swirling around me in the green mist. But its presence didn’t feel evil, like Mrs. Dodds or the Minotaur. It felt more like Ananke: powerful. All-encompassing. All-destiny-changing. Something like that.

I took in another deep breath. “O’ Oracle,” I said after a few moments. “What is my destiny? I mean, what am I supposed to – *OH MY GODS!*”

After I had asked my first question, the mist started to swirl more thickly, collecting right in front of me. Suddenly, Ethan, Alabaster, Chris, and Luke were all standing there, right in front of me – except it wasn’t *them*. I mean, don’t get me wrong, the mist definitely looked like them, but their eyes weren’t grey, green, brown, and blue. Instead, they were all *green*. And their faces were carefully blank, too, as if they were unfeeling of emotion.

Ethan spoke first, albeit in the rasping voice of the Oracle: “*You shall go west, and face the god who has turned.*”

Alabaster was next, still in the same voice: “*You shall find what was stolen, and see it safely returned.*”

Chris then said: “*You shall be betrayed by one who you call more than a friend.*”

Finally, Luke spoke, but he delivered the worst line of all: “*And you shall fail to save what matters most, in the end.*”

Then, their figures began to dissolve. At first, I was too stunned to say anything – my heart was pounding in my ears, because seeing them all like that and hearing the Oracle speak through Luke was just too much to bear – but as the mist retreated, coiling into a huge green



serpent and slithering back into the long of the mummy, I cried, “Wait! What do you mean? Who am I going to call more than a friend? And what will I fail to save?”

The tail of the mist snake disappeared into the mummy’s mouth. She reclined back against the wall. Her mouth closed tight, as if it hadn’t been open in a hundred years or more. The attic was silent again, abandoned – nothing but a room full of mementos.

I got the feeling that I could stand here until I had cobwebs, too, and I wouldn’t learn anything else.

My audience with the Oracle was over.

## Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: I Go Hunting For Quest-Mates

# I Go Hunting For Quest Mates

## Chapter Notes

Good morning, everyone! Hope you all are well! Today's chapter is a little shorter, but the next update will be on Wednesday, so it's all good. ;)

My past two weeks were...eventful, I guess ha ha. I didn't get as much writing done as I wanted to, but I got more done than I was expecting to because of how busy I was, all things considered. All of the comments I received over the past two weeks were what fueled me into writing when I wasn't busy, so thank you so much! It really means a lot to me. :)

Welp, that's all I have for now. So, with that being said, I will see you on Wednesday!

Sincerely,  
~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### **"Well?" Chiron asked me when I walked back outside.**

Shakily, I sat down. The words that the Oracle had told me kept echoing in my brain, along with the unsettling features of Luke's blank face with those misty green eyes. "She said I would retrieve what was stolen," I said.

Katie, who was now sitting at the table, gave me an encouraging smile. "That's great," she said soothingly.

Chiron, though, wasn't satisfied. "What did the Oracle say exactly?" he pressed. "This is important."

My ears were still tingling from the reptilian voice. "She...she said I would go west and face a god who had turned. I would retrieve what was stolen and see it safely returned."

"And?" Chiron questioned, his face rapt with attention.

I didn't want to tell him.

I mean, *come on*. There weren't that many people that I considered a friend, much less *more* than one. And the fact that I would supposedly fail to save what mattered most sounded a lot like I would also fail the quest in some shape or form, regardless of the fact that I would be able to do exactly what I was supposed to do.

"No," I said with finality. "That's it."

He studied my face. "Very well, Percy. But know this: the Oracle's words often have double meanings. Don't dwell on them too much. The truth is not always clear until the events have come to pass."

"Okay," I said quickly, anxious to change topics. "So where do I go? Who's this god in the west?"

"Of that, I am not certain," Chiron replied with a frown. "Because of the Fury that had come after you – yes, that was what Mrs. Dodds was – I would've thought that the prime suspect was Hades, but his symbol of power has been stolen, too. But that does not rule out the possibility that this god is somehow connected to the underworld."

I frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Various gods either live in or are connected to the Underworld, Percy," he told me. "Such as Nemesis, Hecate, and Eris. One of them may have found a minion, ready to cause chaos or even outright war – Eris especially has been known to pull 'tricks' like these in the past."

"Regardless of who is at fault, though, I do think that you must go to the Underworld to reveal the truth."

A strange fire burned in my stomach. The weirdest thing was: it wasn't fear. It was apprehension. Because while going to the Underworld was something that I knew most heroes didn't come back from, I also knew that if my mother was dead – if she really had died when her body had vanished – she would be there. Somewhere.

Besides, my dad needed me, and although I didn't really like that, the fact was true nevertheless.

"Okay," I said, before letting out a loose breath. "And just where do I need to go to get to the Underworld? Besides west, I mean."

"The entrance to the Underworld is located in Los Angeles," Chiron said. "In a recording studio called DOA – an acronym for Dead On Arrival."

*Huh, I thought. So the god of the Underworld is a fan of puns.*

"Anything else I need to know?"

Chiron nodded. "Two more things. First, that you must travel by land to get to Los Angeles – as a child of Poseidon, it is, well...not wise of you to ever get on a plane, to say the least. Especially now. And second, two companions may accompany you."

Instantly, I turned to look at Katie. "You up for another trip out of here?" I asked.

She grinned in response. "Of course, Percy. It's just like I told you: we're step-siblings. And step-siblings look out for each other."

I already knew that I wanted Luke to be my second companion, but just as I was about to say so, Chiron said, "Well, I must say that I expected that. But before you decide on your next

companion, Percy, you must know that someone has volunteered for the job."

"Who?" I asked, surprised. "Who else would be stupid enough to volunteer for a quest like this?"

The air shimmered behind Chiron, and Annabeth appeared, stuffing what looked to be a Yankees' baseball cap into her back pocket.

"Oh, *no*," I said. "You are *not* going on a quest with me."

"I've been waiting a long time for a quest, Seaweed Brain," she said. "And while my mother may hate your father, but if you're going to save the world, I'm the best person to keep you from messing up. Besides, do you have anyone else in mind?"

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As a matter of fact, I did.

I headed to Cabin Eleven, where I knew Luke would be at this time of day. Because while all of the other people in the cabin had to attend Ancient Greek lessons, Luke had been at camp for so long that I'm pretty sure that he could both speak and write the language fluently.

Plus, he was a counselor. He could do whatever he wanted to.

When I got to the cabin, I stared at the closed door for a moment, not really sure what to do – should I knock? I didn't live there anymore, after all. Yet, at the same time, knocking felt...*wrong*, for some reason. It was too formal, too pretentious.

And I didn't want to be pretentious with Luke.

Fortunately for me, though, before I could even knock, the door opened. Luke, of course, was on the other side. "Percy," he said, obviously surprised but also happy. The thought made me smile. "Please, come in. Cabin Eleven's door is always open to a former camper."

I walked in, and couldn't help but notice how...*strange* it was for the cabin to be empty. It was too silent. Like my cabin, but in a way that felt sad. Ominous.

"So," Luke said after he closed the door behind me. "What's wrong? I mean, you're going on a quest, right? Do you need some advice or something like that?"

"Uh, yeah," I replied. "Actually, no. I just...I was wondering if you wanted to go with me on my quest?"

The words came out of my mouth fast, way too fast. I blushed as soon as they did, but Luke didn't seem to be bothered by it. He merely smiled and said, "Repeat that again, please?"

"I was just wondering if you wanted to go on my quest with me," I said, slower this time.

His smile weakened, but only a little bit. "You want me to go on your quest?" he asked.

"Uh, yeah? Annabeth volunteered to go, but I...I don't really want her on the quest," I confessed. "She hasn't been particularly nice to me since the day that I got here and I don't want this quest to be more stressful than necessary." *And I really, really like you and I think you like me too and I'm tired of beating around the bush about it. There? You happy?*

Luke nodded. "Yeah. I can see why you wouldn't want her on the quest...but I'm not so sure if I would be a better candidate."

Okay, *that* caused me to blink in surprise. "What? What do you mean?"

His face twitched around the scar. "Let's just say that I messed up things for everybody else. Two years ago, I went on a quest to the Garden of Hesperides, but...things ended badly. Since then, Chiron hasn't allowed any more quests. Until you, that is. And while I would really like to go on a quest with you, Percy, I'm not so sure if Chiron would allow it because of that."

My eyes stung. I couldn't help but think that he was brushing me off.

"Hey," Luke said, before he walked over until he was right in front of me, all up in my personal space. "Don't get me wrong, Percy. I'd *really* like to go with you on this quest. But I also know what Chiron would most likely do and say."

"Okay," I said, my voice trembling. "Okay. But do you...I don't know...do you have any..."

"Recommendations for people?" he asked.

I nodded.

He grinned. "As a matter of fact, I do."

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And that was how I wound up standing in front of Cabin Ten a few minutes later, with Luke standing just behind me.

Now, I don't know if anybody has ever told you what Cabin Ten looks like. The outside, admittedly, doesn't look like much – it kind of looks like a Cabin Three, but the walls are grey and it has a painted roof and a blue-and-white checkerboard deck. It also has a mulberry-colored door, which at Luke's encouragement, I knocked on nervously.

A few moments later, Drew opened the door. She looked pretty unimpressed when she saw us, although she was pretty much the master of the look, so I didn't take much offense to it. "Luke, Percy," she greeted us, with a tone that matched her facial expression. "What do you want?"

"Can we see Silena?" Luke asked her.

Drew rolled her eyes, before she turned to look behind her. "Silly," she said. "Your new ship is here to see you."

All of the sudden, there was a very loud *thud* that came from inside the cabin, along with a shriek that sounded like it belonged to Mitchell. A few seconds later, Silena appeared just behind Drew, with a huge smile on her face. "Luke! Percy!" she exclaimed. "Please, come in! I can tell that we have much to discuss!"

We walked inside without much further ado, only for me to stumble in shock at both the smell of heavy perfume *and* the interior of the cabin. Because, all around me, from the walls to the carpets to the beds, everything was *pink*. Sure, there were different shades of it – the walls were a pastel pink, the carpet was hot pink, and the beds each had a unique shade – but that didn't detract from the fact that it all looked...not gaudy, per se, but certainly flamboyant and ostentatious.

Silena led us to a tea table on one side of the cabin, before making us sit down and pouring us both tea from a pot that kind of looked like the one from Disney's *Beauty And The Beast*. "So," she said excitedly, without any prompting. "I have to ask, what made you two finally decide to confess to each other? Because I've been waiting for you to do it for forever now and I was starting to think that you weren't going to!"

I blinked. "Confess to what, exactly?" I asked.

She stared at me in response for several moments, before she blinked and groaned. "You haven't confessed, have you?" she asked. "Oh my *gods*! I've felt it spilling all out of both of you for two weeks now and you're sitting here, telling me that you're not together? How can both of you be so dense?"

Luke shifted uncomfortably. "Silena," he said.

"Don't 'Silena' me!" she huffed. "I'm a daughter of Aphrodite, Luke, which means that I can sense love, all kinds of it. And I know for a fact that you love Percy just as much as he loves you! And the fact that you haven't addressed that is..."

"Scandalous?" Mitchell suddenly interjected from the other side of the cabin, where he was sitting on his bunk.

"Yes! Scandalous!" Silena agreed.

"Look," Luke said and I couldn't help but notice that there was a pink tinge to his cheeks – was he *blushing*? "I'm sure we can get into this later, but we don't have time for this. Percy needs your help."

Silena frowned, before turning to me. "My help with what? What could you possibly need my help with that isn't about your feelings for one another?"

I didn't answer immediately – because holy fuck, was my head *spinning*. I mean, I'd had my suspicions for a while now about Luke liking me back and Silena introducing herself purely so that she could somehow get us together, but they were just *suspicions*. Now, I had confirmation that my suspicions were true and I was simultaneously turning into a pile of goop about it and having an existential crisis.

But I couldn't think about all of that right now. I had a quest to go on. I told Silena as much.

"You want me to go on a *quest*?" she asked. "I'm sorry, Percy, but that's just something that children of Aphrodite don't do!"

"You mean *most* children of Aphrodite," Luke interjected.

She deflated a little bit at his words. "Yes, you're right," she said. "But my point still stands. Besides, who would – who would watch out for Drew, Laurel, Mitchell, and Lacy? And who would take care of the pegasi? Or, or..."

"Silly," Drew said as she walked over, with Laurel walking behind her. "We can watch over ourselves."

"And I can take care of the pegasi," Laurel added. "You should go on this quest, Silly. Gods know how much you were telling me the other day that us kids of Aphrodite don't get enough recognition around here. This is the way that you can do it."

Silena stared at both of her half-sisters unfathomably, before she sighed. "Oh, all right," she said. "But only if the two of you," she pointed at Luke and I, "Agree to talk about your feelings for each other as soon as we get back! Because I'm sick and tired of you two circling around each other without doing anything about it!"

Luke opened his mouth to say something, but I beat him to it. "Deal," I said quickly. "Now come on, we have to go tell Chiron that you're coming with me."

## Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: We Blow Up A Bus

# We Blow Up A Bus

## Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Hope you all are well! I forgot to mention in Monday's notes that this fic officially passed the 1,000 view mark on both FFN and AO3 over break – which is something I am really excited about and thankful for! Your support has meant so much to me that I can't help but mentally squeal each time I see a new favorite/follow/bookmark/kudos/comment lol!

The next five or so chapters after this one will be shorter (think around 3k with one 2.2k exception), as that is just how it worked out when I was writing them. They flow pretty well though, I think, so I hope that you don't mind. Also, I'm going to try my best to get the family tree of the gods up (on AO3) somehow by either the Friday or Monday update. It's big and messy (it's written in pencil LOL), but it's the best I can do without going into one of my family tree-making sites, which is even more complicated than the basic layout ha ha!

Well, with all of that being said, I will see you all on Friday! Sincerely,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### **That afternoon, we left camp to officially start the quest.**

The camp store loaned me one hundred dollars in mortal money, and twenty golden drachmas. The golden coins were the size of Girl Scout cookies and had various images of Greek gods stamped on one side and the Empire State Building on the other. The ancient mortal drachmas had been silver, Chiron had told me, but the gods refused to use anything less than pure gold. He also said that the coins might come in handy for non-mortal transactions – whatever that meant.

All three of us were also given a canteen of nectar and a Ziploc bag full of ambrosia squares, to be only used in emergencies, if we were seriously hurt. It was the food of the gods, Chiron reminded us, and while it would cure us of almost any injury, it was also lethal in a high enough dose.

None of us had much else to pack. All I had was an extra change of clothes and a toothbrush, and the same could be said for Katie and Silena (although, I had a feeling Silena wanted to bring more with her, even if it wasn't really all that feasible).

The three of us waved goodbye to the other campers, took one last look at the strawberry fields, the oceans, and the Big House, then hiked up Half-Blood Hill to the tall pine tree that used to be Thalia Grace, daughter of Zeus.



Chiron was waiting for us in the wheelchair. Next to him stood the surfer dude I'd seen when I was recovering in the sick room. According to Katie, his name was Argus, and he was the camp's head of security since he had eyes all over his body and couldn't be surprised. Today, though, he was wearing a chauffeur's uniform, so I could only see the extra eyes on his hands, face, and neck.

"Argus will drive you into the city," Chiron said. "And, err, keep an eye on things."

I heard footsteps behind us.

"Wait!" Luke shouted as he came up the hill, surprisingly with Alabaster and Ethan behind him.

He'd said after Silena had agreed to the quest that he had something left to do before we left, but I hadn't thought that that involved my possible former friends. Admittedly, I was a little touched at the effort.

"Hey," Luke said as he walked towards us. "I'm glad I caught you."

I couldn't help but blush.

Next to me, Silena visibly smirked.

"Hey," Alabaster suddenly said, before he and Ethan moved to stand in front of me. "I just wanted to say that I'm sorry for – for everything."

"Me too," Ethan agreed.

"We were kind of a bunch of dicks," Alabaster continued. "And you didn't deserve it. I mean, you're still you, regardless of who your dad is."

Ethan snorted. "What Alabaster is trying to say," he said. "Is that he made a *bull* for you. And Silena, because she's going on the quest with you. But mostly you."

"Aww!" Silena gushed. "Ally, that's so sweet!"

Alabaster scowled at the nickname, but nevertheless he fished out two bulky, bronze-colored lockets from his shorts' pockets and handed them to us.

"Thanks," I said. "And I accept your apology."

"I also have something to give you," Luke cut in.

Silena grinned at his words, before she grabbed Ethan and Alabaster by the arms and pulled them away from us. I watched them go for a moment, before I blinked and turned to Luke to see what he had brought.

"Shoes?" I asked humorously. "Why, you shouldn't have!"

"Shut up," he said with a grin, and that pink tinge returned to his cheeks – how had I never noticed it before? "I just thought you could use them. I mean, my dad gave them to me as a gift for my own quest, but seeing as how I haven't been on a quest in ages..."

I looked at the shoes as I took them from his hands. They were sneakers – very *normal*-looking sneakers. And they smelled normal, too. But I knew that there had to be something *special* about them.

Sure enough, there was. Because when Luke said "*Maia!*" in the next instant, white birds wings sprouted out from the heels.

"Thanks," I grinned.

Then, after making sure that everyone else was occupied – Katie was talking to Chiron and Argus, and Silena was joking around with Ethan and Alabaster – I reached up and kissed him on the cheek.

Luke's blush deepened. "I thought the deal was to talk about our feelings when you got back," he accused.

I shrugged. "What more is there to discuss other than I like you and you like me?" I asked. "Besides, I won't be back for ten days at least. That's *way* too long for me to wait."

"Percy," Katie suddenly said. Loudly. "We probably should be going, shouldn't we?"

I turned over to where she was and glared at her. Luke only laughed. "She's right," he said. "You know she is. Just...stay safe. And kill some monsters for me while you're out there, will you?"

I nodded.

Luke waved goodbye to Silena and Katie, before he, Alabaster, and Ethan left and walked back towards camp.

I looked at the shoes in my hands, then at Chiron. "I won't be able to use these, will I?"

He smiled sadly and shook his head in response. "Luke meant well, Percy. But, as I previously said, taking to the air would not be wise for you."

I nodded, disappointed, before I decided to stuff the shoes in my bag anyways. After all, while they may have seemed useless right now, that wasn't to say that they wouldn't be useful sometime later.

"Alright, let's go now. Before I change my mind," Silena declared, before she started to march down the hillside that led to the road, where a white SUV was waiting on the shoulder.

Katie followed after her and I moved to follow, but suddenly Chiron grabbed me by the arm, causing me to stop and turn to look at him. "I should have trained you better, Percy," he said, his eyes mournful. "If only I had had more time. Hercules, Jason, Theseus – they all had more training."

"That's okay, Chiron," I said, although inside I was wishing that my dad had given me a cool magical item like Luke's dad did.

"That reminds me," Chiron cried. "Percy, when you had fought Mrs. Dodds, you had stolen that sword from me, yes?"

I nodded, knowing that he had already seen me with it on the night of capture the flag.

"Your father had given me that sword years ago," he continued. "I kept it, not knowing you were the one I was waiting for, although I had my suspicions when you stole it and it didn't return to me...it's charmed to do that, you see.

"It does have a long and tragic history," he admitted. "One that we do not need to go into at this point in time. But I will tell you this: its name is Anaklusmos."

"Riptide," I translated. "Huh. Well, it fits."

"Quite," he said. "The sword is celestial bronze, like all of the weapons we use at camp. Forced by the Cyclopes, tempered in the heart of Mount Etna, and cooled in the River Lethe. It's deadly to monsters and any other creature from the Underworld, provided that they don't kill you first. But it's also deadly to demigods, for though it does not harm mortals, you are not fully mortal, Percy. And that makes you twice as vulnerable."

"Good to know."

After that, Chiron and I said our goodbyes to each other, and I walked down to the bottom of the hill. When I looked back, I saw Thalia's tree and Chiron standing there in his centaur form, and I couldn't help but feel like I was walking away from my home.

Because that, I realized with sudden clarity, was what Camp Half-Blood had become to me, ever since I made my first step past the boundary protecting its borders.

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Argus drove us out of the countryside and into western Long Island. It felt weird to be on a highway again, with Katie and Silena sitting next to me as if we were normal carpoolers. Because after two weeks at camp, the real world had started to seem like a fantasy. I found myself staring at every McDonald's, every kid in the back of his parents' car, and every billboard and shopping mall.

In the front seat, Argus smiled at my antics. He didn't say anything, but one blue eye on the back of his neck winked at me.

When we got to Queens, traffic slowed down. And by the time we got into Manhattan it was sunset and starting to rain.

Argus dropped us off at the Greyhound Station on the Upper East Side, not far from my mom and Gabe's apartment. Taped to a mailbox was a soggy flyer with my picture on it, along with the words *HAVE YOU SEEN THIS BOY?* in gigantic black lettering.

I ripped it down before Katie and Silena could notice.

Argus unloaded our bags, made sure we got our bus tickets (nobody noticed his eyes – one of the perks of the Mist, or the thing that keeps mortals from seeing monsters and all of the other crazy shit that goes on), and then drove away, with the eye on the back of his hand watching us as he pulled out of the parking lot.

Idly, I thought about how close I was to my old apartment. On a normal day, my mom would be home from the candy store by now. Gabe was probably up there right now, playing poker, not even missing her.

The truth was – as I'm probably sure you've guessed by now – I didn't care about saving Zeus's master lightning bolt or Hades's helm of darkness, because both of them were being douchebags by making me go on this crazy quest. And as for my dad, well, the more I thought about him the more I resented him, because he'd never helped out my mom and he probably only claimed me because he needed me to prove his innocence and all that jazz.

No, the only reason why I had taken this quest – besides preventing my own death or transformation into a dolphin – was because I wanted to save my mom. Because the more that I thought about it, the more I was convinced that she was still alive, even if she was in the Underworld like I'd previously thought. And I was going to get her back if that was the case...

...Or even if it wasn't. Because, even if she was dead, I'd find some way to resurrect her. Revive her. There was almost nothing I wouldn't do to save my mom, even if it risked me getting electrocuted by Zeus or just plain-out killed by Hades.

Admittedly, I felt a little guilty about hiding all of this from Katie and Silena. They didn't deserve to be led on a quest by someone who had ulterior motives, but at the same time, I couldn't tell them about said motives. I needed to give them plausible deniability, just in case I did wind up actually dying in the process of this quest and rescuing my mom.

We got restless waiting for the bus after a little while and decided to play some Hacky Sack with an apple that Katie conjured – and wasn't *that* cool, summoning fruits and whatnot? Both she and Silena were unbelievable, with the ability to bounce the apple off of their knees, elbows, and shoulders.

I wasn't too bad myself, but I definitely was no match for them.

The game ended when, finally, the bus came. Katie snatched the apple out of the air with surprising ease before she put it into her bag. After that, the three of us got on the bus without much further ado, and found some seats together at the back of the bus before stowing our backpacks.

As the last passengers got on, Katie suddenly clamped her hand onto my knee. "Percy," she said warningly.

I looked up, confused, but then saw what she was worried about. An old lady had just boarded the bus. She wore a crumpled velvet dress, lace gloves, and a shapeless orange-knit

that shadowed her face, and she carried a big paisley purse. When she tilted her head, her black eyes glittered, and my heart skipped a beat.

It was Mrs. Dodds. Sure, she was older and more withered, but I'd recognize that evil face from anywhere.

"Shit," I cursed, causing Silena – who had been looking at herself in one of those small, compact mirrors – to look up. Her face turned to the color of bone. "I thought that the *bullas* were supposed to protect us!"

"They do," Katie replied under her breath. "I don't get why Mrs. Dodds is here, unless..."

Katie's face turned the same shade as Silena's. Very quickly, she pulled her *bullas* out from underneath her shirt and twisted it around, so that all three of us could see the crack that went directly down its middle.

"It must have happened the night that we arrived at camp," Katie whispered as she began to tremble. "I was out of it for a day myself, so I didn't notice it. And when I woke up and went back to my own cabin, I put it away without another thought. Oh my gods, Percy, I am so – "

"It's fine," I said, before I took in a deep breath to calm myself.

"Um," Silena interjected, with a tone that was bordering on hysteria. "I don't really think that you should be saying that, Percy!"

I looked back up at the front of the bus. Two more ladies had walked in, right after Mrs. Dodds: one in a green hat, and one in a purple hat. Otherwise, they looked exactly like her – the same gnarled hands, paisley handbags, and wrinkled velvet dresses.

Triplet demon grandmothers, I thought, and had half the nerve to break out into nervous laughter right then and there.

Instead, I scrunched down in my seat.

All three of the Furies sat down in the front row, right behind the driver. The two on the aisle proceeded to cross their legs over the walkway, making an 'X'. It was casual enough, but to the three of us, it sent a clear message: *nobody leaves*.

The bus pulled out of the station, and we headed through the slick streets of Manhattan. "Why is she here?" I asked – well, more like hissed at – Katie and Silena. "I know Annabeth told me during one of our lessons that monsters can reform in Tartarus and whatnot, but I was under the impression that that takes a lifetime."

"That's only if you're lucky," Katie whispered. "Something which children of the eldest gods usually aren't."

"We need a plan," Silena cut in. "I mean, they're the Furies! The three worst monsters from the Underworld. Maybe we could – maybe we could just slip out the windows?"

Katie shook her head. "They don't open!"

"A back exit, then?"

There wasn't one. And even if there had been, it would t have helped. By that time, we were on Ninth Avenue, heading for the Lincoln Tunnel.

I looked down at Katie's arms, where I could tell the vines were growing back again – she was stressed. I was, too. But, as I looked at her, a sudden idea struck me.

"Katie," I said. "How well can you control those vines? And how fast can you make them grow?"

"I can control them and make them grow extremely fast. Why – " Her eyes widened. "You want me to use them against the Furies, don't you?"

"Uh, yeah? What's the point of having awesome powers if you're not going to use them?" I replied, before I turned to look at Silena. "Silena, did you bring *any* weapons with you? Any kind will work."

"I brought a dagger," she said, albeit weakly. "Percy, what are you – "

She didn't have time to finish her sentence, though. Because at that moment, two things happened.

The first thing that happened was that we hit the Lincoln Tunnel, and the bus went dark except for the running lights down the aisle. It was eerily quiet without the sound of the rain.

The second thing that happened was Mrs. Dodds stood up, before announcing in a flat, rehearsed voice: "I need to use the restroom."

"So do I," one of her sisters said.

"So do I," the other sister repeated.

They all started coming down the aisle.

"Okay. I got it," I said. "Katie, if you can, grow your vines so that they're covering the aisle."

"On it," she replied with a firm nod.

"Silena, you're going to stab Mrs. Dodds first, since you're in the aisle seat," I continued on. "And as for me, well, you'll see."

We were almost all of the way through the Lincoln Tunnel now, and the old ladies were almost upon us. Except, they weren't old ladies anymore. Their faces were still the same – I guess those couldn't get any uglier – but their bodies had shriveled into leathery brown hag bodies, complete with bat wings and feet like gargoyle claws. Their handbags had turned into fiery whips.

I stood up then. At once, all three pairs of their eyes were on me, and they began to snarl. "You!" Mrs. Dodds cried. "The thief!"

"I'm not a thief," I sneered at her. "At least, not when it comes to this."

Then, without anymore prompting, I grabbed the empty seat in front of me and jumped over both it and the other empty seat in front of it, so that I was just in front of all three of the Furies. Somehow, I was so fast – or perhaps the move was so unexpected – that all they did was stare at me while I did it.

Great, I thought. That makes this next part so much easier.

Because while I had been jumping over the seats, I had taken out my pen-sword – Riptide – and uncapped it, so that I was now holding a celestial bronze weapon of death and doom in my hands. The sister in front of me hissed when she saw it, but all I did was grin in response.

"What?" I said. "Oh, were you expecting me to be weaponless? Well, I'm sorry to burst your bubble."

Then, instead of slashing at her with the sword, I kicked her in the stomach.

Immediately, she backed into her sister – whether because she was surprised or because of Newton's Laws, I wasn't sure – who, in turn, backed into Mrs. Dodds. With a screech, Mrs. Dodds tripped and fell over Katie's vines, and Silena stabbed her in the chest with her celestial bronze dagger just as she hit the floor.

With another screech, Mrs. Dodds exploded into yellow dust.

Okay, I thought. One down, two more to go. How difficult can this be?

I realized not even half of a beat later that I shouldn't have thought that.

Because, while kicking the Furies' asses may have been beneficial for me, it wasn't beneficial for everyone else – especially not when it made the driver distracted. "Hey!" he shouted as he looked at us from the rearview mirror. "Kid, what are you doing?"

"Shit!" I cursed. "Katie, Silena, I'm going to need you to cover me!"

Behind me, the first of the two remaining Furies stood up. But, before she could slash her talons at me, I ran down the aisle, causing the other passengers to scream and shriek in fright, and grabbed for the wheel.

The driver immediately began to fight me – he hit me on the arms and tried to push me away as he screamed something about how I needed to let go or I was going to be in grave trouble.

I refused the urge to snort, knowing that I was going to be in deep ass shit whether I let go or not.

We careened out of the Lincoln Tunnel and back into the rainstorm, causing both people and monsters to be tossed around the bus while cars were plowed aside like bowling pins.

Somehow, the driver found us an exit. We shot off of the highway, through half a dozen traffic lights, and ended up barreling down one of those New Jersey rural roads where you

can't believe there's so much nothing right across the river from New York. There were woods to our left, the Hudson River to our right, and the driver seemed to be veering towards the river.

I had a great idea then to go and hit the emergency brake.

The bus wailed, spun a full circle on wet asphalt, and crashed into the tree. The emergency lights came on. The door flew open. The bus driver was the first one out, followed by the passengers who were yelling and screaming as they stampeded after him. I stepped into the driver's seat and let them pass.

The Furies – wait, no. The singular Fury that was left, because Silena and Katie must've killed the other one, regained its balance. It was then that I realized that she had a whip in her hand – her paisley handbag must've turned into it – and, what was worse, that she was *coming after me*.

"Perseus Jackson!" she hissed. "You have offended the gods. You shall die."

Quickly, I grabbed Riptide, which had been thrown down on the bus's floor during all of the commotion, before saying, "Yeah, I don't think so."

"Submit now," she hissed again. "And you will not suffer eternal torment."

But I didn't care. Because just as the Fury was about to lunge me, *I* lunged at *her*, Riptide firm in my hands as I performed a move that was similar to the one that I had pulled on the Minotaur: I ducked just underneath her talons, before I slashed my sword at her torso just as I crashed into her.

The Fury screeched before she turned into dust, which I was unfortunate enough to get a mouthful of.

"Gross!" I coughed.

"Percy!" Katie gasped. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," I said as I got to my feet. "But I think maybe we should all get off of the bus."

Thunder shook the bus, almost as if in agreement. The hair rose on the back of my neck.

"We need to get out!" Silena screamed.

Katie and I didn't need any encouragement.

We rushed outside and found the other passengers either wandering around in a daze, arguing with the driver, or running around in circles yelling, "We're all going to die!"

A Hawaiian-shirted tourist with a camera snapped my photograph before I could recap my sword, but I didn't have any time to worry about that, because at the same time that he did it Silena suddenly shouted, "Our bags! We left our – "

BOOOOOM!

The windows of the bus exploded, causing the passengers to all scream again as they ducked for cover. Lightning shredded a huge crater in the roof.

I had a feeling that that was a divine message that we shouldn't be sticking around.

"Come on," I said, as I grabbed Silena and Katie's arms. "We have to get out of here!"

And with that, we plunged into the woods as the rain poured down, the bus in flames behind us, and nothing but darkness ahead.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: Aunty Em's Garden Gnome Emporium

Aunty Em's Garden Gnome Emporium

Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Sorry about the late-ish update today – I've had somewhat of an eventful morning, so I wasn't able to post until now ha ha. Hope you can forgive me ;)

The godly family tree is going to be posted on AO3 on Monday. I finished it, but I decided I'm going to do it over in Sharpie so that I can erase all of the messy pencil marks. That way, it will look neater. :)

Next update will be on Monday, as always. Sincerely,

TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

In a way, it's nice to know that the Greek gods are out there, because you have somebody to blame when things go wrong. For instance, when you're walking away from a bus that's just been attacked by monster hags and blown up lightning, not to mention the fact that it's raining on top of everything else, most people might think that it's just really bad luck. But when you're a half-blood, at least you have the solace of knowing that some divine force out there is just *really* trying to mess up your day.

So, there we were, Katie and Silena and I, walking through the woods along the New Jersey riverbank, the glow of New York City making the night sky yellow behind us, and the smell of the Hudson River reeking in our noses.

"I *really* shouldn't have agreed to go with you on this quest," Silena moaned as she rubbed her arms for warmth and shivered. "I should've known that it wasn't going to be an easy quest. I mean, the last quest that a child of Aphrodite went on, he *died*. Oh gods, what was I thinking?"

I was in too much shock to ask her what she meant by that. The explosion of the bus windows was still ringing in my ears.

But, Katie – who had now been properly de-vined again – kept on pulling us along, saying, "Come on! The farther away we get, the better."

"All of our money was back there," I reminded her at one point, when I got annoyed enough at her forced upbeat attitude. "Our food and clothes. Everything."

"But we're still alive," she said, with a forced smile. "At least there's that. Besides, Silena, you should be proud of yourself. It's not everyday that a child of Aphrodite kills two Furies, after all."

"That's because we don't fight monsters!" Silena snapped back, before she shook her head and sighed. "I'm sorry. You're right. It's just...I'm scared, okay? I mean, I'm not a year-rounder, and I don't know what my dad would do if something happened to me..."

I blinked. *Okay*, that was something that I couldn't ignore. "You live with your dad?" I asked her, curiosity seeping into my voice.

Silena nodded weakly. "Yeah," she said. "H-he's a painter. Maybe you've heard of him? His name's Jean Beaugard."

I hadn't heard of him, but nevertheless I nodded along like I did. She must've taken it as a sign to continue, because she added on, "We live in Queens, not all that far away from Drew lives – none of us children of Aphrodite are year-rounders, you see. In fact, Drew, Laurel, and I all go to the same private school."

Silena continued to ramble on about her dad and the school that she went to, but I admittedly wasn't paying all that much attention. Katie, though, gave me a kind look nevertheless, as if she was saying *"nice job at averting that panic attack"*.

After that, we walked along for another mile or so, all of this still feeling pretty miserable, but at least no longer at risk of breaking down at any moment. It was around that point that I started to see light up ahead: the colors of a neon sign. I could smell food. Fried, greasy, *excellent* food. I realized then that I hadn't eaten anything unhealthy since I'd arrived at Camp Half-Blood, where we lived on grapes, bread, cheese, and extra-lean-cut nymph-prepared barbecue. This boy was in need of a double cheeseburger.

We kept walking until I saw a deserted two-lane road through the trees. On the other side of the road was a closed-down gas station, a tattered billboard for a 1990s movie, and one open business, which was the source of the neon light and the good smell.

It wasn't a fast food restaurant, like I had hoped. Instead, it was one of those weird roadside curio shops that sell lawn flamingos and wooden Indians and cement grizzly bears and other shit like that. The main building was a long, low warehouse, surrounded by acres of statuary. The neon sign above the gate was impossible for me to read, though, because if there's anything more horrible for dyslexia than regular English, it's red cursive neon English.

To me, it looked like: *ATNYU MES GDERAN GOMEN MEPROUIM*.

"What the hell does that say?" I asked.

"I don't know," Silena said.

"Me either," Katie agreed.

After a few minutes of the three of us squinting and staring at the sign, we were finally able to translate the sign into: *AUNTY EM'S GARDEN GNOME EMPORIUM*.

Sure enough, flanking the entrance, as advertised, were two cement garden gnomes – ugly bearded little runts, smiling and waving, as if they were about to get their pictures taken.

"The lights are on inside," Katie noticed as the three of us stood there, on the other side of the street. "Maybe it's open."

That was all that the three of us needed to cross the street, following the smell of hamburgers and fries and milkshakes.

The front lot was a forest of statues: cement animals, cement children, and even a drunken cement satyr playing the pipes.

"I can't believe the level of detail," Silena said as we reached the warehouse door. "They look even more realistic than the people that my dad paint..."

Just as we stopped in front of the door, it suddenly creaked open, and standing in front of us was a tall, Middle Eastern woman – at least, I assumed she was Middle Eastern, because she wore a long, black burqa-like outfit that covered everything except for her hands, leaving her head completely veiled. Her eyes glinted behind a curtain of black gauze, but that was about all that I could make out of her face. Her coffee-colored hands looked old, but also well-manicured and elegant, which made me think that she was an old woman that had once been an incredibly beautiful lady.

"Children," she said, and I couldn't help but notice that her accent sounded vaguely Middle Eastern, too. "It is too late to be out all alone. Where are your parents?"

"We're orphans," Katie said, the half-lie slipping easily off of her tongue – she was practically an orphan herself, after all.

"Orphans?" the woman asked. The word sounded alien in her mouth. "But, my dears! Surely not!"

"Our parents died and we went to an abusive foster home, so we left and decided to live out on the streets," I interjected, trying to do my best to make the lie sound as believable as possible. "But we got lost while trying to get to New York City. Is that food I smell?"

"Oh, my dears, the streets are no place for children – most of all the streets of New York City," she said. "Please, come in, poor children. I am Aunty Em. Go straight through to the back of the warehouse, please. There is a dining area."

We thanked her and went inside.

Silena muttered to me, "Runaways living on the streets?"

I shrugged. "Hey, whatever gets us food, gets us food, right?"

Inside, the warehouse was filled with even more statues – people in all different poses, wearing all different kinds of outfits and with all sorts of expressions on their faces. A small part of me was thinking that you'd have to have a pretty huge garden to fit even one of these statues, because they were all life-size.

But mostly, I was thinking about food.

And yes, I realize that that was probably – no, *most definitely* – an idiotic thing to do. But I was hungry. And Auntie Em's burgers smelled so heavenly, that I couldn't think about much outside of sitting down and getting to eat one. Thus, I barely noticed the way that the statues' eyes seemed to follow me and Katie and Silena, or the fact that Auntie Em had locked the door behind us.

All I cared about was finding the dining area. And, sure enough, there it was the back of the warehouse, a fast-food counter with a grill, a soda fountain, a pretzel heater, and a nacho cheese dispenser. Basically it had everything you could want, plus a few steel picnic tables out front.

"Please, sit down," Auntie Em said.

"Awesome," I breathed, while I felt my stomach rumble in agreement.

Our hostess disappeared behind the snack counter and started cooking. Before we knew it, she'd brought us plastic trays heaped with double cheeseburgers, vanilla shakes, and XXL servings of French fries.

I was halfway through my burger before I could even remember to breathe, and I'm pretty sure Katie and Silena had the same problem, judging by the looks of pure satisfaction on their faces.

Auntie Em ate nothing. She hadn't taken off her headdress, even to cook, and now she sat forward and interlaced her fingers and watched us eat. It was a little unsettling, having someone stare at me when I couldn't see her face, but I was feeling satisfied after the burger, and a little sleepy, and I figured that the least that I could was try to make small talk with our hostess.

"So, you sell gnomes," I said, trying to sound interested.

"Oh, yes," she replied. "And animals. And people. Anything for the garden. Custom orders. Statuary is very popular, you know."

"A lot of business on this road?"

"Not so much, no. Since the highway was built...most cars, they do not go this way now. I must cherish every customer I get."

Suddenly, my neck tingled, as if somebody else was looking at me. I turned to see who it was, but it was just a statue of a young girl holding an Easter basket. Like Silena had said earlier, the attention to detail was incredible, much better than what you see in most garden statues. But something was wrong with her face. It looked as if she was startled, or even...

...Terrified.

"Ah," Auntie Em said sadly. "You notice that some of my creatures do not turn out well. They are marred. They do not sell. The face is the hardest to get right. Always the face."

"You make these statues yourself?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. Once upon a time, I had my sisters to help me with the business, but they have passed on, and Auntie Em is all alone. I have only my statues. That is why I make them, you see. They are my company." The sadness in her voice sounded so deep and so real that I couldn't help but feel sorry for her.

And yet, at the same time, there was a distinctive *itch* in the back of my mind. A hint of recognition. I looked at Katie and Silena and noticed that they had picked up on whatever it was that I had as well, because they were no longer eating, instead sitting forward with anxious faces.

"How many sisters did you have?" Silena asked, with a nervous tone to her voice.

"Oh, just two," Auntie Em replied. "And it's a terrible story as to what happened to them. Not one for children, really. You see, Silena, a bad woman was jealous of me, long ago, when I was young. I had a...a boyfriend, you know, and this bad woman was determined to break us apart. She caused a terrible accident. My sisters stayed by me, despite it, only to be forced to share my bad fortune. Eventually, they passed on. They faded away. I alone have survived, but at a price. Such a price."

Katie and I shared a look.

None of us had ever told Auntie Em our names.

"I think we should get going," I said. "I mean, even if the streets of New York are as bad as you say, they're still better than going back to our abusive foster home if the police find us."

"Please, dears," Auntie Em pleaded. "I so rarely get to be with children. Before you go, won't you at least sit for a pose?"

"A pose?" Katie asked warily.

"A photograph. I will use it to model a new statue set. Children are so popular, you see. Everyone loves children."

"I don't think we can, ma'am," I apologized. "We really should be going."

But Auntie Em had already stood up and was making her ways towards the front door, gesturing for us to follow her.

I turned to Silena and Katie nervously. "Do you see any other way out of here?" I asked underneath my breath.

"Besides the windows, no," Katie whispered back. "And I think if we try to escape that way, she'll be even worse to deal with. I say that we just follow her for now."

"I second that idea," Silena said.

"Okay," I nodded. "We'll follow her. Just...stay alert, got it?"

The three of us then followed Aunty Em outside of the warehouse and to the garden of statues. She directed us to a park bench next to the stone satyr. We all sat down, which she seemed to be happy about, because she then said, "Now, I'll just position you correctly. The young boy in the middle, I think, with both of you fine young ladies on either side."

We shifted into the positions that she wanted us to be in.

"Not much light for a photo," I remarked.

"Oh, it's enough," Aunty Em replied with a wave of her hand. "Enough for us to see each other, yes?"

"Where's your camera?" Katie asked.

Aunty Em ignored her and stepped back, as if to admire the shot. "Now, the face is the most difficult. Can you smile for me please, everyone? A large smile?"

She still had no camera in her hands.

"I will just be a moment," Aunty Em continued on. "You know, I can't see you very well in this cursed veil..."

Then she reached up to undo the wrap around her head.

Immediately, Silena, Katie, and I sprung into action. We all jumped off of the bench, but we did so at the same time and in the process I somehow tripped and fell to the floor.

"Oof!" I grunted as I slammed against the ground.

I had a nice view of Aunty Em's sandaled feet, as well as Katie and Silena's retreating figures. They were both running in opposite directions, which I was kind of glad for. It would make Aunty Em all the more confused when she tried to fight us.

As I got up, my head positioned so that I was staring at the floor, I heard strange, rasping sound above me that caused me to freeze. Nervously, I looked at Aunty Em's hands, which had turned gnarled and warty, with sharp, bronze talons for fingernails.

I almost looked higher, but didn't, because at that moment I realized who Aunty Em really was – because she wasn't some monster that I vaguely recognized for no apparent reason.

She was Medusa.

Think, I told myself, as I heard the rasping of dozens of tiny snakes from above me. *How did Medusa die in the myth?*

"Such a pity to destroy a handsome young face," Medusa said soothingly, unaware of the fact that I was trying to figure out how to kill her. "Stay with me, Percy. All you have to do is look up."

I fought the urge to obey – because even though I had figured out who she really was, her voice still had some sort of strange effect on me. Instead, I looked to one side and saw one of those glass spheres people put in their gardens – a gazing ball. I could see Auntie Em's dark reflection in the orange glass; her headdress was gone, revealing her face as a shimmering pale circle and the snakes that made up her hair writhing like inky black noodles.

But that was not the only thing I saw. I also saw a fountain, something that I hadn't noticed when we had first walked into the gardens. It was one of those fancy, elegant fountains, but that wasn't what I cared about.

No, all that I cared about was the water that was bubbling inside it.

Desperately, I tried to remember what it had felt like that night during capture the flag, when I had controlled the water to subdue Clarisse and her five half-siblings. I remembered that I had felt angry, extremely angry, but I also remembered the tug just behind my navel, too.

So, I did my best to try to replicate that feeling.

At first, I felt it only sparingly, and I watched the water in the fountain move in a way that *definitely* wasn't natural. *I'm going to have to remind myself to practice with this*, I thought, while also feeling like I was about to have a panic attack from my plan not working like I wanted it to.

But then, Medusa said in the same soothing voice that she had used only a minute prior, "And what fine statues you and your friends will make, Percy. Just think. None of you need suffer on this quest, or be pawns of the Olympians. Instead, you can all be with each other...*for eternity*."

At her words, anger boiled in my stomach – because I had made myself a promise that I wouldn't let anything happen to Silena and Katie on this quest, and I wasn't about to let that promise be broken.

The tug from behind my navel increased in volume.

The water in the fountain began to move violently. Slowly, it rose out of the fountain in one, giant tendril. It moved towards Medusa and, just as she turned around, presumably hearing some sound in the water that I couldn't hear, *attacked*.

The water formed a bubble around her head, causing her to shriek and scream, if the bubbles in the water were a good indicator.

But I didn't care. All I had was one thought in my mind as I got to my feet.

"Percy!" Katie shouted, suddenly appearing in the gardens and looking at me with wide, green eyes.

"I'm okay," I replied, but I didn't turn to focus on her.

Instead, I focused on Medusa, who was thrashing around and trying to get out the bubble of water. The distortion of the water prevented her eyes from having any petrifying effect,

which was good, because we sort-of made eye contact just as I uncapped Riptide.

She started to freak out and thrash anymore, and I realized that I couldn't keep the bubble of water on her head for much longer. It was starting to wear me out.

So, without much further ado, I ran at her and slashed at her neck with my sword.

A sickening *schlock!* was heard as my sword passed through her neck like a knife cutting butter, then a hiss like wind rushing out of a cavern – the sound of a monster disintegrating, which I could see was exactly what she was doing when I turned around to look at her.

At the same time, something fell to the ground next to my foot. It wasn't that hard to look at it, because suddenly, I felt waves upon waves of exhaustion hit me.

"Oh, shit," I said as the tug from behind my navel vanished. "That was a lot harder than I thought it was."

The last thing that I remembered was Katie screaming and the blurry outline of Silena rushing over to us, before my knees gave out from underneath me and the world turned black.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: We Spend Some Time Hitchhiking Pt. 1

Edit: Forgot to take out my “word count” for the chapter lol ;)

We Spend Some Time Hitchhiking Pt. 1

Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Sorry for the later update today – I was really busy this weekend so I was both catching up on my writing today and finishing up the family tree ha ha! Speaking of which, the family tree is at the bottom of this chapter (on AO3 for you FFN readers), and if you have any questions, let me know! I got everybody that I wanted/was able to on there, which I am pleased about! I will say, though, that if two people have kids, then that's all of the kids that they have together (i.e. Charon is said to be a son of Erebus/Nyx, but in my genealogy he is not. Instead, he was just a mortal that Hades liked well enough to offer immortality to :P).

With all of that being said, the next chapter will be posted on Wednesday!

Sincerely,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Now, I know what you're thinking: *"oh my gods Percy, you just slayed Medusa and you passed out? How lame is that?"*

Well, it's pretty lame, I'll give you that. I even thought as much when I woke up what had to be hours later, laying on top of one of picnic tables in the dining area of the warehouse – which, let me tell you, was really uncomfortable. My mouth was also rather dry, which sucked, but not as much as the rest of my body did.

"Ow," I said as soon as I was awake enough to speak.

"Percy!" Katie suddenly gasped somewhere to the left of my head. "Oh my gods, you're awake!"

"Yeah," I groaned out as I sat up and rubbed my eyes, before running a hand through my hair as well for good measure. "How long have I been put for?"

My best friend hesitated, but when I glared at her for a few moments, she finally relented and said, "About twelve hours. It's eight o'clock in the morning right now. We were gonna leave here but, well..." she trailed off, before she suddenly grinned and added, "You're too heavy, Percy. Even for me and Silena combined."

"Gee, thanks," I replied with a roll of my eyes, before I frowned. "Speaking of Silena, where is she?"

"Right here, lover boy!" Silena exclaimed as she walked towards the dining area. I couldn't help but notice that she looked a lot better than she had the previous day – and not just because of her weird Aphrodite powers, either. She looked like she had had a shower and had obviously found some makeup and new clothes, if the new t-shirt and shorts she was wearing were anything to go by. "Oh, I'm so happy to see that you're finally awake! I was so worried that you wouldn't wake up!"

Katie rolled her eyes. "And I told you that this is just how powers with the children of the eldest gods work," she retorted, before she gave Silena an appraising look. "Obviously, you found some clothes and makeup at the gas station next door. What else did you find?"

Silena smiled. "Some clothes for all of us," she corrected. "And some money. It's probably enough to bribe someone into letting us hitchhike with them to a bus station somewhere, and after that I can...*make things go smoother*, if I need to."

I frowned. "Make things go smoother"? What do you mean?"

She winked at me. "You'll see what I mean. Now, get dressed!"

Without another word, she handed Katie and I two separate bags. At first, I was kind of dreading what clothes she could've found at the gas station, because I didn't know what kind of clothes a closed-down gas station could have and I was worried about Silena's tastes – I mean, she's a daughter of Aphrodite, after all, and her sudden chipper mood was nothing if not suspicious. But, I was pleasantly surprised when I pulled a pair of dark jean shorts and a black ABBA t-shirt out of the bag, because both were to my tastes, even if the shirt was a little vintage.

"How'd you know I like ABBA?" I asked Silena as I pulled off my camp t-shirt, which was torn and tattered and covered in a green goo that I didn't really want to think about.

Silena rolled her eyes in response. "Percy," she said sweetly. "You're *gay*. Not that I want to stereotype you or whatever – because gods knows that's horrible and unbecoming of *anyone*, let alone a daughter of love – but if there's one thing I've learned from Mitchell and Al – "

"Silena," Katie suddenly interjected warningly.

The daughter of Aphrodite paused long enough to huff and roll her eyes again, before she continued with, " – it's that ABBA is one of the best bands to ever exist, along with Queen...and My Chemical Romance...and – "

"Alright, alright, I get it," I said as my face flushed, desperate to change the subject. Thankfully – or perhaps *unthankfully*, considering the nature of my thought – a sudden realization went off in my brain, because at that moment I distinctly remembered that the reason why my camp shirt had been covered in goo was because Medusa's head had fallen on it...

...And her head was nowhere in sight.

I turned to look at Katie, who had already finished getting dressed from just behind the food counter. "Hey," I said, causing her to look at me with an unamused expression, as if she already knew what I was thinking and was thinking of a million ways to punish me for it. "About last night..."

When I trailed off, her unamused expression intensified. "What about it?" she asked.

"What happened to the head?" I replied. "Because although I was pretty out of it – "

"Literally almost dead on your feet, more like it," she not-so-quietly interjected.

" – I'm pretty sure that Med – *her* head didn't disappear like the rest of her," I finished with a not-so-subtle glare. "So, where is it?"

Katie rolled her eyes again – apparently, all of us were in the mood to do it and nothing else to show off our irritations – before she reached down and picked up a gigantic paper bag from right next to her. The bag was obviously from the store, as it had a green head with a bunch of snakes on it, as well as the words *WE APPRECIATE YOUR BUSINESS* printed in bold, yet equally green letters.

I couldn't help but snort at the sight. "You put her head in a paper bag?"

Katie shrugged. "More like a bunch of plastic bags instead of a paper bag, but yeah," she said. "Technically, it's your spoil of war or whatever, since you killed her. You could theoretically do whatever you want with it."

At her words, an idea suddenly occurred to me – one that I couldn't help but grin at. "'Whatever I want with it?'" I quoted.

She nodded, although with a hesitance that made me think she already knew what I was planning.

With an even wider grin, I walked over and took the Medusa-head bag from her, before I opened the door that was just behind the food counter and walked inside. As I'd kind of suspected, the room on the other side of the door was actually an office-industrial kitchen combo of the sorts, but I wasn't really interested in the industrial kitchen part (at least, not yet. I wanted to do what I was planning to do before I ate anything). No, I was more interested in the office part, especially when I saw an accounting book on her desk and several boxes beside it.

"Percy," Katie said warningly as she trailed after me, but I ignored her.

Grabbing one of the boxes off of the floor, I put it on the desk and not-so-delicately shoved the Medusa-head bag inside it. Then, I grabbed one of the packing slips for *Hermes Overnight Express* (apparently even the gods had a shipping business) from the desk and slapped it on the box before writing:

The Gods

Mount Olympus

600th Floor, Empire State Building

New York, NY

With regards,

Percy Jackson

"Are you trying to get yourself killed?" Katie asked as I grabbed a pouch and stapled it to the box.

"No, not really," I replied vaguely, before I grabbed some of the drachmas on the desk and put them in the pouch.

As soon as I closed it, a sound like a cash register rang out through the air, before the box floated off of the table and disappeared with a sudden *pop!*

"The gods are going to think that you're impertinent," Katie said, even though the box had already left the building.

I shrugged. "I am impertinent. Now, come on. We can at least make some breakfast before we head out to wherever Silena's planning on us going."

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Around six hours later, the three of us were sitting on an Amtrak train, in one of its first class carriages that I hadn't known even existed. The train was set to go all of the way to Denver – which was kind of freaky, considering the fact that that was where Silena predicted we were going to go, but it wasn't nearly as freaky as just how she got us on the train in the first place.

You see, after our breakfast of burgers and fries at Auntie Em's (which weren't nearly as good as they had been the previous night, probably due to gorgon magic or something like that), we had walked a little ways down the road when Silena had successfully made a semi-truck pull over. The guy that was driving the truck was really hesitant about driving three hitchhiking teenagers to the nearest train station, even if it was only a few miles down the road, but the money that Silena offered him along with a saucy wink made him pretty malleable.

That wasn't what weirded me out, though. No, what weirded me out was, when we got to the train station, Silena had basically *commanded* the people there to let us on board the incoming train. Because while she asked them nicely and all that, her voice had taken on a strange tone that I'd never heard before – an edge that I'd never thought anyone could have. And it affected the people there, made them (both guys and girls) grin sloppily and look at her hazily while they did just what she wanted to do. Even Katie seemed to be a little bit affected by it, but I wasn't. In fact, I was a little *terrified*...which sounds kind of lame, considering the fact I could control water with my mind, but it's true.

"You're still freaking out about earlier, aren't you?" Silena suddenly asked me, causing me to blink and snap out of my train of thought.

Next to her, Katie was sleeping, her head and arm propped up against the train window. She admitted that she hadn't slept well at all last night, too afraid I was going to "die from exertion" or something like that, and I felt kind of bad about it. The only way I figured I could make her worry less, though, was to get control over my powers somehow...which was probably going to be more than just a little difficult, if *Avatar: The Last Airbender* had taught me anything.

Still, though, I couldn't focus on that right now. I needed to focus on Silena. Turning to her, I offered a shaky smile and a shrug. "Yeah, kinda," I admitted regretfully. "I've just...never seen anything like that before."

Silena smiled back comfortingly. "It's fine," she said. "I probably should've warned you about it this morning. What I did...it's called charmspeak, Percy. It's something that only certain children of Aphrodite can do, like me or Drew. Neither of us like using it, though...as I'm sure you saw why. It's pure manipulation. At least, that's what I think, anyways. I'm sure my mom would disagree."

I blinked. "You've met Aphrodite?"

"Twice," she admitted. "Once, when I was a kid. The gods aren't supposed to interact with their kids, but...she didn't show up for me. She showed up for my dad, because she wanted him to paint another portrait of her. That's how they met, you see. She liked his paintings so much that she wanted him to paint her, and when he did she gave him me as payment."

*Wait, what?* I thought. My stomach began to churn. *As payment? That's – that's so fucked up.* "And the second time?" I asked, desperate to get my mind off of her last statement.

"The last solstice," she replied with a shrug. "I'm technically not a year-rounder, but I've been going to camp since I was eight. Chiron thought it was only right for me to see Olympus. And before you ask, it was...*nice*, I guess. She's a little over the top, but I'm pretty sure all children of Aphrodite are like that, too, so I can't really complain. That would be hypocritical."

I nodded, not sure of what else to say. I mean, what *did* you say to that? "*Oh, I'm sorry your mom only had you as payment for your dad's work, but at least you got to meet her?*"

Yeah, no.

"Wait," I said, as a strange thought suddenly occurred to me. "This...charmspeak thing. How come Katie was affected and I wasn't?"

Again, Silena shrugged. "I don't know," she said. "It affects everyone, except for other charmspeakers. But charmspeaking is something exclusive to children of Aphrodite, so obviously you don't have it."

"Great," I said with a roll of my eyes. "So yet another power that makes me weird."

She laughed. "Percy, we're demigods. We're all a little weird."

"You got that right," Katie muttered from beside her, before she opened her eyes, yawned, and stretched. "You guys really don't know how to be quiet, do you?"

"Sorry," I said with a grin. "Have a nice nap?"

She shook her head. "Not really. I had a weird dream."

Next to her, Silena frowned. "As in, normal weird or demigod weird?" she asked.

"Demigod weird," Katie replied as she rubbed one of her eyes. "I think it might have been from my mom – like, she was warning me about something."

"Warning you?" I questioned nervously. "About what?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. All I know is that, whatever she was trying to warn me about, it's waiting for us in Denver."

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## Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: I Meet The God Of Assholes

Edit: Apparently imgur (my preferred image-hosting site...others are too confusing for me lol) will only let me link it. That's weird. Oh, well. The link does work =P

# I Meet The God Of Assholes

## Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Sorry for another late-in-the-day update again. I was gonna post around 12-2, but I wound up witnessing a car wreck at that time. It was more than just a little jarring, even if everyone turned out okay, so I've been spending the rest of the day up until now just relaxing and trying to recover from the adrenaline high.

Next update will be posted on Friday, as always, so I will see you then. Sincerely,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

**Two days later, on June 13th – aka eight days before the solstice – our train rolled into Denver.** None of us had eaten anything since the night before somewhere in Kansas, because Katie's dream about something bad waiting for us in the Colorado capital had set all of our nerves on edge. None of us had taken a shower ever since we left Aunty Em's, either, which might not have sucked, except none of us had deodorant or anything like that to put on.

"We should try to contact Chiron," Katie said after we had gotten off of the train. "Just to let him know that we've gotten this far somewhat safely."

"How?" I asked. "I mean, we can't use phones, right?"

"She's not talking about phones, Percy," Silena replied, but didn't say anything else after that.

We wandered through the downtown of Denver for about half an hour, looking for something, although neither Katie or Silena would tell me what that "something" was. The air was dry and hot, which felt weird after the humidity of Camp Half-Blood, seeing how close it was to the Long Island Sound. And everywhere we turned, the Rocky Mountains were looming over us, like a snow-topped tidal wave about to crash into the city.

Finally, we found an empty do-it-yourself car wash, which seemed to be what the two girls were looking for. We veered towards the stall farthest from the street, keeping our eyes open for patrol cars. I mean, we were three teenagers hanging out at a car wash with no car, after all. That was bound to be suspicious to any somewhat decent cop.

"What exactly are we doing?" I asked, just as Katie took out the spray gun.

"You'll see," she replied as she fished for change in one of her shorts' pockets, because despite having raided Aunty Em's and the closed-down gas station next to her place, we



didn't have much cash left after paying the truck driver that we hitchhiked from and paying to eat in the dining cart of the Amtrak train. "Ha! I've got just enough money to pay for it."

With that, she stuffed all three of her quarters into the machine, before she set the knob to *FINE MIST*. Next to her, Silena grabbed a drachma from out of her pocket, which she threw into the mist once the late afternoon light filtered through it and broke into the different colors of the rainbow. "O' goddess Iris," she said as she threw the drachma, "Accept our offering."

The drachma flew through the mist and into the rainbow, where it promptly disappeared in a golden shimmer.

"Half-Blood Hill, please," Silena requested.

For a moment, nothing happened. But then, an image began to form in the rainbow and mist – an image of strawberry fields with the Long Island Sound in the distance. We seemed to be on the porch of the Big House, which was pretty fucking *amazing*, because it seemed that whatever this was like that Instant Messaging video chat thing – only ten times better.

I didn't think about that for long, though. Because standing with us back to us at the railing was very familiar, sandy-haired guy in shorts and an orange tank top. He was holding a bronze sword and seemed to be staring intently at something down in the meadow.

It had only been three days since I had last seen him, but somehow, those three days also felt like an eternity.

"Luke!" I called.

He turned, eyes wide. I could swear he was standing three feet in front of me through a screen of mist, except I could only see the part of him that appeared in the rainbow.

...Not that I was complaining, of course! Just seeing him at all caused a tidal wave of relief to crash over me.

The same could be said for him, because as soon as he saw me with his wide eyes, his face broke out into a grin and his cheeks flushed ever so slightly. "Percy!" he exclaimed. "Thank the gods! Are you guys okay?"

"We're fine," Silena interjected before I could say anything at all, much to my...*displeasure*, to say the least. "Where's Chiron?"

Luke's smile faded. "He's down at the cabins. We're...having some issues with the campers right now. Listen, is everything cool with you guys? Is Katie all right?"

"I'm right here," Katie said. She held the nozzle out to one side and stepped into Luke's line of vision. "What kind of issues?"

Just then, a big Lincoln Continental pulled into the car wash with its stereo turned up to what had to be the maximum volume. As the car slid into the next stall, the bass from the subwoofers vibrated so much, it shook both my chest and the pavement.

"Chiron had to – what's that noise?" Luke yelled.

Silena winked at me. "I'll go take care of it," she yelled, with a look that told me she was relieved to have an excuse to leave Luke and I alone. "Katie, come on!"

"What?" Katie said, before a look of understanding dawned on her face, along with a grin. "Okay. We'll be right back Percy!"

Katie then handed me the spray gun, before she and Silena walked out of our stall and over to the other one.

I quickly readjusted the hose so I could keep the rainbow going and still see Luke.

"Chiron had to break up a fight," Luke shouted to me over the music. "Things are pretty tense here, Percy. Word leaked out about the Zeus-Hades-Poseidon standoff. We're still not sure how, but that doesn't matter, because the campers are starting to take sides. So far, Aphrodite, Ares, Apollo, and most of my cabin are siding with Poseidon – " I could tell by the way that he said that last statement that it wasn't the cabin siding with Poseidon that he had a fault with, but rather the fighting, " – while Athena, Hephaestus, and Dionysus are backing Zeus."

In the next stall, I heard Silena using her charmspeak on some guy, before the music's volume decreased drastically.

"So, what's your status?" Luke asked me after that. "Chiron will be sorry he missed you."

"I'm not," I blurred out, before I flushed rather brilliantly.

Luke laughed.

I told him pretty much everything. It felt so good to see him, to feel like I was back at his side, even if only for a few minutes, that I didn't realize how long I had talked until the beeper went off on the spray machine, and I realized I only had one more minute before the water shut off.

"I'm sorry I'm not there," Luke said. "I miss you. Really. I do."

"You miss me?" I asked as my blush worsened. When he nodded, I said, "I miss you, too. I can't wait until all of this is over."

He smiled. "Me, either. Listen, are you wearing the flying shoes? I'll feel better if I know they've done you some good."

"Oh...uh, yeah!" I said, although inside I felt incredibly guilty about the fact that his shoes had long-since been destroyed. "Yeah, they've come in handy."

In the stall next to us, the music suddenly stopped completely. A man screamed in terror, car doors slammed, and the Lincoln peeled out of the car wash.

"You better go see what that was," Luke said, just as the water shut off and the mist started to evaporate.

I didn't want to, though. I wanted to stay here and keep talking to him or – better yet – just go back to camp and *be* with him again.

Luke seemed to sense as much, because in the next moment, he said with a voice that steadily got fainter, "Hey, I know you can do this, Percy. And once you do it, you can come back and we can – "

His voice stopped, just as the mist vanished and his image faded into nothing. And I was alone, in a wet, empty car wash stall.

Katie and Silena came around the corner, both of them laughing, but they stopped when they saw my face. "Percy?" Silena asked soothingly. "What happened? What did Luke say?"

"Not much," I lied, not wanting to tell them about the absolute shit storm that we had left camp in. "Come on. Let's go find some dinner."

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About half an hour later, we were sitting at a booth in a gleaming chrome diner. All around us, families were eating burgers and drinking malts and sodas.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity to my empty stomach, the waitress came over. With a raised eyebrow, she asked, "Well?"

I blinked. "We, um, want to order dinner, ma'am."

She snorted. "Of course you do. Why else would you be here? What I wanna know is if you kids have the money to pay for it."

Katie, Silena, and I all shared a look.

"We, um," I said as I tried to come up with a sob story for the waitress, not sure of what else to do, when suddenly, *it* happened.

And by *it*, I mean the thing that Katie had been warned about – because what else would I mean? Especially when *it* was a huge motorcycle about the size of a baby elephant pulling up to the diner, with a rumble that shook the whole building.

At that moment, all conversation in the diner stopped. The motorcycle's headlight glared red through the windows, casting a reddish tint on everything inside. Its gas tank had flames painted on it, and a shotgun holster was riveted to either side, complete with shotguns. The seat was leather, but not like any leather that I had seen before.

...In fact, now that I got to thinking about it, the leather almost looked like *Caucasian human skin*.

The guy on the bike was the type of guy that would make even pro-wrestlers run screaming for their mamas. He was dressed in a red muscle shirt with black jeans and a black leather duster, with a hunting knife strapped to his thigh. He wore red wraparound shades, and he had the cruelest, most brutal face that I'd ever seen, in a way that may have been handsome if

it just wasn't so utterly not my type. He had an oily black crew cut and thin, faded scars all over his body, as if he had been in multiple bar fights ever since he was a kid.

And the weird thing was, I was pretty sure that I'd seen him before, because he was familiar in a way that I just couldn't place.

As he walked into the diner, a hot, dry wind blew through the place, like the guy was literally *smoldering* with fire or something like that. All the people rose, as if he was the Queen of England or something like that, and they didn't sit down again until the biker waved his hand dismissively. Then, they all went back to their conversations, as if nothing unusual had just happened. At the same time, our waitress blinked, as if somebody had just pressed the rewind button on her brain. Then, she asked us, "You kids have the money to pay for it?"

"It's on me," the biker suddenly said in a smooth, but deep voice as he walked towards us, before he proceeded to slide into our booth, which was way too small for him, and crowded Katie against the window.

"Ow!" Katie exclaimed.

The biker smirked at her. "Sorry, doll face," he said, before he turned to look up at the waitress, who was still gaping at him. "Why are you still here, lady?"

He pointed at her then, causing her to stiffen. She turned as if she'd been spun around, and marched stiffly back towards the kitchen, looking as if she had just had a broom taped to her spine.

After she left, the biker turned to look at me. I couldn't see his eyes behind the red shades, but bad feelings started to boil inside my stomach – anger, resentment, bitterness. Suddenly, I wanted to hit a wall. Or, perhaps even better, pick a fight with somebody.

Who did this guy think he was?

"So," the biker said with a wicked grin. "You're old Seaweed's kid, huh?"

I couldn't help but glare at him then, because he reminded me a *lot* of Gabe – even more than Mr. D did. I wanted to punch him in the face at the very thought, but I didn't. Instead, I said, "Yeah. What's it to you?"

Next to me, Silena shifted uncomfortably. "Percy," she said warningly, and sounded like she wanted to say something else, too, but the biker raised his hand, which caused her to immediately stop talking.

"It's alright," he said. "A little attitude's what I like to see – it means you haven't been ground down by the life yet. It's good. Healthy, even. As long as you remember who's the boss. And you know I'm the boss right now, right, little cousin?"

In that instant, I suddenly knew why this guy looked so familiar. He had the same vicious sneer as some of the kids at Camp Half-Blood – specifically the ones from Cabin Five.

"You're Clarisse's dad, aren't you?" I asked. "Ares, god of war."

Ares grinned and took off his shades, revealing his eyes...or lack thereof, more like it. Because instead of eyes, there was only fire, empty sockets glowing with miniature nuclear explosions. "That's right, punk. I heard you broke my Clarisse's spear."

"She was asking for it."

"Probably. That's cool. I don't like getting into my kids' fights, you know? Wouldn't be fair – especially when she seems to like you so much. No, the reason why I'm here, cousin, is because I got a little proposition for you."

Just then, the waitress came back with heaping trays of food – cheeseburgers, fries, onion rings, and chocolate shakes.

Ares handed her a few gold drachmas once she had gotten all of the plates on the table. She looked nervously at them. "Sir, these aren't..."

He pulled out his huge knife and started to clean his fingernails. "There a problem, sweetheart?"

She stared at him for one long, hard moment, before she swallowed deeply, took the coins, and left.

"You can't just do that," I hissed at Ares once she was outside of listening range. "You can't –"

"Can't what? Defend myself?" he retorted with a laugh. "It's one of my constitutional rights, according to this country. It's one of the best things that your civilization came up with – after the entire city of Sparta, of course. Can't beat that. But, I'm getting off-topic here – we should be talking about my proposition. Or, more like a favor I need you to do for me, really."

I grimaced. "What kind of favor could I possibly do for a god?"

He shrugged in response. "Something that a god doesn't have time to do himself. It's nothing much, really. I left my shield at an abandoned water park here in town. I was going on a little...*date* with one of my girlfriends, you see. We were interrupted. I left my shield behind. I want you to fetch it for me."

"And why should I do this for you?" I asked, as I desperately tried and failed to keep my cool. It wasn't *fair*, after all, that a god could just come in and stop my life- and world-saving quest like this – even if I knew that life wasn't fair in general. "What's in it for me?"

Ares leaned forward, just as the fire in his eye sockets began to glow a little hotter. "You realize, cousin," he said in a dangerously low voice. "I could turn you into a prairie dog right now and run you over with my Harley 'cause of your attitude? I don't really feel like doing it, but I could. Just like how I could, theoretically, turn both of your little girlfriends here into bitches – oh, wait! I forgot! Old Seaweed's boys aren't really the non-pansy type of material."

I clenched my fists, but didn't say anything. Which was good, because Ares sneered down at me viciously before saying, "A god is giving you an opportunity to prove yourself, Percy

Jackson. Are you going to waste it and prove yourself a coward like my father and old Death think you are, or are you willing to rise above their expectations and prove yourself to be better?"

I wanted to punch this guy, god or not, so fucking badly, but somehow, I knew that that was what he was waiting for. Ares was goading me on, I realized, and what was worse, his power was only increasing my anger. Feeding into it, pushing it. He'd love it if I attacked.

I didn't want to give him the satisfaction.

"Fine," I snapped after a moment. "We'll do it."

Ares grinned. "Great," he said. "Just so you know, the water park is a mile west on Delancy. You can't miss it. Look for the *Tunnel of Love* ride. And, while you're there, I'll arrange some...*transportation* for you. It'll take you the rest of your way out west, don't worry. And it'll be free of charge.

"Just remember one thing, punk," he added after a moment as he put his shades back on. "You're lucky you met me, and not some other Olympian like Athena or dear Arty. They're not as forgiving of rudeness as I am. I'll meet you back here when you're done. Don't disappoint me."

And with that, he was gone.

"Oh, that's not good," Katie groaned after a moment. "Ares sought you out, Percy. That's not good."

I didn't say anything in response. Instead, I stared out at the window, at the spot where the god of asshole's motorcycle had been.

Next to me, Silena shifted nervously. "It...might not be as bad as it could be," she admitted.

At that, both Katie and I turned to look at her. "What do you mean?" I couldn't help but ask.

She grinned. "Think about it," she said. "He said 'look for the *Tunnel of Love* ride'. *Love*, Percy! As in Aphrodite! Whatever made him freak out about this ride, I'm sure that my mom had something to do with it – which means that I got a fair shot at getting Ares's shield, no problem!"

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: We Ride The Tunnel Of Love

We Ride The Tunnel Of Love

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! I don't really have anything special to say today, other than I am currently writing a chapter that is a few chapters ahead of this one, and I'm really excited about the chapters that are going to follow this one. :P I won't say why, of course, but I'm 99.9999% sure that you're all going to love them! :)

Next chapter will be posted on Monday, like always. So, until then,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Okay, before you read any farther, let me just say this now: whoever coined the phrase "no problem" needs to be slapped. *Hard*.

After our encounter with Ares at the diner, the three of us quickly left the place (although, not without finishing our meals first, 'cause we were all starving) and wandered towards the water park, using the directions that the dick-ish god gave us. By the time that we got there, the sun was already sinking below the mountains, and the water park looked as if it had been abandoned for years, if the way that the *WATERLAND* sign now read *WAT R A D* was any indicator.

The main gate was padlocked and topped with barbed wire. Inside, huge dry waterslides and tubes and pipes curled everywhere, leading to empty pools. Old tickets and advertisements cluttered around the asphalt. With night coming on, the place looked desolate, sad, and most of all, *creepy*.

"What kind of girlfriend would Ares bring here?" I couldn't help but wonder out loud as I stared up at the barbed wire.

Silena shrugged. "Probably a nymph of some sort," she said. "I mean, Ares is technically married to Enyo, but I don't think they really...get along, you know? At least, not like they used to."

Vaguely, I recalled from one of Annabeth's genealogy lessons that Enyo was the goddess of war and the official counterpart of Ares – hence why she was both his twin sister and his wife. Where Ares was hotheaded and rash, she was cold and calculating. And where he was brute force, she was an expert in battle strategy...which made it kind of odd that they couldn't get along right now, considering they were supposed to. *Destined* to, even.

"Right," I said after a few moments. "What's the plan here? Climb up over the fence?"

Silena laughed and rolled her eyes as she ran a hand through her hair. "Percy, you spent two weeks in Cabin Eleven and the best thing you can come up with is to *climb the gate*? Didn't the Stolls teach you *anything*? Now, come on, where is – aha! There it is!"

She pulled a bobby pin out of her hair with a flourish, before she just barely stuck her arms through the gate and somehow unlocked the padlock on the other side. Then, she turned to us and winked. "Come on, Katie," she said. "Ladies first."

The shadows grew long as we walked through the park, checking out the attractions. There was *Ankle Biter Island*, *Head Over Wedgie*, and *Dude, Where's My Swimsuit?*, among a bunch of other weird sorts of rides that made it really obvious as to just why the place went out of business.

Thankfully, no monsters came to get us while we were walking. In fact, nothing made even the slightest of noise.

About halfway through the park, we found a souvenir shop that had been left open. Merchandise still lined the shelves: snow globes, pencils, postcards, and racks of –

"Clothes!" Silena squealed. "Fresh clothes! Oh, I can't believe it!"

"Great," Katie said with a slight deadpan, although I could tell that she was also excited at the prospect of getting out of the clothes we had worn for the past three days. And I couldn't blame her for it, because I kind of wanted to get out of my ABBA shirt, too. It was starting to stick.

Silena wasn't listening to her, though. Instead, she quickly snatched an entire row of stuff off of the racks and disappeared into one of the changing rooms. A few minutes later, she came out in *Waterland* flower-print shorts, a big red *Waterland* t-shirt, and commemorative *Waterland* surf shoes – all of which seemed to suit her, even if I thought that the clothing was a little tacky...must've been a child of Aphrodite perk. She also had a *Waterland* backpack slung over her shoulder, which was obviously stuffed with more goodies.

"Well, what do you think?" she asked. "It's not really to my tastes, but –"

"It's great, Silena," Katie suddenly interjected. "Now just let us get changed and we'll be on our way."

A few minutes later, all three of us left the shop, looking like walking advertisements for the defunct theme park. But hey, at least we had clean clothes, right? And a map of the park, too, which really came in handy when it came to finding the *Tunnel of Love* ride, 'cause it was actually at the end of the park, hidden in a tight little corner that none of us probably would've noticed otherwise.

When we got there, though, it turned out that the ride was nothing like I was expecting – which is saying something, because I wasn't really expecting *anything* at all. Still, the somehow full-pool that was at least fifty yards across with at least a dozen bronze statues of baby Cupid was a little...*weird*, to say the least. Although, the cupids admittedly weren't as

weird as the sign hanging from a tunnel opposite us, which read: *THRILL RIDE O' LOVE: THIS IS NOT YOUR PARENTS' TUNNEL OF LOVE!*

Marooned in the middle of the pool was a giant, pink-and-white two-seated boat with a canopy over the top and little hearts painted all over it. In the left seat, glinting in the fading light, was Ares's shield, a polished circle of bronze.

"This is too easy," I said. "All I have to do is use my – "

"No!" Katie suddenly shouted.

Both Silena and I turned to look at her. "What?" I asked.

Katie looked at me softly. "Percy," she said, "I don't want to be mean or anything, but...you don't exactly have a hold on any of your powers yet. I mean, you fainted when you were fighting Medusa and you almost fainted during capture the flag at camp. You don't want to do that now, believe me. Not with Ares. Just...just let me get the boat, okay?"

I opened my mouth to protest her, to tell her that I really had a control over my freaky powers and they weren't as hard as they looked...but that was a lie, and not a very good one. I mean, Katie was a daughter of *Demeter*, so she would know better than anyone else just how hard it was to grapple our insane children-of-the-eldest-gods powers. Especially when I'd only used them three or two times, intense of the countless amount of times that she had used hers.

"...Okay," I said finally. "You can get the boat. Just...be careful, okay? I don't have a good feeling about this."

Katie rolled her eyes. "Yeah, yeah," she said. "I'll get the boat over here in just a sec, don't worry."

And with that, she began to grow her freaky vines out of her arms.

Not really wanting to watch her move the boat with her vines, I turned to talk to Silena, but she wasn't right next to me like I had thought she was. Instead, she was a few feet away, staring at one of the cupids, a look of confirmation and mild concern on her face. "What?" I asked as I walked towards her. "What is it? What are you looking at?"

"There's a Greek letter carved here," she replied, and pointed at the letter that she was talking about for good measure. It kind of looked like the letter A, but also...*different*, at the same time. *Maybe*. I didn't know for sure, because all of the Ancient Greek lessons that I'd had with Annabeth were slowly turning to mush in my brain. "It's the letter alpha. I'm sure of it."

I nodded. "So...what does this mean?"

She shrugged. "It confirms that my mother was up to something here, but...not in the way that I thought. At least, I don't think so. Which...could be bad."

I blinked. "'Could be bad'?" I quoted. "What do you mean, '*could be bad*'?"

"Let's just say that Mom and Hermes didn't just get married because of their personalities, Percy," Silena said as a serious expression formed on her beautiful face. "They also got married because of their mutual love for...*pranks*. And not the 'ha-ha. Everyone laughs' kind, either."

"Guys!" Katie suddenly called, causing us both to turn around. "I got the boat!"

And, sure enough, she did.

Both Silena and I walked towards the boat hesitantly, the words that she had said about Aphrodite ringing in our ears – or, at least, they were in mine. I mean, no offense to Silena's mom or anything, but my experience with people who liked to play cruel pranks wasn't exactly...*pleasant*, to say the least. And so, I was more than just a little worried about what kind of person Aphrodite actually was, and what kind of prank she might have had up her sleeve with this ride.

As we reached the boat, I saw that the shield was propped up on one seat, and next to it was a lady's silk scarf. But those weren't the only things that I saw, because I also realized while staring at them that there were mirrors all of the way around the rim of the pool, seemingly facing the spot where the boat had just been: the center. *Of course*, I thought with a fair amount of my usual sarcastic attitude. *This is why Ares took his girlfriend here: he could spend his time feeling her up and looking at himself in the process.*

Disregarding the god's shield for a moment, I reached over and picked up the scarf. It was a deep, shimmering blue, almost like the color of the Sound, and when I smelled it, it smelled like the ocean. But not just that. It kind of smelled like my *mom*, too. In fact, for a moment I could almost picture her standing right next to me, with a smile on her face and a glint of happiness in her eyes.

"You're right, Silena," I said as I stuffed the scarf into my pockets. "He brought a nymph here, all right. An *ocean* nymph."

Katie huffed. "That's great and all, Percy," she said. "But do you mind grabbing the shield so that we can just go ahead and go? While the current in this pool isn't bad, per se, the boat isn't exactly weightless, even with all of my vines."

"Oh," I said stupidly, before I grinned at her sheepishly. "Right. Sorry, Katie."

Turning back to the boat, I reached down and grabbed the shield.

And that's where everything became fucked up.

You see, the moment that my hand touched the shield, it broke through something that been connecting the shield to the dashboard. At first, I thought it was a cobweb, but then I looked at a strand of it on my palm and saw it was some kind of metal filament, so fine that it was almost invisible – a trip wire.

"Wait!" Silena suddenly cried out.

I winced. "Too late."

"There's another alpha on the side of the boat. I was right! It's a trap!"

As soon as she said the word "trap", noise erupted around all of us. It sounded like a million years grinding, as if the pool was turning into one giant machine.

But that wasn't the least of our problems, because in the next instant, two things happened. Well, more like one thing, but the one thing caused the second thing, so I digress. The first thing that happened was that, on the rim, all of the cupids suddenly drew back their bows into a firing position, before they shot, but not at us. No, they fired at each other, across the rim of the pool. Silky cables trailed from the arrows, arcing over the pool and anchoring where they landed to form a huge golden asterisk. Then, smaller metallic threads started weaving together magically between the main strands, making a tight net over the boat and the full pool.

In the process of all of this, one of the arrows caught onto one of Katie's vines, causing her to fall into the pool with a shriek just before the smaller metallic strands wove themselves into a net. "*Katie!*" I shouted as she was fully submerged.

A moment later, her head popped out of the water. "I'm fine," she said. "Now, help me up."

I grabbed her arm and pulled her out of the water. Looking around, I realized that all of the statues' heads had popped open, revealing video cameras inside. Pink spotlights rose up all around the pool, bathing us in a rosy glow, and a loudspeaker boomed: "Live to Olympus in one minute...Fifty-nine...fifty-eight...fifty-seven – "

"Silena!" I screamed over the loudspeaker. "Do you have any idea how to get us out of this mess?"

On the other side of the net, Silena shook her head. Her face was pale and her kaleidoscope eyes were wide, as if she knew what was going to come next and was dreading it with every fiber of her being.

Which, I suppose, made sense, what with her being a daughter of Aphrodite and all. But it certainly wasn't comforting, I'll tell you that. No, far from it.

The row of mirrors around the rim of the pool suddenly opened up like hatches. Dozens of metallic swans, I shit you not, instantly zoomed out, all of them honking and flapping their metallic wings like crazy as they converged on us, like something straight out of a shitty sci-fi movie. First, they only bit us, which hurt like hell, but at least wasn't as terrifying as they opened their beaks and began to spit out strands of metal thread, which they used to tie us down.

"Oh, you got to be fucking kidding me!" I shouted as Katie and I tried to escape, but it was no use. There were just so many strands and so many swans, and for every strand and swan we broke, there were a dozen more, ready to take their places.

"Nineteen...eighteen...seventeen..." the loudspeaker called out.

Come on, I thought to myself as Katie and I were pinned to the boat, both of us screaming and thrashing all the while. *There has to be a way out of here...think. Think.*

The pool was full of water, I realized, before mentally slapping myself for not thinking of it sooner. The pool was full of water and, even if it put me into exhaustion for the rest of the day, I could *control* it. I could drown out all of the swans and get rid of the wires tying me and Katie down, and hopefully the net, too, in the process. It wouldn't be hard. Just a pull from behind the navel...

"Katie!" I screamed. "Don't breathe!"

"What?" she shouted, even though she was right next to me.

"*Don't. Breathe!*" I screamed again.

And then, we became fully submerged in water.

Instantly, all of the swans were pushed to one side of the pool as they visibly short-circuited from the overload of water in their systems. The strands of metal that they had been pushing out from their mouths were, too, allowing Katie and I to move freely about – which was good, because while I could, apparently, breathe and see underwater, I knew that she couldn't.

What *wasn't* good, though, was the fact that, despite my best efforts, I couldn't break the net that was over the top of the boat and the pool. It was resistant to the water, as if Aphrodite had expected my water powers...although, now that I got to thinking about it, I guess she *had*, since Ares's date was an ocean nymph and all.

After a few extra seconds of trying to break the net and failing, I finally gave up and let all of the water fall back into the pool with a mighty *splash*. Both Katie and I resurfaced with great gasps of air, although not for the same reasons. At least the water was rejuvenating me, though, because otherwise I'm pretty sure that I would've passed out then and there.

With a shaky breath, I looked up as I ran a hand through my hair. The loudspeaker wasn't counting down anymore, which meant only one thing: we were live on Olympus. I turned to face one of the cameras and waved. "Hey!" I shouted. "Can we get a little help here? Please?"

Suddenly, the net over us shimmered, before it turned into a golden light and vanished. Obviously, some deity up there had listened to my demand and acquiesced. Not wanting to be rude, I hastily added, "Thank you! Show's over! Good night!"

All around us, the statues turned back to their original positions. The lights, which had turned to spotlight on us sometime during our excursion underwater, shut off. The park went quiet and dark again, save for the rather noticeable trickle of water from the *Thrill Ride of Love's* pool. Mildly, I wondered if Olympus had gone on commercial break and the cameras would be back to filming at any moment, or if the show was truly over like I had said. If the latter was true, then I also wondered if our ratings had been any good.

But, most of all, I was angry – but not at Aphrodite, no. At least, not that much. Because while I hated being teased and tricked, her prank hadn't been meant for me. It had been meant

for Ares, and instead of facing it like he should have as the fucking *god of war*, he'd sent me after it like a coward.

No wonder Enyo wasn't getting along with him anymore. He couldn't fucking represent his domain like he was supposed to.

"Come on," I told Silena and Katie a few minutes later, after we'd gotten out of the pool and after I'd hefted Ares's shield onto my arm. "Let's go have a *little* talk with Ares."

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: We Spend Some Time Hitchhiking Pt. 2

We Spend Some Time Hitchhiking Pt. 2

Chapter Notes

Hello, again, everyone! Hope you all had a wonderful weekend! I've mostly been writing, as I've been in the mood for it ha ha.

This chapter is the last "fluffy" chapter (what I call "talking chapters" that don't necessarily deal with the action) for a while, as the next few chapters after this are all about the action! ;) This chapter is pretty necessary, though, because it's setting the scene for something tagged shortly down the line, along with some untagged things that are very crucial to the story...which if you want to theorize about, I won't mind. I won't confirm your theories, though lol. I'm evil that way :P

Next chapter will be posted on Wednesday, as always, so I will see you then,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ares was waiting for us in the diner parking lot.

"Well, well, well," he said. "Here comes my two cousins and their friend, safe and sound after all."

I glared at him as best as I could. "You knew it was a trap," I accused.

He shrugged and gave me a wicked grin. "So maybe I did. It doesn't matter. You got me my shield and made a nice TV skit in the process. That takes some style, kid."

I rolled my eyes. "You're a jerk," I said as I shoved his shield at him, causing both Silena and Katie to catch their breath. "Now, where's our ride?"

Ares snickered. "Bossy, bossy," he said. Then, he grabbed his shield properly and spun it around in the air like pizza dough. It changed form as he did so, melting into a bulletproof vest, which he slung across his back before he said, "See that truck over there?" He pointed to an eighteen-wheeler parked across the street from the diner. "That's your ride. It'll take you straight to LA, with only one stop in Vegas."

I stared at the eighteen-wheeler warily. The trailer was black with wavy white stripes on it, like a zebra, and the text on the back of it was white, too – which was good, because it made it easy to read with my dyslexia. It read: *KINDNESS INTERNATIONAL: HUMANE ZOO TRANSPORT. WARNING: LIVE WILD ANIMALS.*

"You're kidding," I said once I'd finished reading.

Ares snapped his fingers. The back door of the trailer unlatched. "Free ride west, punk," he said. "Stop complaining. And here's a little something for doing the job."

He slung a blue nylon backpack off of his handlebars and tossed it to me. It was already open at the top, so once I caught it I could easily tell that inside there were fresh clothes for all of us, along with twenty bucks of cash, a pouch full of golden drachmas, and a bag of *Double Stuf Oreos*.

Still, I didn't want it. Ares had tricked me and the way that he had done it was *low*, even for a god. So, as I zipped up the bag, I said, "Look, I don't want your – "

But before I could say anything more than that, Katie cut me off. "Thank you, Lord Ares," she said as she gave me her best warning look for good measure. "Thanks a lot."

I gritted my teeth, but nevertheless reluctantly slung the backpack over my shoulder. I mean, I knew that my anger was being caused by the war god's presence, but that didn't stop me from wanting to just throw him back his bag of shit and be done with it, regardless as to the fact that that would probably result in my doom. He reminded me of every bully I'd ever faced, after all: Hudson Lake, Smelly Gabe, sarcastic teachers who didn't believe me, and every other jerk who had called me stupid in school or had laughed in my face when I'd gotten expelled. And I didn't like him because of it. Not one bit.

Anxiously, I looked back at the diner, which only had a couple of customers now. The waitress who'd served us dinner was watching us nervously through the window, her face pale and her eyes wide, as if she was afraid Ares was going to hurt us or something like that – if that was the case, then I didn't blame her. Still, I didn't like how she dragged the fry cook out from the kitchen to see, or how they seemed to have a short conversation before he held up a little disposable camera and snapped a picture of us.

Great, I thought with a grimace. *Time for me to make the papers again.*

I could just see the headline now: *FOURTEEN-YEAR-OLD BOY MISSING FROM NEW YORK FOUND TALKING TO BIKER THUG IN COLORADO.*

The thought of the headline made me think about the first one, which in turn made me think about my mom. "Hey," I told Ares, trying to keep my voice level because of the idea that was currently rolling through my brain. "I want one more thing from you."

He sneered. "What? That bag ain't enough for you, punk? You a spoiled brat or something?"

I ignored his jibe in lieu of asking, "What do you know about my mom?"

Ares raised an eyebrow. "Your mom?" he asked. "What, do I look like old Death or something?"

"No," I said. "I just – I have a feeling if any of the gods knows something and is willing to share it, it's you."

At first, I thought he was going to kill me right then and there for that comment, but after a moment his sneer turned into a dark grin and he laughed. "Dionysus was right," he said. "You *are* smart. And just for your smarts, I'll tell you one thing: your mother isn't dead, punk. She's still alive. And she's being kept by old Death as a hostage, so that he can control you. So if you want her back and all that, your best bet is to find him that helm of his before the solstice."

Despite Ares's meddling over my emotions, waves of relief crashes over me at his words. I was *right*, after all. My mom was *alive*. And that was all that mattered to me at this point. "Thank you," I told him honestly as my shoulders sagged from the release of all of the tension that I had been experiencing ever since I started this quest.

Ares's grin widened. "Don't thank me yet, punk," he said. "We'll meet again in the near future. *That's* when you can thank me."

Then, he revved his motorbike and roared off down Delancey Street.

Next to me, Silena groaned. "Only you can piss off the war god and somehow get on his good side again, Percy," she said. "Now, come on. We need to get on that truck before the guys inside decide to leave – or worse, somehow notice us."

And with that, the three of us ran across the street and climbed in the back of the open trailer, before closing the doors behind us.

The trailer was dark inside, and it smelled something awful, like it was the world's biggest pan of kitty litter or something like that. With a grimace of disgust, I uncapped Riptide for the first time since I had used it to cut off Medusa's head way back in New York. The blade cast a faint bronze light in the trailer, and revealed a scene that made my stomach churn in disgust and pity: a scene depicting a zebra, a male albino lion, and an antelope that I didn't know the name for, all looking filthy and malnourished.

Part of the reason for their malnourishment, I assumed, was the fact that the lion had a sack of turnips in his cage, which he obviously didn't want to eat, and the zebra and the antelope had each gotten a styrofoam tray of hamburger meat, which they also looked disgusted at. The zebra's mane was matted with chewing gum, like somebody had been spitting on it in their spare time, and the antelope had a stupid silver birthday balloon tied to one of its horns that read: *OVER THE HILL!*

And none of this was even mentioning the fact that all of them were sitting in cages that were way too small for them, with soiled blankets and no water next to their ill-matched food. All of them also had all of their ribs showing, which was even more sickening than the other signs of malnourishment that they were showing.

Right behind me, Katie let out a low moan that almost sounded like a sob. "*This* is kindness?" she asked no one in particular. "*Humane zoo transport?*"

"Katie," Silena began softly.

Katie wasn't listening to her, though. In fact, she didn't seem to be capable of listening to anyone in that moment, because there was a dangerous look in her eyes and I could see vines poking out of her skin, growing at a rate that was a lot faster than what I thought she was capable of.

Suddenly, Luke's words about her being dangerous didn't seem so funny anymore.

I swallowed hard as I tried to figure out what to do. Obviously, Katie wasn't going to let us just sit here and let the animals be abused any longer – I mean, I didn't think even *I* could let myself just let that happen. But we needed to go west, somehow, someway, and Ares had at least been agreeable enough to give us the truck...

...*The truck*. He gave us the truck.

But he didn't give us the people driving it.

"Silena," I said as I turned to look at her. "Do you know how to drive?"

Silena frowned. "My dad gave me practice lessons before I left this summer, since I'd turn fifteen and a half in August. Why would you..." she trailed off as her eyes lit up in recognition. Then, she gave a hesitant grin. "Are you sure about this, Percy? I haven't had much experience driving, you know. Just a few lessons."

I grinned back. "Well, I haven't had any," I said. "So you're already loads better than me." Then I turned to look at Katie. "Katie, are you fine with staying back here with the animals? To keep them calm?"

She looked up at me with glassy eyes and a frown of her own, but that was okay, because I was, quite frankly, surprised that she responded to me at all. "What do you mean?" she asked in a trembling voice.

"You'll see," I promised her, before I looked back at Silena. "Come on, Silena. Let's go show those assholes what *Kindness International* really means."

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Three hours later, we were driving along I-70 West, with a radio station playing all of the hits from the '70s and '80s playing smoothly in the background. Silena was sitting in the driver's seat, her beautiful face showcasing an expression of determination, while I was sitting in the passenger seat, munching on my portion of the *Double Stuf Oreos* and watching her drive in case she fucked up somehow in spite of her actually amazing driving skills.

Although, I have to say, her driving skills were no match for her breaking-into-and-hotwiring-a-semi-truck skills, because those were by far some of the best skills I had seen in that area, even if the skill set was pretty niche.

"Do you think we did the right thing?" Silena suddenly asked me.

I couldn't help but jump in surprise at her words, causing the crumbs from my cookies to go flying. "Shit!" I said as I watched the small, dark brown flecks fly into the area around my

seat. "Silena, you just made me spill my crumbs!"

She rolled her eyes. "You don't eat crumbs, Percy. That's why they're called 'crumbs'. Now, answer my question: did we do the right thing?"

"The right thing about what?" I asked, confused. "I mean, you know as well as I do that those *Kindness International* guys had all of this coming to them with the way they treated those animals back there."

"Yeah, they did, but that's not what I'm talking about. I just – " she sighed. "I just feel bad about leaving Katie back there, okay? I mean, she was having a panic attack and we just *left* her to get through it by herself, and that wasn't *fair* – especially when I'm not sure if I could stop this thing before we get to Las Vegas. I think Ares did something funky to the gas and the gas pedal, because the gas mileage won't go down and the pedal won't go all of the way up. Which means Katie could be stuck back there for the rest of the eight hours of the drive."

I blinked. I think that had been the most words I had heard Silena speak all at once *ever*, and it kind of surprised me. But, it also made me think about why she had been so unwilling to come on the quest itself. "I'm sure Katie's fine," I told her comfortingly, even if I was a little uncomfortable at the thought myself. "I – I mean, it's probably best that she's on her own, if she's really as powerful when she gets angry as I heard she is. But that's not really why you're so upset, are you?"

At first, she stiffened, but then her shoulders slumped. "No," she admitted. "It's not."

"Then what is making you so upset?"

"*Nothing*," she snapped, before she sighed and shook her head. "Everything, I guess. I can't help but wonder how Drew and Laurel are faring with taking on my duties, how Mitchell and Lacy are doing, how my dad is doing, and...and..."

"And whether or not we're going to survive this quest?" I asked.

She nodded.

"Well," I said. "I think we're doing pretty good so far. I mean, we survived the Kindly Ones, Medusa, Ares, your mom – "

"It's not the monsters and gods that make me worried, Percy," she interrupted. "I mean, they do, but I'm not – I'm not as worried about them as I'm worried about what happened the *last* time a child of Aphrodite went on a quest."

I blinked again. "Wait," I said. "I thought you said children of Aphrodite *don't* go on quests? I mean, except for you, obviously."

"And Luke corrected me," she corrected. "He said '*most*' after I said that. *Most*, not all."

"Oh," I replied stupidly, before I frowned. "Wait, who was the other kid of Aphrodite then? The one that you said died?"

She winced. "I can't tell you that, Percy."

"Why not?"

"Because it's not my story to tell," she said.

"Then whose story is it, then?"

She winced again. "I can't tell you that, either."

"Is it Luke's?"

Silena shrieked and jerked the steering wheel. With a scream of my own, I watched as she instantly corrected it, only to be on the receiving end of her wrath as she turned to look at me and shouted, "*How* could you possibly know?"

"Gah, it wasn't that hard to figure out," I managed to croak out as I fought to catch my breath. "'Cause if he corrected you about that, obviously he knew this kid of Aphrodite, right? And how many other people could know the kid other than you, Annabeth, and maybe Katie? I'm not stupid, you know."

"I never implied that you were," she replied wearily. "It's just...I *really* want you two together, okay? You two work together so well, it's like it's...fate or something. *Destiny*. And I don't want anything to ruin that. So you – you gotta promise me to *not* mention this to Luke ever, okay? At least, not until he's ready. Because otherwise he'll kill me and I'd rather not have that happen before I can have my first kiss with Ally."

I stared at her for a moment, before I sighed and said, "Okay, I promise. Whatever you think is best, since you figured out Luke and I liked each other before we did..." I trailed off, as a thought suddenly occurred to me. "Wait. *You* like Ally? As in Alabaster, the son of Hecate?"

Silena blushed. *Hard*. Which was an impressive sight, all things considered, because I'd never seen her blush before. I didn't even know children of Aphrodite were capable of blushing, although now that I thought about it, I didn't know why they wouldn't be. Capable, I mean. "*Shut up*," she hissed at me, drawing me out of my short-circuited train of thought.

But I couldn't just let this go. "Oh my gods," I said, stunned. "*You* like Alabaster. *Alabaster* likes you. How have you two not managed to kiss each other yet? Or kill each other. I mean, no offense, but he seems pretty predisposed to doing both when it comes to you."

"Gee, none taken," Silena replied with a roll of her eyes. "I tried asking him out before at the beginning of this summer, before you arrived. He said no."

"He said *no*?" I cried out. "But Silena, you're – you're –"

"A daughter of Aphrodite," she finished smoothly. No, not smoothly. *Angrily*. "Apparently because most children of Aphrodite don't go on quests, we're not *womanly* – or manly – enough for him. Like any of that matters. Nobody's been on a quest for two years now."

"*Until* now, you mean," I countered. "You agreed to go on this quest. Was it because of that?"

She blushed again. "No!"

"If you did, I don't blame you," I said honestly, because I really didn't. I was still just happy about the fact that she had accepted so I didn't have to deal with Annabeth for the duration of the quest.

"I didn't!" she huffed angrily.

"Okay, okay," I said, before I shrugged. "It doesn't really matter, anyways, because I'm almost certain that he just said that because he was *scared*. I mean, did he *tell* you that you weren't womanly enough for him, or was that just something you thought he meant?"

Her silence was an answer in of itself. With a grin, I shook my head and stretched out my arms. "Tell you what," I said as I stretched. "Assuming we survive this quest, I'll help you out with Alabaster like you helped me out with Luke, as thanks for both coming on this quest with me and helping me realize that Luke has feelings for me, too."

Silena turned to look at me with wide, nervous eyes. "Really?" she asked with a trembling voice. "You'd do that?"

"Of course," I replied easily, even if I was a little baffled about the fact that *I* was going to help *her*, a daughter of the love goddess, ask out the guy she liked. I mean, it seemed kind of paradoxical – not that I was going to tell her that. "That's what friends do, right?"

She smiled. "Yeah," she said softly. "That's what friends do."

And with that being said, we continued on into the dark desert night.

## Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: The Lotus Hotel & Casino Pt. 1

# The Lotus Hotel & Casino Pt. 1

## Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Here's Wednesday's update! Not much more to say other than that, although I will say that I can't wait to read your reactions to this chapter ;)

So, with that being said, I will see you all on Friday. Sincerely,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

**True to Silena's word, the truck was magicked into staying on course for the entire eleven hour drive that it took to get from Denver to Las Vegas – meaning we were unable to stop.** Not once. Not even for a bathroom break, which sucked. Majorly. But, admittedly, my bladder did not suck as much as the fact that Katie was left alone in the trailer with the lion, antelope, and zebra, because not even an hour after Silena confessed she was worried about her did I start to feel guilty, too. I mean, apocalyptic rage or not, nobody deserved to be stuck in an eighteen-wheeler trailer all alone for eleven miserable hours.

But Katie and my urge to pee were not my only concerns during the trip, because around the point that we merged from I-70 West onto the I-15, I fell asleep. And, of course, with demigod sleep comes demigod dreams, although this dream was admittedly like no other dream I had ever had before...

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...My nightmare started out as something I'd dreamed a million times before, over and over again: I was being forced to take a standardized test – the horror! No, really. That shit's terrifying – while wearing a straightjacket. All of the other kids had been dismissed to lunch, but I was stuck sitting there, and the teacher kept saying, "Come on, Percy. You're not stupid, are you? Pick up the pencil."

Then the dream strayed from the usual.

I looked over at the next desk and saw a girl sitting there, also wearing a straightjacket. She looked to be around my age, if not a little older, with black, punk-style hair, stormy green eyes with dark eyeliner around them, and a smattering of freckles across her cheeks and nose. Somehow, without even thinking about it, I knew who she was. She was Thalia Grace, the daughter of Zeus who had gotten turned into a pine tree.

Strangely enough, Thalia wasn't struggling against the straightjacket like I was. Instead, she was staring at me with a somber expression, and her eyes were wide and mournful. "Can you make him happy?" she asked me sadly.

I blinked. "What are you talking about?" I asked.

She just shook her head. "Please," she said. "Make him happy again – like he was with me. Like he was with Alan. Please. Make him happy, Percy. Make him happy."

I opened my mouth to reply to her, but I wasn't able to say anything. Or do anything else, really, except watch her helplessly as the straightjacket melted off of me, causing me to fall through the classroom floor. The teacher's voice changed until it was cold and evil, echoing from the depths of a great chasm. "*Percy Jackson,*" the voice said. "*So we meet again.*"

"Who are you?" I asked in a trembling voice, as spirits of the dead drifted all around me. "What do you want with me? And what did you do to Luke?"

"The son of Hermes got what he deserved for disobeying my orders," the voice replied cryptically. *"But he will have no lasting harm from it, I assure you, Percy Jackson. As to what I want to do with you...it is more of what I want to do for you."*

"F – for me?"

"Yes," the voice said. *"I have been watching you for some time now, Percy Jackson, ever since Zeus and Hades' symbols of power were stolen. I've watched as the two of them, along with most of the other Olympians, have senselessly blamed you and your father for a crime that neither of you committed. I have watched as your father has let them toy with you needlessly, letting his elder brother take your mother and his younger brother almost take your life. And although I did agree to let Luke Castellan to convince you to come to my side by August, I am far too impatient to let you suffer underneath the burdens the gods have given you for much longer."*

"What do you mean 'suffer underneath their burdens'?" I asked, while inside I couldn't help but marvel at how – how – how *poetic* the voice was. How tempting, kind of like the ghost of Hamlet's father. Because even though I didn't really believe his words – or, at least, didn't believe the part about my father willingly not doing anything to help me – I couldn't help but want to hear more of what he was talking about.

"Did you ever wonder the real reason why Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades decided to stop having children, Percy Jackson?" the voice replied. *"Because they would not stop having children because of a measly mortal war, I assure you. Because they do not care about mortals. If they did, then they would have interfered in the World Wars long before they made the pact, and they wouldn't have stolen your mother."*

At his words, my mouth went dry – which was weird, because I was pretty sure that this was a dream, and I'd never experienced something like a dry mouth in a dream before. Nervously, I wet my lips, before I shouted, "You're – you're lying! They *do* care! Why else would have Zeus turned his daughter into a pine tree? Why else would have Demeter sent Katie to find me?"

The voice laughed. "*Foolish boy,*" it said. *"So naive. But I will let you believe in them. For now. Just remember, Percy Jackson: when you go into the Underworld, do not immediately rush to Hades's palace once you get off Lord Charon's boat. Instead, stay at the banks of the*

River Styx and ask for the Lady of the River. She will come. And she will tell you everything there is to know about why the eldest gods stopped having children."

The voice laughed again, except this time its laughter echoed from the chasm and off of the walls of the dark cavern that I was in. It roared in my ears, to the point that I anxiously put my hands over them and squeezed my eyes shut tight. So tight, in fact, that in the next moment –

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– I woke with a start.

"Percy, are you alright?" Katie asked me.

I blinked. "Katie?" I said. "What are you doing up here? Are we already in Las Vegas?"

She grinned. "Yeah," she replied. "Silena said you fell asleep about halfway through Utah and didn't wake up until now. Not once. You must've needed the sleep."

I winced as my stomach began to churn at the mention of "sleep", because if there was one that I hadn't needed on the drive to Vegas, it was falling asleep and having a dream as weird and fucked up as the one that I just had. Still, I didn't want to weird Katie out, or worse, scare her. So, I said in a careful voice, "Yeah...something like that. Listen, I'm sorry about –"

She rolled her eyes. "Don't apologize for leaving me in the trailer of the truck," she said. "Silena already did that. *Twice*. Which is nice and all, but unnecessary. Because I wasn't in a good state and I couldn't get myself to calm down, and if I snapped, either you or Silena would've been on the receiving end of my powers. Maybe both. Besides, I was able to help the animals out enough to the point that I think they'll be able to survive until someone finds this truck."

I frowned. "Finds this truck?" I quoted. "What do you mean?"

Silena suddenly appeared right next to her. "Apparently, Ares wasn't exactly truthful about the fact that this ride would get us to Los Angeles," she said, in a voice that was way too chipper for the news that she was delivering. "Because – well – it stopped here and it won't start again."

"Here'?" I asked as I sat up. "Where exactly is 'here'?"

The huge building that was standing just behind them was apparently the answer. *THE LOTUS HOTEL & CASINO* was displayed in bright green letters at the top of the building, and there was a huge neon flower underneath it, which apparently served as the entrance to the building, its petals constantly lighting up and blinking. I couldn't see anyone going in or out, but the glittering chrome doors were open, spilling out air-conditioning that, even from where we were at towards the end of the parking lot, smelled like flowers.

Once again, the nagging, itchy feeling returned to my brain – as if to serve as a warning of the sorts. I frowned at the thought. "Why would the truck stop here?" I couldn't help but ask.

Silena shrugged. "Maybe because Ares wanted to give us a break?" she said. "I mean, he did say that the truck only had one stop here – and, let me tell you, I am *sick and tired* of driving, Percy. I need a break. Besides, we still got what, seven days left until the solstice? That leaves plenty of time for us to take a break, even if it's only for just a day and night."

I really wanted to say no – I didn't have good vibes about this place, and the last time that I hadn't had good vibes, the three of us had almost gotten killed by Medusa. Still, both Katie and Silena looked *knackered*, and I couldn't help but feel guilty about that, because I'd gotten plenty of sleep on the ride here, even if it wasn't all that restful. So, with a sigh, I said, "Alright. But just for today and tonight, okay?"

"Oh, thank you!" Silena shrieked, before she grabbed me and Katie by the hand and led us towards the hotel entrance.

When we made it to the entrance, we were greeted by a doorman, who gave us a large, friendly smile. "Hey there, kids," he said. "You look tired. You want to come in and sit down?"

"Uh, yeah," I said. "Of course. Thank you."

Inside, we took a look around, causing Katie, Silena, and I to all exclaimed "*Whoa*," at once. Because inside, the whole lobby was a giant game room – and I'm not talking about the cheesy, old *Pac-Man* games or slot machines, either. More like the kind of stuff you see at deluxe, older-kid game places. There was also an indoor waterslide snaking around the glass elevator, which went straight up for at least forty floors. There was a climbing wall on one side of the building, an indoor bungee-jumping bridge, and pretty much everything else that you could ever imagine and more.

There were a few other kids playing, but not many. And there was no waiting for any of the games. But there were waitresses and snack bars all around, serving every kind of food you could ever want – cheeseburgers, fries, onion rings, and what looked to be some sort of fried octopus or calamari.

"Hey!" a bellhop shouted at us – or, at least I guessed he was a bellhop. The white-and-yellow Hawaiian shirt with lotus designs, shorts, and flip flops that he wore made it a little hard to tell for certain. "Has anyone helped you yet?"

Katie, Silena, and I all shared a look with one another. "No," I said nervously after a moment.

The bellhop grinned. "Well," he said. "Then let me be the first person to welcome you to the Lotus Hotel & Casino! Here's your room keys."

He handed each of us a green plastic credit card, then before any of us could say anything, said, "And before you ask: your bill has been taken care of. No extra charges, tips, or anything like that required. Just go on up to the top floor, and find room 4001. If you need anything, like extra bubbles for the hot tub or skeet targets for the shooting range or whatever, just call the front desk and they'll supply you with whatever you need. Oh, and before I forget: your room keys also double as LotusCash cards. They work in the restaurants and on all the games and rides. Any questions?"



Now more than ever, that distinctive *itch* was back in my brain. I mean, don't get me wrong, all of this was great and all that, but it also seemed inherently *wrong*, too. After all, I doubted that it was in Ares's nature to hitch us up in a place as grand as this at all, let alone for one night. So, once the bellhop guy finished his speech, I asked, "How much is on here?"

His eyebrows knit together. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean, when do these cards run out of cash?"

The bellhop laughed. *Hard*. "Oh," he said once his laughter had subsided. "You're making a joke. That's cool. Enjoy your stay!"

And then he left.

We took the elevator upstairs – even if, once again, I was having *serious* doubts about this place – and checked out our room. It was a suite with three separate bedrooms and a bar stocked with candy, soda, and chips. There was also a hotline to room service, a jacuzzi in each of the bedrooms' en-suite bathrooms, and fluffy towels and water beds with feather pillows. Oh, and that wasn't mentioning the big, flat-screen television with satellite and high-speed internet, or the balcony that had its own hot tub and skeet-shooting machine and shotgun, so that you could launch clay pigeons right over the Las Vegas skyline and plug them with your gun. I didn't see how that could be legal, but it was pretty cool – especially considering the amazing view the balcony had of the Strip and desert skyline.

"Oh, goodness," Katie said, looking absolutely gobsmacked.

"Amazing," Silena purred. "Absolutely *amazing*."

Each of us claimed one of the three bedrooms – Silena taking the one with lavender-colored bedding, Katie the one with forest green-colored bedding, and me the one with light blue-colored bedding. In my bedroom, there were clothes in the closet, and they fit me. I noticed this with a frown, thinking it was strange, but that thought didn't stay in my head for long – nor did the itch that I had been experiencing, for that matter.

I threw Ares's backpack in the trash can in the main room. We wouldn't need that anymore. In fact, when we left, I could just charge a new one at the hotel store and be done with it.

I took a long, nice bath in the jacuzzi, but only after taking a shower first, so that I could wash off all of the grime that came with days of unhygienic travel. Then, I changed clothes, ate a bag of chips, drank three Cokes, and came out feeling better than I had in a long time.

In the main room, I found that Silena and Katie had also showered and changed clothes. Both of them were watching an Amanda Bynes that I hadn't seen before, but then again the only Amanda Bynes movie that I had seen was *What A Girl Wants*. But, that shit was pretty good, I have to admit, so I was willing to bet that this movie was, too. Especially since it seemed to be based off of a Shakespeare play.

"So, what are we going to do?" I asked the two of them as I plopped down on the couch that they were sitting on.

Katie shrugged. "There's just so much to do here, that I don't know where to even begin," she said.

Silena nodded. "Agreed. But we don't have to see it all right now. We could...I don't know, watch the rest of this movie and get room service?" She said the last part with a giant grin.

"Yeah, okay," I said. "That sounds reasonable."

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Around two hours later, the movie was over and we were all stuffed with food. My full stomach made me a little sleepy, but then I remembered the game room in the lobby and all of my drowsiness disappeared. With a grin, I fished my room key/LotusCash card out of my pocket, turned to Katie and Silena, and said, "Alright, are you two ready to have some fun?"

Their smiles were the only answer that I needed.

I don't know how much time I spent in the lobby, but it didn't really matter, because I honestly didn't remember the last time that I had had so much fun. I mean, due to my mom's poor income and the combined expenses for my boarding school and Gabe's poker games, we never really had the chance to splurge out on anything – and when we did, it was usually on a night out at Burger King and renting a video, and never on a five-star Vegas hotel.

I bungee-jumped the lobby five or six times, did the waterslide, snowboarded the artificial ski slope, and played virtual-reality laser tag and FBI sharpshooter. I saw both Katie and Silena a few times, going from game to game, playing stuff that piqued their interests, but I didn't really talk to them, because I was having so much fun on my own.

...Up until that *itch* came back into my brain, that is, and I realized that something was seriously *wrong*.

It all started when I decided to go check out this cool, mythology virtual card game...called *Mythomagic Online!* or something like that. No one else was really playing it, save for this kid who looked like he couldn't be more than eleven-years-old, if that. His hair was this messy, inky black – so basically, a lot like mine – and he had wide, dark brown eyes and an olive skin tone. But none of that was what surprised me about him.

No, what surprised me was the fact that he was wearing these old, posh clothes that made him look like he was straight out of a World War 2 flick, and the fact that he was *alone*. I mean, don't get me wrong, all of the kids here seemed to be alone – but, like I said, this kid was only *eleven*, if that. *No way* should he have been left alone without adult supervision.

"Hey, kid," I greeted him as I sat down on the seat next to him.

The kid was pretty engrossed in his game, but he did pause to turn to look at me with a wide, friendly smile. "Hi!" he exclaimed. "My name is Nico. Do you like Mythomagic?"

"My name is Percy," I replied, before I admitted, "I've never actually played Mythomagic before, but it looks interesting."

Nico's already-wide eyes widened even more. "What! You've never played Mythomagic before? But – but it's like the coolest game. *Ever*. Or, at least, I think so. My sister disagrees. She doesn't like it."

"You have a sister?" I asked.

He nodded, before his face scrunched up. "Her name is Bianca," he said. "She's around here somewhere. She doesn't really like the games, I don't think...which is *weird*, because everyone else likes the games here! Speaking of which, do you want me to show you how to play Mythomagic, since you've never played it before?"

I blinked. Gods, did this kid talk *fast*. Like, I could barely keep up with what he was saying. Still, I smiled at his question and said, "Yeah, sure. I'm always open to learning new things."

The kid grinned. "Sweet!" he said. "Hold on, let me just start up a new game..."

As Nico launched into an explanation about the various rules and strategies of Mythomagic, I looked around the room, trying to find his sister. I didn't have much luck, but I did wind up seeing various people dressed in outfits that didn't really...fit in 2006, much like Nico's clothing. One kid looked like an Elvis impersonator's son, another like an '80's supermodel, and yet another like a kid straight out of the show *Saved By The Bell*.

Seeing all of these people sent shivers down my spine. They looked like they were from different time periods – different *lifetimes*, even – and yet they were only my age, if not a little older or little younger. Something wasn't right – *seriously* wasn't right.

Nervously, I turned to look at Nico. He was still talking about the Mythomagic game, but when he noticed the expression on my face, he frowned. "Percy?" he asked. "What's wrong?"

"What year is it?" I questioned back.

He laughed. "What, are you trying to be dingy or something?" he said, before he added, "It's 1938, duh! What else would the year be?"

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: The Lotus Hotel & Casino Pt. 2

The Lotus Hotel & Casino Pt. 2

Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Here is the conclusion to this little subplot that you have all been waiting for! All of your answers concerning the di Angelos (for the most part...) will finally be answered, so I hope you like it! :P

Also, for those of you who are not aware (I told my other fanfiction's readers this, but I know the stories are very different and not many people probably enjoy both), I am thinking about taking another break that would take place from June 22nd to July 3rd. Those two weeks are always very busy for me, and even if some of that will be taken away cause of the coronavirus, it'd also be nice to have another break again, 'cause I've been writing like crazy. Like, around 5-7 chapters for both stories combined a week crazy. So I think I deserve a little break ha ha!

Next chapter will be posted on Monday, like always. So, until then,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"*Shit*," I cursed. "Shit, shit, shit..."

Nico stared at me uncomfortably. "That's not a nice word," he said.

"It doesn't matter," I replied, before I grabbed him by the wrist and started to walk towards where I had last seen Katie. "At least, not when we need to find your sister."

Nico wasn't listening to me, though, because as soon as I had grabbed his wrist he started to struggle and said, "Hey! Let me go! I want to go back to the Mythomagic game!"

I ignored his protests, though, because inside I was internally screaming. Because if Nico and his sister had been here since 1938, how long had I been here? I mean, it only seemed like a couple of hours since Silena, Katie, and I had checked in, but was it really? And why had we come here in the first place? I tried to remember why, but it was hard to, as if a fog had settled in my brain. I knew that we were going to Los Angeles, and that we were supposed to find the entrance to the Underworld. I also knew that my mother was there...but, for a second, I had trouble remembering her name, until it came to me, clear as day. Sally. Sally Jackson. That was her name. I had to find her, and I had to stop the gods from causing World War III in the process.

Katie wasn't that far from where I had last saw her, playing what looked to be some sort of farm simulator. "Katie," I said as soon as I walked over to her, Nico still struggling against me all the while. "Come on. We've got to get out of here."

There was no response.

I shook her shoulder. "Katie?"

She looked up, annoyed. "What?"

"We need to leave," I said.

She frowned. "Leave? What are you talking about? I've just got the barn set up!"

"Look, this place is a trap," I said as I gestured for her to look at Nico. "Nico here says he's been here with his sister since 1938, and I've seen kids look like they're from the '70's, '80's, and '90's. Whatever this place is, it's manipulating us in some way into wanting to stay here so that we *never leave*. And we aren't aging, either. It's creepy and we need to leave and finish our quest before any more time passes than what already has."

At first, Katie just glared at me with slightly glassy eyes, before she blinked and shook her head. "Are you serious?" she asked me.

"As serious as I can be," I replied.

Her face paled. She took a quick glance at Nico and his clothes, before she said, "How long have we – "

"I don't know," I said. "But we've got to find Silena and his sister and get out of here."

To be honest, I didn't really know why I wanted to bring Nico with us so bad – I just knew that, for some reason, he *had* to come with us. I mean, there was something about him that was different from all of the other kids, something about his wide eyes and black hair that made me think he was familiar, somehow. Like I was supposed to know him.

Idly, I thought about why that could be, but I didn't spare the idea much thought, because Katie and I were too busy trying to find Silena.

As we searched, Nico slowly became less and less resistant to me tugging him along everywhere that we went. At first, I thought it was just because he realized that I wasn't going to let go of him anytime soon, but then he looked up at me with those wide eyes of his and asked me in a defeated voice, "It...it isn't 1938 anymore, is it?"

I grimaced. I hadn't really wanted to break the fact that it had been almost seventy years since he had first come to this place until after we had all escaped (assuming that we could, anyways...but I was cautiously optimistic about that, considering the fact that all of the workers seemed to be high and there were no buff security guards in sight), but I knew that this kid wasn't going to let such a fact go. No way in hell. So, with a sigh, I said, "No. No, it's not."

"Th – then what year is it?" he asked.

"2006," Katie supplied helpfully. When I turned to glare at her, she scrunched up her face and said, "What? You were about to coddle him just like how Luke coddles all of the new

campers in his cabin, but we don't have time for that. Not when gods know how much time has passed and we need to find not just Silena, but apparently this kid's sister, too."

"I'm not a kid!" Nico protested.

Katie rolled her eyes. "Yeah, yeah, sure," she said, before her face lightened up and she pointed. "There she is!"

Both Nico and I turned to look at where she was pointing. Sure enough, there was Silena, standing in front of a makeover game and looking as if she was having the time of her life. It almost made me feel a little bad about taking her away from the game, but I knew we had places to go, people to see, and monsters to defeat still, and because of it we couldn't spend any more time here than necessary.

"Oh, she's pretty," Nico whispered to me.

I ignored him.

"Silena!" I said as the three of us approached her rather cautiously, knowing that it may not be easy to get her to come with us, considering how hard it was for me to get Katie and Nico to listen to me in the first place. "Silena, it's time to go!"

"What?" she asked as she briefly turned to look at us, a frown on her face. "What do you mean? We've only been here for a few hours!"

"I know it seems like that," I said. "But I have a feeling that we've been here much longer. Take Nico here for example."

I then hurriedly explained to her what I had explained to Katie. At first, she didn't look like she wanted to believe me, but by the end of it her face was pale and her kaleidoscope eyes were wide. "Oh, *no*," she moaned, looking as if she was going to be sick. "I can't believe it! We're going to be in so much trouble if we missed the deadline! Like, we're facing instant death-type trouble!"

I grimaced. "We know, Silena."

"Oh gods, we have to leave right now!" she cried, acting as if she hadn't heard me – but then again, given the near-panic attack that she was having, she probably didn't.

"No, we can't. We have to find Nico's sister first," I interjected, before she could say anything else.

Silena blinked. Then, she frowned, and turned to look at Nico, giving him a once-over that told me she didn't quite know what to make of him. "His sister?" she asked. "What, are we breaking them out of here, too? Why?"

"I don't know," I admitted, because like I said before, I truthfully didn't know why I felt the need for them to come with us – I just felt it. "But I know that they have to come with us, because they're important. Like, *majorly* important."

Silena bit her lip. "Okay," she said after a few moments. "I mean, if there's one thing this quest has proven, Percy, it's that I can't trust you. So I will." Then, she turned to look at Nico again, except this time her face was expectant and her voice was a lot more sympathetic. "Hey, Nico? Can you tell me about your sister? What her name is? What she looks like?"

Nico wrinkles his nose. "Don't talk to me like that," he said. "I'm not a baby!"

Nevertheless, though, he spent the next few moments quickly telling us about his sister. Apparently, Bianca was only three years older than him (meaning she was thirteen, as Nico said that he was eleven) and she looked a lot like him. She had the same inky black hair – except hers was curled like Katie's and Silena's, and not messy like mine – along with the same dark brown eyes and the same olive skin tone, except where Nico's face was clear, she had a smattering of freckles across her nose and cheeks. She was also wearing clothing that was similar to his, except where his clothing was a suit, hers was a dress, complete with a floppy green hat.

"Oh, I think I saw her at the rock-climbing wall a little while ago," Katie said. "Didn't really talk to her, though. Just saw her."

Nico smiled. "Well, Bianca does like to do stuff like that," he said.

With that being said, the four of us started to walk towards the other side of the lobby, where the rock-climbing wall was. Even from the distance that we were at – which was pretty far away, because again, the lobby was *huge* – I could see a black-haired girl in a '30's dress climbing her way up the wall with relative ease, as if she had been *born* to climb or something like that. It made me kind of jealous, actually, because I knew that if she were to climb the climbing wall at camp, she would make it up to the top no problem like Katie had.

Unfortunately for us, though, about halfway through our trek across the lobby, one of the bellhops noticed us. It wasn't the same one from before, but he was wearing the same getup and had the same goofy smile on his face. "Hey, kids!" he greeted us. "Are you ready for your platinum cards?"

Despite having just been told he had been stuck in this place for almost seventy years, Nico perked up. "Platinum cards?" he asked the bellhop.

The bellhop nodded. "We just added an entire new floor full of games for platinum-card members!" he exclaimed. "So come on, take one! You deserve it!"

He held out the cards, and I wanted one. Badly. But I knew that if I took one, I'd never leave. I'd stay here, like Nico and all of the other kids, happy forever, playing games forever, and soon I'd forget my mom, my quest, *Luke*, and maybe even my own name. And I didn't want that. No way in hell. So, with as much force as I could manage, I said, "Thanks, but no thanks. The four of us will be leaving just after we find Nico's sister here."

Nico still looked like he wanted to accept the card, but at my words he nodded defiantly. "Yeah," he said. "We're just staying long enough to find my sister."

The bellhop's smile suddenly became strained. "Are you sure?" he asked. "Such a shame, really...especially when we have so many things to do here..."

Silena, Katie, and I all shared a look – we had had enough experience with monsters and asshole gods by now to know to suspect that something was up with this guy. Nervously, I reached into my pocket and grabbed Riptide, and fiddled with it as I watched the bellhop's smile only become more and more strained.

"I'm sorry," the bellhop said, as if his voice had never trailed off. "I'm afraid that, while you three may go, Nico and his sister must stay with us."

I frowned, before I shifted my feet to get ready for a fight. "Why?" I asked.

"'Why' what?" the bellhop retorted pleasantly.

"Why do Nico and Bianca have to stay?"

"I'm afraid that matter doesn't concern you," the bellhop said. "Now, if you will please go...I have platinum cards to give out to everyone..."

I gritted my teeth, before I pulled out Riptide and uncapped it, causing the sword to appear. Silena did much of the same with her dagger, while Katie started to grow her vines.

Nico didn't really do anything except whimper, but that was all right, because I was pretty sure I didn't want an eleven-year-old fighting one of my battles, anyways.

"*No*," I said, with more force than before. "We're leaving. *All of us. Now.* And if you can't deal with that – "

I didn't get to finish my threat.

Because before I could say anything else, the bellhop stopped smiling, and his purple eyes began to *glow*. Nervously, all four of us took a step back as he began to grow taller and taller in height, until he was standing at around seven feet, and as purple talons, horns, and feathered wings sprouted from his hands, head, and back, respectively.

Suddenly, the *itch* in my brain that had been bothering me for most of the duration of our stay here stopped. Without even thinking, I knew what this guy was: a Lotus-Eater...although, the myths never said anything about them changing into hideous monsters like this.

Next to me, Nico screamed. *Loudly*. "*BIANCA!*" he shrieked, as if his life depended on her suddenly appearing – although for all that he knew, it might have.

Silena, Katie, and I weren't swayed, though. As the monster roared at us, trying to cow us into submission, Katie made her vines wrap around his legs, causing him to come crashing to the ground. Silena and I then stabbed at his head and chest, respectively, causing him to explode into a purplish dust.

But, of course, our escape wasn't just that easy. Because as soon as we killed the one monster, all of the other bellhops looked up at us, horrible smiles etched onto their faces as they began

to shift and change form like the first one had. As they changed, they began to move towards us, circling us, so that the four of us were trapped and had nowhere else to go.

Although I knew that I would probably knock myself out again with any water that I summoned, I couldn't help but search for it, looking for something, *anything* that responded to the tug from behind my navel. At first, I didn't feel anything, but then, there was *something*, something big and deep and churning right from underneath our feet.

And it was coming from the pipes.

"Alright," I whispered to Silena and Katie as the three of us maneuvered ourselves so that we were all standing around Nico. "I got an idea."

"Does it involve you controlling water?" Katie whispered back in a disapproving tone.

"...Maybe."

"Percy!"

"Just wait for my signal, okay?" I said.

"What signal?" Silena asked a little snidely.

I ignored her in favor of focusing on controlling the water in the pipes as much as I could. It wasn't easy – in fact, it was the most difficult thing I had ever tried to do, because there was so much water and my control over it was so little. But, as we waited for the monster-bellhops to do something, I was able to get almost all of the water underneath my control...which was good, because almost all of it was all that I needed for my plan to work.

Just as the monsters were about to attack us, I made my move. "Okay, *now*!" I shouted as I lifted the water up through a combination of my hands and the tug.

The effect was instantaneous. As all of the monsters roared and moved to attack us, water burst up from the floor and sprayed them all in the face. The monsters let out vicious shrieks in response, while I quickly grabbed Silena, Katie, and Nico. "You all ready for a ride?" I shouted.

"*No*!" they all screamed.

I grinned. As much as I was able to, I moved the water so that it was tunneling us and all of the other kids – all of the way from the climbing wall to the front of the lobby – to the entrance of the hotel. I realize that this sounds like a lot of power, and if I wasn't as immersed in water as I was, I'm sure I would've passed out already. But, in the moment, all I could feel was the feeling of being *alive*, and it was the most exhilarating feeling that I had *ever* felt.

We all burst through the doors of the Lotus Hotel & Casino, riding on a wave of water that dispersed as soon as we got outdoors. All of the other kids – Silena, Katie, and Nico included – were shouting and screaming, but I could only laugh at their antics as the water healed the spot from behind my navel and stopped the power-exhaustion that I was beginning to feel in its place.

The monsters didn't even try to follow us.

"Oh my God!" Nico shouted once he had quickly gotten over his screaming. Idly, I couldn't help but think that the way he said *God* instead of *gods* was a little weird. "That was so *cool*! Percy, how did you do that? And why did those bellhops turn into monsters? And where's my – oh, there she is! Bianca, Bianca, you have to come over here and meet these guys! They saved us!"

A few yards away from us, Nico's sister Bianca was sitting in the water, her eyes wide. She looked at Nico like she couldn't believe what was happening, but then again, she probably didn't...and not just because she hadn't been with us when I flooded the hotel, either.

But I couldn't focus on that. Not right now, anyways. No, I had to focus on the fact that, while it felt like late morning, about the same time of day that we had gone into the hotel and casino, it was no longer sunny like it had been before. Instead, it was stormy, with dark clouds overhead and heat lightning flashing out in the desert. Ares's backpack was slung over my shoulder again, too, even though I had thrown it out in the trash can in room 4001.

Shakily, I got to my feet and ran to the nearest newspaper stand, willing some of the water to stay on me all the while so that I didn't pass out from exhaustion. First, I read the year on the newspaper and breathed out a sigh of relief, because *thank the gods*, it was still 2006. But then I noticed the date, June 20th, and my blood ran cold, because not only had we been in the Lotus Hotel & Casino for seven days, but we had only one day left until the summer solstice.

One day left to complete our quest.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: I Have A Talk With The Lady Styx

I Have A Talk With The Lady Styx

Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Hope you all had a wonderful weekend, and that you have been staying safe with all that is going on currently!

On the subject of me taking a break, I decided that I'm going to go through with taking a break from June 22nd to July 3rd (meaning the next update after this week's round will be on July 6th), 'cause I honestly just need a break from my two stories right now so that I can..."recharge", if you will. However, that being said, I will be working on a one-shot story or two during that time! ;) I've had an ABO Luke/Ethan/Percy story swirling around in my brain for the past month or so, but I haven't really had the time to write it, so I think I'm going to take the opportunity to do that over the course of the next two weeks. :)

Next chapter will be on Wednesday, as always, and it's like...3.9k, I think? So, basically, quite a bit longer than the chapters you have been getting as of late. Hope you all are happy about that! ;)

And, of course, I hope that you all enjoy this chapter! :)

Sincerely,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was Katie and Silena's idea.

While I was busy having an existential crisis and Nico's sister Bianca was busy having an *"oh my gods I'm technically eighty-three-years-old"* crisis, the two of them loaded all five of us into the back of a Vegas taxi-minivan-thingy, as if we actually had money, and Silena, with a voice of persuasion that wasn't quite charmspeak, told the driver, "Los Angeles, please."

Immediately, the cabbie took his cigar out of his mouth and *laughed*. "That's three hundred miles, kid," he said. "Or around four and a half hours, in case you can't do math. That's a lot of miles for gas. And a meal, too. What makes you think you can convince me to drive you there?"

Silena smiled wickedly, but she still didn't use her charmspeak. Instead, she asked him, "Do you accept casino debit cards?"

The cabbie shrugged in response. "Some of 'em. Same as credit cards. I gotta swipe 'em through first."

Silena handed him her LotusCash card/room key.

He looked at it skeptically.

"Swipe it," she purred.

He did.

As soon as his meter machine registered the card, it started to rattle. The lights flashed. Finally, an infinity symbol came up next to the dollar sign.

The cigar, which the driver had just stuffed back inside his mouth, promptly fell out of it. He looked back at us, eyes wide. "Where to in Los Angeles...uh, Your Highness?"

Silena's grin widened. "Well, do you know of a place called DOA Records?"

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Three hours later, the five of us were standing outside of DOA Records, looking at the building with pale faces and wide eyes. Bianca's face was probably the palest out of all of us – something which I felt more than a little guilty for, because Katie, Silena, and I had basically given her and her brother a crash-course into being a demigod after the three of us quickly realized that that was what she and her brother were. I mean, why else would someone *willingly* shove their kids into a place like the Lotus Hotel & Casino, with a promise that they would one day come back for them, with that day being more than sixty years later? Why else would Nico be able to see the monsters for what they were, and why else would he have ADHD so bad that he made even *me* a little tired with his antics?

So, yeah. Basically the answer was obvious. And it was something that Nico took with no small amount of joy, while his sister, Bianca, looked like it was the worst thing she could ever possibly be told...but I guess, in a way, it was.

But while figuring out that they were demigods and all was great, it presented the three of us with a new problem: we were going to have to bring them to the Underworld with us. Because while the Underworld was no place for *anyone* – let alone two new demigods – to go to while they were still alive, we couldn't exactly send them back to camp or tell them to wait outside, because camp was too far away and their scents just got ten times stronger due to them being told about their semi-godly existence.

At least they didn't have to face the Minotaur as a bunch of newbie demigods. Although, that was assuming that Hades and his minions weren't going to be a million times worse in terms of terror and not-so-idle threats...

...But enough about that. I had places to go, people to see, and river goddesses to talk to.

"Alright," I said as I continued to look at the DOA building, which had black marble-framed glass doors with golden lettering on them that said: *NO SOLICITORS. NO LOITERING. NO LIVING.* "Does everyone remember the plan?"

"Yeah!" Nico exclaimed with a grin.

Katie and Silena echoed him, while Bianca muttered out, "Is it still too late to go back to the hotel?"

We all ignored her.

"Great," I said. "Then let's go find whichever Underworld deity did this."

With that, the five of us walked inside the DOA lobby.

Now, if you've never been inside DOA records – which I'm sure you haven't, provided that you aren't dead – then allow me to describe it to you. The place is packed with people – people sitting on couches, people standing up, and people staring out the windows or waiting for the elevator. At first glance, they all seem normal, even if they don't talk, move, or do much of anything. But if you try to focus on them for more than a minute, they become transparent, to the point where you can see right through their bodies no problem.

And as if this wasn't dreary enough, the entire place is colored steel grey, from the walls, to the carpet, to even the pencil cactuses that grew in the corners of the lobby like skeleton hands. Depressing muzak – if that's possible – played softly over hidden speakers, and there were posters on the walls depicting the various parts of the afterlife, from the Fields of Punishment (*HOW GOOD WERE YOU REALLY? THINK ABOUT IT.*) to the Isles of the Blessed (*THE FOURTH TIME'S THE CHARM!*). For some reason, the latter poster seemed familiar to me, but I couldn't dwell on it long, because we had to walk up to the security guard's desk, which was sitting on a raised podium – meaning that, despite him sitting down, we still had to look up to him.

Speaking of the security guard, he was a tall and elegant dude, with chocolate-colored skin and bleached-blond hair that was shaved into a military style. He wore tortoiseshell shades and a silk Italian suit that matched his hair. A black rose was pinned to his lapel underneath a silver name tag, which I was pretty sure read *CHARON*. And even if it didn't, I knew better than to ask.

Without looking up from the paper that he was writing on – it looked to be official paperwork or something like that – Charon asked in a distinct, Cockney-esque accent, "Now, what can I do for you little dead ones today?"

Silena and I shared a look.

"We want to go to the Underworld," I said after a few moments, while I desperately tried to keep my voice as level and clear as possible.

Charon snorted. "Well, that's a first," he said. "Straightforward and honest. No screaming. No 'Please, there must be some sort of mistake!'" He looked up then, with cool, dark brown eyes, which he narrowed at us. "But you aren't really looking to go there for your semi-final destination, are you?"

I froze.

He grinned. "That's what I thought. Unfortunately, the Lord of the Dead doesn't allow multiple trips to the Underworld, unless you're either a *dead* rebirth or have a special reason for coming. So, what's your reason, son? Come on, I don't got all day."

Nervously, I wet my lips. This hadn't gone like I thought it was going to go. I'd planned on us all saying that we were dead, bribing the guy (which shouldn't have been hard to do, considering how expensive the suit that he was wearing was), and then getting down to the Underworld, no problem. But now...

...Now I didn't know what to do, except maybe tell him the truth.

But before I could do that, Nico suddenly exclaimed from behind me, "Wow, are you really Charon, the ferryman of the dead?"

Silena winced.

Charon blinked. Then, his eyes widened, and he turned to look at Katie, Silena, and me with something akin to astonishment and pity in his eyes. "You went to the Lotus Hotel & Casino," he said.

I snorted. "More like got dropped off there by Ares."

But he didn't hear me – at least, he didn't *seem* to. Instead, the guy ran a hand through his hair and said, "This is bad. Very bad. You don't realize how much *shit* the three of you just got yourselves into, do you?"

The three of us shared a look.

"Uh...no?" I said. "Care to enlighten us about how we've gotten ourselves into so much 'shit'?"

"I – " Charon began, before he shook his head. "I better not. I'll let the boss explain it to you downstairs – right before he kills you, anyways."

He then stood up, stretched, and walked towards the elevator and gestured for us to follow him. We did, causing us to push through the crowd of waiting spirits, who started grabbing our clothes like the wind, their voices whispering things I couldn't make out. Charon shoved them all out of the way with a grimace and snarled, "*Freeloaders*."

He escorted us into the elevator, which was already crowded with souls of the dead, each one holding a green boarding pass. Charon grabbed two spirits who were trying to get on with us and pushed them back into the lobby.

"Right. Now, no one get any ideas while I'm gone," he announced to the waiting room, his tone forcibly upbeat – I could tell that he was really *nervous*, for whatever reason. "And if anyone moves the dial off of my easy-listening station again, I'll make sure you're here for another thousand years! Understand?"

He shut the doors. Then, he put a key card into a slot in the elevator panel and we started to descend.

We descended in silence – partially because Charon was freaked out, and whatever freaked out a god freaked *me* out, and partially because Nico seemed to be too excited for words at this point. Gods, was that kid *weird*...although, not in a bad way. More in a way that I suspected older brothers felt about their younger siblings, but since I was an only child for all intents and purposes, I couldn't say for sure.

At some point during our elevator ride, I got a dizzy feeling. I quickly realized that we weren't going down anymore, but *forward*. The air turned misty. The floor of the elevator began swaying, causing me to stumble and blink hard.

When I opened my eyes, all of us were still looking the same – Charon and the spirits included, *thank the gods*, because I doubted I could deal with them otherwise – but the elevator wasn't an elevator anymore. Instead, it was a small, Viking-esque wooden boat, sitting in a river comprised of dark, oily water and swirling with bones, dead fish, and other strange things – like plastic dolls, crushed carnations, and soggy diplomas with gilt edges.

"The River Styx," I muttered, remembering what the voice in my dream told me to do when I got to its banks.

Charon must have thought that I was awed by it instead of apprehensive of it, because he said, "You should have seen it four thousand years ago, kid. It wasn't as polluted then. But then again, the people back then didn't have hopes, dreams, and wishes that never came true like the people now do."

Mist curled off of the filthy water. Above us, almost lost in the gloom, was a ceiling of stalactites. Ahead, the far shore glimmered with greenish light – the color of poison.

A few minutes later, the shoreline of the Underworld came into view. Craggy rocks and black volcanic sand stretched inland about a hundred yards to the base of a high stone wall, which marched off in either direction as far as we could see. A sound came from somewhere nearby in the green gloom, echoing off of the stones – the howl of a large animal.

"Old Three-Face is hungry," Charon said with a wicked grin. "That's double bad luck for you, godlings."

The bottom of our boat slid onto the black sand. The dead began to disembark – a woman holding a little girl's hand, an old man and an old woman hobbling along arm-in-arm, and even a boy around Nico's age, shuffling along with wide eyes and a look of fear.

Charon said, "I'd wish you luck, mate, but there isn't any down here. 'Specially not for you."

And with that, he took up his pole, the pole that he had used to steer the boat along the river, before he warbled something that sounded like a Barry Manilow song as he ferried the empty boat across the river.

Katie, Silena, Nico, and Bianca all moved to follow the spirits that we had been in the boat with, who were all moving down a well-worn path. But, before they could actually follow them, I said, "Wait."

They all turned to look at me, visibly confused. "What?" Katie asked with a frown on her face. "What's wrong?"

"I – I have to do something," I replied nervously. "I had a dream before we went into the hotel. I – I have to talk with the Lady Styx."

Katie's frown deepened. "Percy, I don't think that that's a good idea," she said.

Silena nodded in agreement.

I shook my head. "Look, I have to do this," I said as firmly as I could. "There's just – I gotta ask her something, okay? I gotta – "

But before I could say anything else, a voice from behind me said, "Ask me what, demigod?"

Despite having faced Medusa and the weird monsters from the Lotus Hotel & Casino, I couldn't help but shriek as I spun around to look at the owner of the voice behind me.

The owner of the voice was, of course, none other than Styx – or, at least, that was what I presumed her to be. She was a beautiful woman, with long, flowing black hair, olive skin, and volcanic black eyes. She was wearing a black chiton with a silver girdle, along with black sandals that were *literally* sitting on the water...although, I guess I shouldn't be surprised, given the fact that she was a goddess of water and could probably do whatever she wanted to do with it.

"L – Lady Styx," I greeted her as best as I could, while behind me Katie, Silena, Bianca, and Nico did the same.

"...Demigod," Styx replied after a moment, before she frowned and narrowed her eyes at me. "Why did you call me, young one? It's been many years since anyone has called me from my river – sixty-eight years, to be precise. And the last people that called me were *gods*, not mere mortals like you."

I sucked in a deep breath. "I – I know, milady...that's actually why I called you today. I...I want to know about why my father and uncles made the oath that they did, sixty-eight years ago. I want to know why they stopped having mortal children."

"*Percy!*" Katie whispered from just behind me, and I didn't need to see her to know that her face had paled to the color of bone.

Styx raised a hand to silence her. "Be still, demigod," she said. "The boy is not wrong for wanting to know, even if he has been manipulated into wanting to."

I frowned. "But I haven't been manipulated!" I protested.

"That is what *he* wants you to think," she replied. "But nevertheless, I will tell you what you wish to know."

Styx waved her arms, causing black water to rise up next to her and form into a steamy circle. The circle then turned into a smoky white color and from it, a picture began to form – a



picture of a girl around fourteen or so with wavy black hair, misty green eyes, and pale skin. She kind of looked familiar, but as to why she did, I couldn't quite figure out why.

"Sixty-nine years ago," Styx began. "This girl became the most current Oracle of Delphi. Upon receiving Apollo's gift, she immediately foretold a prophecy, a prophecy that went like this:

*"A halfblood of the eldest gods shall reach eighteen against all odds, and see the world in endless sleep, hero's soul, cursed blade shall reap. A final choice shall end his days, Olympus to preserve or raze,"* she said. The Oracle of Delphi, whose eyes had started to glow misty green when she started to recite the prophecy, mimicked her with ease.

"Upon hearing this prophecy," Styx continued, "The Olympians declared an emergency meeting, to decide what the prophecy meant. Many arguments were had, many theories thrown out and discarded. Finally, after six months of deliberating, they had decided on their answer – just in time for what you mortals call the Second World War to start."

The image in the watery circle changed. Now, it showed the Big Three's godly symbols of power – Zeus's celestial lightning bolt, my dad's trident, and Hades's helm of darkness. Underneath them, various shadowy figures were shown – one was underneath Zeus, two were underneath Poseidon, and four were underneath Hades. Three of the ones underneath Hades looked smaller than the rest, while one of the ones underneath Poseidon looked as if it was standing with the help of a cane.

"The Olympians had decided that the prophecy referred to a child of either Zeus, Poseidon, or Hades," Styx said. "A child that would turn against them before its eighteenth birthday. So, while allowing their older children to live, they killed their younger children...or should I say, Hades, the only one to have children below the age of eighteen, made everyone *think* that he had killed his own children." Here, the three small figures below Hades's symbol of power vanished. "Then, they made their promise to me to not have anymore mortal children, although they would later tell Chiron to tell the demigods at your camp that the promise was only made *after* the War – after all of the chaos, senseless killing, and the suicide of Hades's last child." The last figure underneath Hades's symbol of power vanished as well.

"Wait – hold on," I said. "You said that the child would turn against them...and you also said that I was being manipulated by *him*. Who is this guy? Why does he want me to turn against the gods?"

Styx smiled grimly. "Think, young hero," she replied. "Who would gain the most from Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon to go to war with each other? Who would gain from the ensuing weakening and crippling of the Olympians' power? Who has a grudge against the gods that was borne out of no good reason?"

I thought about it, long and hard. Although Eris and one of the many other Underworld deities might want the Big Three to go to war with each other, they wouldn't really gain from the weakening of power that would follow. No, only someone *older* than the gods would, someone like –

"It's Kronos, isn't it?" I asked.

From behind me, both Silena and Katie gasped.

Styx nodded. "The Crooked One is indeed at the root of all of this," she stated.

"Well, how do I convince Hades of that?" I questioned her. "I – I mean, he's *not* going to believe me if I go to his palace, stating that Kronos took his and Zeus's symbols of power, and not my father. And even if he believes that, won't he just assume that I've been working for Kronos all along?"

"Hades likes a solemn oath," Styx replied as she waved her hand and made the milky water next to her go back into her river. "But solemn oaths are not meant to be taken lightly, demigod. They have to be worded carefully. Otherwise..." her grim smile turned into a wicked grin, and she added, "Otherwise I will take your soul into my river and you will spend all eternity with me."

With that, she submerged herself into her river and disappeared.

As soon as she was gone, I nervously turned around to look at my friends. All of them looked even more terrified than they had been before, which I couldn't blame them for, because *I* was terrified out of my mind, too. Still, I knew what we had to do, even if I didn't really know what to say or do outside of that, except for making a risky oath to Styx.

"So," I said hesitantly after a few moments. "Change of plans. Who's ready to go to Hades's palace now and not later?"

## Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: We Meet The Lord Of The Dead

# We Meet The Lord Of The Dead

## Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! I don't have much to say today – I'm really tired and don't feel that great (bad chronic illness day), so that's probably why lol. I do have an Ending Notes section for today, though, because my version of Hades is not Rick's version of him, to say the least. ;)

Next chapter will be posted on Friday, as promised. So, until then,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

**"I can't believe you just did that," Katie said as we walked down the well-worn path that the spirits had walked down earlier.**

"You know I had to," I replied with the best grin that I could manage – which probably came out more like a grimace, but still. "I mean, I *had* to know. And not just because Kronos told me to."

Nervously, Katie bit her lip, before she finally nodded in agreement. "I suppose you're right," she said. "But Percy...are you sure you really wanted to know that the gods are probably debating right now about whether to kill you or not, even if you are innocent?"

I shrugged, because I didn't really have an answer to that. I mean, I already knew that the Big Three had made an oath to not have anymore mortal children, and that my entire existence was in spite of that oath...but knowing that they thought, that they expected me to go against them was something else...disappointing, maybe? I didn't quite know.

What I *did* know, though, was that it wasn't fair of them to expect me to keel over before my eighteenth birthday just because of some stu – *prophecy. Some prophecy.* After all, at fourteen, almost fifteen years old, I still had a *lot* of stuff to do yet. I wanted to meet my dad, graduate, and kiss Luke...although not necessarily in that order. And the thought of being unable to do any of those things because the gods decided to kill me was more than just a little infuriating – it was *enraging*.

As we walked down the path, I tried not to focus on these thoughts, which wasn't hard to do once we caught sight of the entrance to the underworld. I mean, I'm not sure what I was expecting – Pearly Gates, maybe, or a big black portcullis, or something – but it *definitely* wasn't for the entrance to look like a cross between airport security and the Jersey Turnpike.

There were three separate entrances under one big, black archway that said *YOU ARE NOW ENTERING EREBUS* that I could read without difficulty for some reason. Each entrance had

a pass-through metal detector with security cameras mounted on top. Beyond that there were tollbooths manned by black-robed ghouls and *literal* skeletons.

The howling of the hungry animal was really loud now, but I couldn't see where it was coming from. But I did know that it had to be Cerberus, the three-headed dog that was supposed to guard Hades's door, because what else could it be? After all, Cerberus was the only animal said to live in the Underworld – besides the Furies, of course, but they don't really count.

The dead queued up into three lines, two marked *ATTENDANT ON DUTY*, and one marked *EZ DEATH*. The latter one was moving right along, while the other two were barely even crawling.

Nervously, I turned to look at Katie and Silena. "Well, what do you think?" I asked.

Katie bit her lip again. "The fast line must go straight to the Fields of Asphodel," she said after a few moments. "No contest. They don't want to risk judgment from the court, because it might go against them."

"Wait, you're telling me that there's a court for dead people?" Nico suddenly asked excitedly, from his place only a few feet away from her.

Katie nodded. "Yeah. They switch around who sits on the bench – right now I think it's King Minos, Thomas Jefferson, and Shakespeare. Something like that. Sometimes they look at a life and decide that person needs a special award, so they go to Elysium. Sometimes they decide on punishment, so they go to the Fields of Punishment...or worse, Tartarus. But most of the time, people...well, they just *lived*. Nothing special, good or bad. So they go to the Fields of Asphodel."

Nico blinked. "And do what?"

Katie snorted. "Stand in a wheat field forever, basically," she said.

Nico flinched. "Oh."

We got closer to the gates. The howling was so loud now, to the point where it shook the ground beneath my feet, but I still couldn't figure out where it was coming from.

Then, about fifty feet in front of us, the green mist that was hanging all over the place shimmered. Standing just where the path split into three lanes was an enormous, shadowy monster that was basically half-transparent, save for its solid, yellow eyes and gleaming white teeth. And it was staring straight at us.

"That's Cerberus, isn't it?" I asked no one in particular, then almost slapped myself for being an idiot, because I had already gone over all of that with myself mentally. "I didn't know that he was a Rottweiler."

Silena shrugged. "Personally, I'd always imagined him as a mastiff," she said, and I nodded in agreement, because I'd thought the same. "But I guess this makes sense as well."

"Wh – why am I starting to see him better?" Bianca asked nervously.

Instantly, the rest of us turned to get a better look at Cerberus – who was twice the size of a woolly mammoth – and found that we were all starting to see him a little bit better as well. I felt myself pale at the realization, and I saw that Katie and Silena did, as well. Nico mostly looked cool with it, although there was a twinge of fear to his eyes, as if he knew what that meant but didn't yet fully comprehend the meaning.

Silena moistened her lips. "I think..." she began, but trailed off for a moment, before continuing with: "I think it's because we're getting closer to death – to – to being *dead*."

The dog's middle head craned towards us, completely oblivious to the spirits of the dead who were walking right between his front paws and underneath his belly, which they could do without even crouching. It – that being the middle head still – sniffed the air and growled for a moment, as if it could tell that we were living and breathing humans, before it huffed haughtily and returned back to its guarding position.

"...Okay," I said as I stared at it, fully expecting Cerberus to suddenly go into full-attack mode and destroy us at any second. "That was weird."

"It was," Katie agreed. "But I wouldn't worry about it. Hades probably let him know we're coming – he's smart like that."

I wanted to ask her how smart a god could really be if they had their symbol of power was stolen from right under their nose, but I didn't. I knew that I would be instantly killed if I did.

True to Katie's words, though, we were able to walk underneath Cerebus – and barely escape his drool – and slip through the metal detectors – which were "magical item detectors" – without a problem, although the guards were watching us with soulless eyes the entire time. We were also able to get through the Fields of Asphodel – which was unimaginably big and full with sad, whispering masses of people who looked lost and wistful – without a problem too, which kind of made me a little concerned, but not really. Or, at least, it didn't make me that concerned when I saw the Furies watching us from the distance, and could feel Mrs. Dodd's beady eyes staring at a spot right in the center of my forehead.

On our way through the Fields of Asphodel, I couldn't help but look to my right. Part of it was because to my left were the Fields of Punishment, and I really didn't want to look at what was going on there, but part of it was because my eyes were simply drawn there, too, for some unfathomable reason. Although I couldn't make out much of what lied after Asphodel, I was able to make out what looked to be a small valley in the distance – a gated community with neighborhoods consisting of beautiful houses and grass that rippled in beautiful colors. And in the middle of the valley was a glittering blue lake, with three small islands like a vacation resort in the Bahamas. Instinctively, I realized that that had to be the Isles of the Blessed, while the valley surrounded it was Elysium.

At the thought, something whispered in my mind – a faint, vaguely familiar voice that said, *"Remember, try for the Isles of the Blest, Penny."*

I shook my head and moved on.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity of walking, we reached Hades's palace. It was made of a glittering, black obsidian, with beautiful parapets and a two-story-tall bronze gate that stood wide open. Up close, I realized that the gate was engraved with scenes of death, both modern and ancient, but all looking as if they'd been etched into the bronze thousands of years ago.

A shiver went down my spine at the thought.

Inside the courtyard was the strangest garden that I'd ever seen. There were multicolored mushrooms, poisonous shrubs, and weird luminous plants grew without sunlight. Precious jewels made up for the lack of flowers, and standing here and there were statues that I easily recognized were victims of Medusa, as they were all smiling grotesquely and looked as if they had once been alive. And standing in the center of the garden, of course, was a single pomegranate tree – no, *the* pomegranate tree – which I stared at for a moment before not-so-subtly pushing Silena and Katie, who had been eyeballing it with wide eyes, forward.

I wasn't going to let them become Hades's newest brides, after all.

We walked up the steps of the palace, between black columns, through a black marble portico, and into the house of Hades. The entry hall had a polished bronze floor, which seemed to boil in the reflected torchlight, and there was no ceiling, leaving the cavern roof visible from far above – which seemed odd at first, until I figured that they probably never had to worry about rain down here.

Every side door was guarded by a skeleton in military gear. Some wore Greek armor, some British redcoat uniforms, and some camouflage with tattered American flags on their shoulders. They carried spears, or muskets, or M-16s. None of them bothered us, but their hollow eye-sockets followed us as we walked down the hall, toward the big set of doors at the opposite end.

"So cool," Nico whispered.

I silently disagreed with him.

Two U.S. Marine skeletons guarded the big set of doors. They grinned down at us, rocket-propelled grenade launchers held across their chests. I opened my mouth to ask them shakily whether or not we could enter, but before I could even get my voice out of my throat, a hot wind blew down the corridor and the doors swung open. The guards stepped aside.

"I guess that means *entrez-vous*," Silena said uncomfortably.

The room inside was dark and cavernous, with a raised platform of the sorts clear on the other side of the room, which was about forty feet away. Centered on the platform were two black marble thrones, one of which was lined with gold, while the other was lined with an emerald green color. The one lined with gold was larger than the other, and off to the side of it sat three unlined, smaller black thrones, but I couldn't focus on those – at least, not when Hades himself was sitting on the gold throne, looking at us with a carefully neutral expression on his face.

Hades was at least ten feet tall, with short black hair that kind of reminded me of Moses from *The Prince of Egypt*, a short black beard, dark brown eyes, and faded olive skin. He was dressed in a black silk chiton with a golden girdle and wore a crown of braided gold, both of which helped him seem like the god that he was supposed to be. He lounged on his marble throne, looking intimidating and dangerous, but also lithe and graceful, too. For some reason, this made me think of my own father, although I wasn't sure why.

"You are brave to come here, Son of Poseidon," Hades said with a low voice, which instantly told me that I was in *deep ass shit*, regardless of what I wanted to happen next. "After what you have done to me, very brave indeed...or perhaps you are simply very foolish."

Nervously, I stepped forward. "Lord Hades," I said. "Uncle. I am sorry for the intrusion, but when I took this quest, Chiron said that it would be best for me to venture here, into the Underworld, because he thought that whoever stole your helm of darkness and Zeus's master lightning bolt would be here, or at the very least connected to your realm."

Hades snorted. "I'm not surprised my half-brother would think suck a thing," he said. "Chiron has spent so many millennia training young heroes, that he forgets that not everyone has such a weak hold on those that are beneath them as he does."

"R – right," I said, before I continued on with the little impromptu speech that I had made. "Uncle, when I came down here, I had every intention on finding the culprit, who I thought might have been Eris or one of her siblings due to Chiron's words, and bringing them to you so that they could face justice...but I learned that this wasn't the case after I had a talk with the Lady Styx."

Here, Hades leaned forward, and his eyebrows knit together in a way that told me he was intrigued. "Oh?" he said curiously, which only confirmed my thoughts. "And what did 'the Lady Styx', as you call her, have to say?"

I swallowed. "She – she said that the culprit behind your and Zeus' symbols of power being taken was not a god," I replied, "but a titan. Kronos, to be precise. She said that he would have the most to gain from you, my father, and Zeus fighting, because your fighting would weaken Olympus and make it easier for him to rise to power once more. And..." I trailed off.

Hades looked at me sharply. "And what, demigod?" he asked.

"And she told me that you like a solemn oath," I said, before I straightened my posture and looked him dead in the eyes. "So, Lord Hades, I swear to you on the River Styx that everything that you just heard was true. I also swear to you on the River Styx that I did not steal your helm of darkness or Zeus's master lightning bolt, or *intentionally* feed into Kronos's plans, because as the Lady Styx told me, I might have done so unintentionally."

Despite us being underground, thunder boomed loudly in the distance both times that I mentioned the River Styx.

Hades raised an eyebrow before he leaned back into his chair, looking both impressed and disturbed. "Styx told you well, Son of Poseidon," he said. "Now I will tell you even better. Take off your backpack."

I blinked, but did as I was told and slung Ares's backpack off of my shoulder and put it on the ground.

Hades gave me a grim smile. "Open it," he said.

I did.

Inside the backpack, which I had previously thought was pretty much empty, were two things. One was a thick, two-foot long celestial bronze cylinder that was spiked on both ends, humming with energy. The other was a black, Ancient Greek war helmet, with a black metal plume that, much like the gates guarding Hades's palace, had scenes of death carved into it.

They were Zeus and Hades' symbols of power.

I had the sudden urge to puke. "Lord Hades – " I began.

But he cut me off. "It is all right, nephew," he said with a wave of his hand. "You just swore to me with the most powerful oath that there is that you did not steal these things. But still...I must know who did. Who gave you this backpack?"

"Ares, Uncle," I answered honestly. "It was Ares."

He snorted again. "Why am I not surprised? Ares has always been more rash than is becoming of a god, especially a god of war. Enyo would've been a better fit for an Olympian...but, of course, my opinion doesn't matter when it comes to such things." He paused to peer down at me. "I suppose that, besides setting you up, Ares also told you that I was the one to take your mother as a hostage?"

"Y – yes, Uncle."

Hades nodded. "Well, he wasn't wrong, I'll give him that. I did take your mother, nephew, because I thought that you were the one to take my helm of darkness and Zeus's master lightning bolt. But, since you did not..."

He waved his hand, causing a small, glittering ball of golden light to form. The light slowly stretched and got bigger and bigger, until it formed into a shape of a human – and not just the shape of any human, but the shape of my *mom*. I watched with wide eyes as she slowly, but surely formed inside the golden light, looking like she had the day that we went off to Montauk – perfectly healthy, as if she hadn't gotten into a car crash or had her throat squeezed by the Minotaur.

"Mom," I couldn't help but whisper as I looked at her, even though I knew that she couldn't hear me. She probably wasn't even conscious.

"Since my realm isn't...*suitable* for the living to live in, much less wake up in," Hades said with a wry smile, "I will transport your mother to your house, where she will wake up in her bed, unharmed. Is that acceptable to you, nephew?"

"I – " I began, but then stopped myself. Was I really okay with my mom going back to our apartment in Manhattan, where the first thing that Smelly Gabe would do when he saw her



there is order her around? Where he might slap her or hit her, because I wasn't there for him to take his anger out on me? Could I really let her go there, knowing that? Where else could she go?

Nervously, I took in a deep breath. "Uncle," I said. "Can you do me a favor?"

Once again, Hades raised an eyebrow. "What kind of favor do you want, nephew?" he asked.

"It – it's nothing big, I promise," I replied. "It's just...I sent a package to Olympus, and I have a feeling that they're either going to kill me for it or send it back. Maybe both. If the latter's the case, can you make sure that the package is somewhere my mom can easily see it once she wakes up? I don't..." *I don't want her to suffer under Gabe without me for gods knows how long. I want her to have an out. An easy way out.*

"...I see," Hades said after a few moments, before he gave me another grim smile. "Very well, nephew. I will do what you ask. And I will make sure that, when your stepfather enters my realm, he will suffer greatly for the heinous crimes that he has committed against you and your mother."

He waved his hand again, and my mom vanished. I watched her disappear with mournful eyes, knowing that even if I somehow survived this mess, what with the prophecy that was hanging over my shoulders, it'd still be way too long before I saw her again.

Hades cleared his throat, before he turned to survey Katie, Silena, Nico, and Bianca. When his eyes landed on the latter two, a strange expression passed over his face, and he said, "Niccolò. Bianca."

My eyes widened. How could he possibly know their names? And *why* would he want to know their names?

The watery white circle that Styx had conjured appeared in my mind, specifically when all five of the figures underneath Hades's symbol of power had been standing there. So did the voice of Styx, specifically the point when she said, *"...Or should I say, Hades, the only one to have children below the age of eighteen, made everyone think that he had killed his own children."*

Fuck. *Fuck*. No wonder why I had felt like I was in deep ass shit with the Lord of the Dead, even if I was almost completely innocent when it came to his stolen symbol of power.

Bianca shifted nervously, while next to her Nico stared up at Hades with wide eyes. "F – Father?" she asked.

Hades nodded, before he said, "I am sorry, my children, that your cousin and his friends took you out of the place of the Lotus-Eaters so soon...it wasn't my plan for them to. You two were supposed to stay in there, ideally, until the prophecy that I presume you heard had finished, so that Zeus would not kill you. But now...now that you have been discovered, sending you back will not be wise, because it will only be a matter of time until Zeus finds out and tries to kill you for it, just like he killed your mother so many years ago..."

"S – so, where do we go?" Bianca asked him, her face pale.

Nico looked like he was about ready to pass out from the excitement of it all.

"You can come with us to camp," Silena suddenly blurred out. Instantly, all of us looked at her, causing her to blush as she hurriedly added, "I – I mean no offense to you, Lord Hades, it's just that...if Nico and Bianca were to come back with us, and we told Chiron and Dionysus about them coming along with us on this quest, both of them might put a good word in to Zeus...right? And if that happens, Zeus probably wouldn't kill them, prophecy or otherwise, because he'd face the same dilemma that he will with Percy if he does."

"...And perhaps, milord," Katie added, sounding way too formal for my tastes, "you could also promise Zeus and Poseidon not to kill another mortal child of theirs, in return for them doing the same? That way, both your children and Percy would be protected, because Poseidon is very likely to agree with you due to Percy being his son."

Hades hummed thoughtfully as he idly stroked his beard. Finally, after several moments, he said, "That's not a bad idea, Daughter of Aphrodite, Daughter of Demeter. Very thoughtful...and cunning, too. Very well." He turned back to look at Nico and Bianca. "Do you wish to go to camp with these demigods, children? You'd be – "

"YES!" Nico shouted, before he quickly noticed his father's amused look, blushed, and added, "Uh...yes, Father, thank you."

Bianca nodded faintly in agreement.

Hades smiled at them, and this time his smile lacked the grimness that it had before. Then, he stood up, and held out his hand. The helm of darkness, which had still been in the backpack that Ares had given me, promptly flew into his hand. "I will send the four of you," he told Silena, Katie, Nico and Bianca, "to the edge of camp, out of good faith to Chiron and Dionysus. But as for you, nephew," he told me, "There is no time for us to waste. You and I will be going directly to Olympus."

## Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: I Meet My Maker & His Siblings

Ending Notes: On Hades's throne room, appearance, and kind of OOC personality – this is how I always imagined him for some reason ha ha! I never really liked the imagery of him having long hair (I always thought of Severus Snape and Lucius Malfoy from Harry Potter because of it), and I never really imagined him as having deathly pale skin, either. After all, with how much time he spends in the Underworld, his appearance is probably the least changed from how it was in ancient Greece, right? That's my excuse, anyways lol :P

Once again, the next chapter will be posted on Monday, like always. Sincerely,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

# I Meet My Maker & His Siblings

## Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Sorry for the really-late-in-the-day update – I've spent most of the past two days resting – not sleeping, though. Unfortunately I can't do that due to my internal clock -\_- – because I still feel pretty awful. Ah, well. C'est la vie, right?

As a gentle reminder, the next update after this one will be on July 6th. Like my last break, I will still be around because I don't really have a life outside of fanfiction and sims at the moment, so you don't have to worry about that. ;) And, in the very unlikely that I do not post on July 6th for whatever reason, I promise you that that reason will be posted on my FFN profile and the AO3 summary, okay? Like I said, this event is extremely unlikely, but I also want to keep you guys prepared in case my health issues have not let up by then. :)

So, with all that being said, I hope that you all remain well and safe over this break! Seriously. 'Tis a worrisome world out there as of late.

Sincerely,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

**You know, whenever I thought of how teleportation would feel as a kid, I always imagined it as feeling painless, like how *Star Trek* portrayed it to be.**

So, you can bet your ass off about how surprised I was that being teleported – or, at least, *side-along* teleported – was *not* a pleasant feeling at all. Rather, it felt like I was being squeezed into a tube that was spinning around at a hundred miles per hour, only to be suddenly spat out like I was a cannonball that had crashed right in front of the Empire State Building, except the sidewalk underneath me refused to bow down to the pressure and instead made my feet hurt *and* gave me the strong desire to puke.

"Oh," I said as I swayed on my feet, trying not to lose my balance, or worse, my lunch, although the constant city noise all around us wasn't helping matters much on either of those fronts. "I don't think that was as cool as I thought it was going to be."

Next to me, Hades chuckled. "Yes, I'm told that most mortals feel that way," he replied. "Don't worry, though, because this is probably the one and only time you will ever have to experience it."

"...Glad to hear it," I mumbled.

"Really? Are you sure about that, punk?" a familiar voice asked me.

I froze at the sound of it.

Hades didn't, though – although I guess that's to be expected, given the fact that he's the Lord of the Dead and all of that, on top of being the uncle of...

"Ares," he greeted the god with fake pleasantry, which I didn't blame him for. I mean, Ares had been a part of the plot to help overthrow Olympus and all that, no matter how direct or indirect his part had been. "How...*interesting* it is to see you here, given what I have just been told about how my helm of darkness and your father's master lightning bolt went missing."

Nervously, I turned and looked at Ares, too interested to see how he would react to having the truth rubbed in his face to just ignore the guy. Unsurprisingly, though, the god of war seemed unfazed at it, as evidenced by how he shrugged from where he was leaning up against the Empire State Building and said in response, "I don't know what the *punk* told you, Uncle, but I had no part in stealing anything of yours – or Father's. In fact, the only reason why I'm here is to *collect* the kid, because Father wants him on Olympus *right now*."

Hades raised an eyebrow. "Then, I imagine he'd be fine with the boy coming along with me, then, seeing as how I have...*crucial* information about the theft of both his symbol of power and mine. Information which, young Perseus, here," here, he gestured to me, causing Ares to glower down at me in a way that made me just *know* that he wanted me dead right now, "swore on the River Styx was true? Are you willing to do the same, nephew, to prove that his supposed lies are, in fact, false?"

Thunder boomed overhead at both mentions of the River Styx, causing Ares's glower towards me to worsen. And despite how much I knew that he wanted to kill me, I couldn't help but grin at the sight, causing him to bark at me, "What are you smirking at, *punk*?"

"Oh, nothing, Lord Ares," I said smugly. "Although...now that you mention it...I *do* want to thank you. For giving me the backpack, I mean. And for letting me and my friends stay at the Lotus Hotel and Casino. We really couldn't have solved this mystery without you, you know?"

And with that, before the god of assholes could say anything else, I quickly walked into the lobby of the Empire State Building, with Hades trailing behind me – and yes, you read that correctly. A *god* was actually trailing behind me.

At the front desk, a guard was reading what looked to be a *Harry Potter* book, and was so engrossed in it that, when Hades asked for the key to the six-hundredth floor, he replied, "There's no such floor, sir."

I did my best not to snicker at his words, especially when Hades gave him a look that looked like it could *literally* kill as he leaned forward and said in a low voice, "*Really?* Because I happen to have it on good record that, not only is there such a floor, but, as its gatekeeper, you have a duty to give me the key, seeing as how I am the Lord of the Dead and all that."

The security guard stiffened. Then, with wide eyes, he looked up from his book and stammered out, "R-right, sir."

Hades scowled. "*Lord* Hades," he corrected.

"L-lord Hades," the guard said as he put down his book and fumbled around the desk for a key card, before he handed it over to the god. "H – here you go. Although, I should warn you, there's still another day until the summer solstice, s – so – "

"You just let me worry about that," Hades interjected with a grim smile, before he turned to look at me and gestured for me to follow him. "Come, nephew. Let's get this over with."

The two of us walked into the elevator without much further ado. As soon as the elevator doors closed, though, my uncle slipped the key card into a slot, causing both the card and slot to disappear and be replaced with a bright, red button that said *600*. Hades pressed it easily enough, and not even a second later the elevator began going upwards as muzak softly played over the speakers.

Inconspicuously (or, at least as inconspicuously as I could manage), I quickly looked over at Hades, trying to figure out why we were going up through the Empire State Building to Olympus instead of...you know...just straight-up teleporting there? I mean, he was the god of the Underworld, right? Surely he could manage that?

But a small voice in the back of my mind said, "no, he can't. Remember, Zeus pretty much banned Hades from Olympus except for the summer and winter solstices, so it figures that he would be petty and only let him come through this entrance, too."

Despite the fact that I had no proof that that assumption was true, my stomach still clenched at the thought, because damn, wouldn't that be a shitty thing to do to your own brother? Especially after he already got the "short stick" with everything else?

Before I could spend anymore time pondering on that, though, the elevator dinged and the doors slid open. Both Hades and I stepped out, but unlike him, when I did I almost had a heart attack.

I was standing on a narrow walkway in the middle of the air. Below me – below us – was Manhattan, except it was Manhattan from the height of an airplane. In front of us, white marble steps wound up the spine of a cloud, into the sky. My eyes followed the stairway to its end, where my brain just could not accept what I saw.

"Look again," that small voice from before said.

I am, I replied. It's just...really there.

From the top of the clouds rose the decapitated peak of a mountain, its summit covered with snow. Clinging to the mountainside were dozens of multileveled palaces – a city of mansions – all with white-columned porticos, gilded terraces, and bronze braziers glowing with a thousand fires. Roads wound up crazily and misshapenly to the peak, where the largest palace was, gleaming magnificently against the snow. Precariously perched gardens bloomed with

olive trees and rosebushes, and I could just make out an open air market filled with colorful tents and a stone amphitheater built on one side of the mountain, while a hippo-dome and a coliseum were built on the other.

All in all, Olympus was the picture-perfect image of an Ancient Greek city, except it wasn't in ruins. It was new, and clean, and colorful – the way that Athens must've looked twenty-five-hundred years ago.

Next to me, Hades chuckled. "Impressive, isn't it?" he asked rhetorically – or, at least, I hoped he asked it rhetorically, because I was too dumbfounded to reply. "Welcome to Olympus, nephew. Now, come along."

Dazedly, I followed after Hades through Olympus. We passed some giggling wood nymphs, a marketplace packed with all sorts of sellers and businessmen, a small crowd of a bunch of good-looking teenagers who were probably minor gods and goddesses, and even the nine muses. All of them were talking and laughing, and overall having a good time, as if they weren't even worried about the impending war...

...At least, not until they saw Hades, that is. Because wherever he went, people stopped, and stared, and whispered to each other as their eyes widened and their faces paled, because obviously they knew how big of a deal it was for the god of the Underworld to show up to Olympus unannounced, and on a day that wasn't the summer or winter solstice.

As for me...well, no one really looked at me. They were all too busy looking at him. But, I didn't mind the lack of attention, because it allowed me to look at everything in complete, gobsmacked awe as I trailed after Hades up the main road and towards the big palace up at the top of the peak, which was a reverse copy (as in, it – along with everything else here – was white and silver, compared to the Underworld's black and bronze) of Hades's palace in the Underworld.

I realized then that Hades's must've built his palace to resemble this one. My gut clenched again at the thought.

Hades and I walked up steps that led up to a central courtyard, before walking into the room that was just past that...

...Although, now that I think about it, "room" really isn't the right word, because the place made Grand Central Station look like a broom closet. Massive columns rose to a domed ceiling, which was gilded with moving constellations. And twelve thrones, built for beings the size of Hades, were arranged in an inverted U, just like the cabins at Camp Half-Blood. An enormous fire freckles in the central hearth pit, and it was being tended by a little girl who I recognized as the girl that had been tending to the camp's fire my first day at Camp Half-Blood...a little girl with loosely-curved chocolate brown hair who was wearing a brown, moleskin cloak.

It didn't take more than a second for me to realize that the little girl had to be Hestia, the goddess of the hearth and the eldest of Kronos and Rhea's children, especially when I saw the occupants of the four thrones that were occupied – the four middle thrones – above her.

Like Hades, all four of the gods were in giant human form, but I could barely look at them without feeling a tingle, as if my body were starting to burn. Zeus, the Lord of the Gods, wore a dark blue pinstriped suit. He sat on a throne of solid platinum. He had a well-trimmed beard, marbled grey and black like a storm cloud. His face was proud and handsome and grim, his eyes a dark, electric blue.

As Hades and I got closer to him, the air crackled and smelled of ozone.

Sitting to the left of Zeus was Hera, the goddess of marriage and the second youngest of Kronos and Rhea's children, sitting on a throne that was pure white and had various etchings carved into it like her cabin did. Like Hades, she looked like she was straight out of Ancient Greece, as she was wearing a white silk chiton with a golden girdle, along with golden sandals. Her skin was perfect, her nails manicured, and her face was gorgeous. Her honey blonde hair was done up in some sort of elaborate twist, while her dark brown eyes – the same color as Hades, Nico, and Bianca's eyes – were both warm and welcoming and cold and calculating at the same time.

I instantly knew then that I didn't want to get on her bad side.

To the left of Hera was Demeter, the goddess of agriculture and my stepmother (which I may or may not have gulped at). But, strangely enough, I wasn't scared of her at all, like I was with Zeus and Hera, because where Hera was both warm and cold, Demeter was just pure warmth. Everything about her, from her loosely-curved chocolate brown hair, to her golden-green eyes, to her dark green summer's dress and brown sandals, and even to her wicker chair-shaped throne, was warm and comforting, like an early summer's day...or my mom.

Yeah, you read that right. Demeter reminded me of my mom.

I didn't look at her for too long, though, because I quickly turned to look at the god who was sitting to the right of Zeus – the god that was my father. Like Demeter and Zeus, he was dressed more modernly for the occasion – leather sandals, khaki Bermuda shorts, and a Tommy Bahama shirt with coconuts and parrots all over it. His skin was deeply tanned, and his hands were scarred like an old-time fisherman's. His hair was black, like mine. His face had that same brooding look that had always gotten me branded as a rebel. But his eyes, which were sea-green like mine, were surrounded by sun-crinkles that told me he smiled a lot, too.

Against my will, my throat closed shut. My eyes watered. This was my dad. The one person who I had wanted to meet more than anything in the world.

...Although, I have to admit, I was a little surprised that his throne was a deep-sea fisherman's chair, even if it was a relatively cool-looking one with a black leather seat and a built-in holster for a fishing pole, which held a bronze trident that had green light flickering along its tips.

Next to my dad, Zeus straightened in his chair as a glare formed on his face. "Brother," he greeted Hades, with a tone that was clearly lacking in anything remotely resembling hospitality, or even kindness. "May I remind you that the summer solstice is still a day away?"



Hades merely smirked in response, before saying, "You may, brother. But I do not come here out of bad will. Rather, I come here out of good faith, because our nephew here just returned me my helm of darkness after proving to me his innocence, and telling me who the real perpetrator of the theft that took both of our symbols of power is. Perseus, if you may?"

At once, Zeus, Hera, my dad, and Hestia – who I quickly realized had golden flames for eyes – turned to look at me. But not Demeter. No, her eyes had been on me since the moment I had stepped in the room, watching me with both interest and...dare I say it...love?

I didn't give her much thought at that moment, though. Instead, I nervously stepped forward, before I bowed to all of them. "Lord Zeus, Lady Hera, Lord Poseidon, Lady Demeter, and Lady Hestia," I said, before I began to tell all of them almost everything that had happened, just as it had happened, carefully making sure to leave out all of my dreams except for the last one with Kronos, for reasons that I was just only beginning to realize. I shrugged Ares's backpack off of my shoulders once more while I was talking, before taking out Zeus's master lightning bolt, which was beginning to crackle in his presence, and laid it at his feet.

After I had finished, there was a long silence, broken only by the cackle of the hearth fire.

Zeus opened his palm. The lightning bolt flew into it. As he closed his fist, the metallic points flared with electricity, until he was holding what looked more like the classic thunderbolt – a twenty-foot javelin of arcing, hissing energy that made the hairs on my scalp rise.

"The boy must be telling the truth," he said. "Otherwise, Styx would've taken him into her depths. But that Ares would do such a thing...it is most unlike him."

"He is proud and impulsive, brother," Demeter replied as a light smile danced across her face. "It runs in the family. But, I'm afraid that that isn't the matter that we should be focusing on."

Hera nodded primly. "She's right," she said. "Husband, if our Father truly is rising – "

Zeus raised a hand, silencing her. "We will speak of this no more," he said, only to hurriedly add when all of his siblings glared at him, "For now. I must go personally to purify my thunderbolt in the waters of Lemnos as quickly as possible, in order to remove the human taint from this metal."

He rose and looked at me, and for a second, I thought I saw his expression soften by just a fraction of a degree. "You have done me and Hades a service, boy," he said. "Few heroes could have accomplished as much."

"I had help, sir," I replied. "Silena Beauregard and Katie Gardner – "

But he continued on speaking, as if he hadn't heard me. "To show you my thanks, I shall spare your life. I do not trust you, Perseus Jackson. I do not like what your arrival – or the reappearance or your cousins," here, Zeus looked at Hades with a dangerous look, "means for the future of Olympus. But, for the sake of peace in the family, I shall let you live, under the stipulation that you never enter my realm, and that you do not let me find you here when I return. Otherwise, you shall taste this bolt. And it shall be your last sensation, regardless of what is to be offered to you."

"Uh...thank you, sir," I said, while internally I couldn't help but think, "regardless of what is to be offered to you"? What does that mean?

Zeus turned to look at Hades again, with yet another hard look. "As for you...brother," he said. "Do not leave Olympus yet. We still have much to...discuss yet, about the reappearances of your children that you previously told us had been killed by your own hand."

And with that, a huge clash of thunder shook the palace, and a blinding flash of lightning illuminated it, causing me to close my eyes.

When I opened them again, Zeus and Hera were gone.

From her place by the hearth, Hestia stood. She turned to look at me, with those strange, golden fireballs of hers that served as eyes, and gave me a gentle smile as she said, "Your uncle has always had a flair for dramatic exits. I think he would've done well as the god of theater."

There was an uncomfortable silence.

After several moments of it, though, Hestia sighed and turned to look at Hades. "Come, brother," she said. "It's been so long since you and I last talked, that I think it would be only proper for you and I to have a chat outside in the garden, don't you think?"

"...I do," Hades said after several moments, before he turned to look at me. "I believe this is our farewell, Perseus. For now, at least. I will not forget the idea that you and your friends came up with, though, because I do think that it will be...beneficial to the conversation that I am to have with Zeus and the other Olympians later."

"Uh...okay," I said. "Thank you again, Lord – "

But Hades and Hestia were already gone, having walked out of the throne room through its doors.

Nervously, I turned around, to look up at Poseidon and Demeter, my father and stepmother, the second power-couple of Olympus, and two people that I had never even spoken to...and only knew the voice of one of them, and that was only because she had not-so-subtly tried to redirect the conversation with Zeus a few minutes before.

I knew that I should say something to them, and that I should greet them by their titles and names and something like that. But, when I opened my mouth, all that came out was a, "So...hi, I guess? Nice to meet you?"

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...Jeesh, no wonder so many people thought that I was an idiot.

Next Chapter Title: I'm Given An Offer I Can't Refuse

I'm Given An Offer I Can't Refuse

Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Hope you all had a wonderful past two weeks! Unfortunately, my two weeks weren't all that great – I didn't start feeling better until Thursday, and by that point I was massively behind on writing, so I didn't get to write my Luke/Ethan/Percy story like I wanted to. -_- Ah, well. Maybe next time, right?

Onto some more pressing matters – first, this chapter, while short, is basically the climax of the TLT arc (which, according to my plans, should actually wrap up sometime around...chapter 26? 27? Something like that.). I had a ton of feels while writing this chapter because of it, and I will unashamedly admit that, if it wasn't for the fact I don't live alone, I would've screamed by the time that I finished it LOL.

Second, after much mulling over my updating schedule while on break, I decided that I'm going to slow it down with the updates...cause five updates per week is a lot. Thus, after this week, I'm cutting the updates down to Monday and Friday updates only...so two updates per week instead of three. I hope this doesn't bother you guys too much, as that's still a very frequent updating schedule, and it will hopefully make me not feel as stressed out as I have been. :)

Well...I'm out of things to ramble about, so with that being said, I hope you all stay safe and well and I will see you on Wednesday! :)

Sincerely,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

You know that feeling you'd get as a little kid when you were talking with certain adults – that feeling that they found you cute and whatever, but didn't actually know what to do when you started to talk to them?

That was the feeling I got immediately after saying, "So...hi, I guess? Nice to meet you?" to *my own father and stepmother*.

Both of them were looking down at me with what looked like bemused expressions on their faces, as if neither of them had never interacted with one of my dad's mortal children in person before...although, I suppose for all that I knew of them, they very well mightn't've, which made my stomach twist and turn rather violently.

Finally, just when I had about enough of the silence, just when I was about done with their bemused looks, Poseidon tilted his head and said, "You know, you do remind me of your mother."

I blinked in surprise. “I r – remind you of Mom?” I couldn’t help but ask, because while my mom had always compared me to him, my dad, *nobody* had compared me to my mom before. I was the only one who had ever done that.

Poseidon smiled softly. “Your mother is a queen among women, child,” he replied wistfully. “I had not met such a mortal woman in a thousand years...had not met any mortal woman, perhaps, as *kind* and *good* as she is. You radiate her kindness, child. And her love. Although, I do think you got most of your rebelliousness from me, along with your hair and eyes.”

“Your smile, though, is all hers,” Demeter added kindly.

Surprised, I turned to look at her. “You’ve – you’ve met *me* before? And my mom?”

Gently, she nodded. But before she could fully reply, Poseidon turned and gave her a solemn look. She replied with a look of her own, but then she turned back to me and said, “Forgive me, Perseus. The three of us have much to discuss today, and I am admittedly getting ahead of myself.”

“...Oh,” I said awkwardly, not sure of what else to say. “Okay. What – what do we need to discuss?”

Poseidon looked at me for a hard, long moment before he ran a hand through his hair and sighed. “I presume that, during your talk with Styx, she told you of the prophecy?” he asked.

I blinked – I hadn’t thought that I had left that out, but apparently, I had. “Uh...yeah, I guess? I mean, you are referring to the prophecy that says ‘*A halfblood of the eldest gods, shall reach eighteen agai –*’”

“Yes, Perseus,” my father interjected before I could get any further. “That is the prophecy I was referring to. But do you know what it means?”

“It means...” I started, but then trailed off, because I wasn’t sure how much the two of them really wanted me to know.

Next to Poseidon, Demeter smiled at me warmly again. “It’s okay, Perseus,” she said. “You can be honest. We won’t hold it against you. We just want to see what you already know.”

“Well...” I said, “I know that it means I’m going to have to make a decision on my eighteenth birthday...if I survive that long, that is...right? I mean, I may not...probably won’t...” here, I nervously wet my lips, before continuing with, “Anyways, I have to decide whether or not to save Olympus and the gods, or to let it and you all be destroyed...right? Whether to let the...old age, I guess...remain, or to...bring in a new one?”

Demeter chuckled at my words, while Poseidon gave another tender smile. “All of that is true, Perseus,” he said. “But that is not the meaning that I was looking for.”

Again, I blinked. “Uh – it wasn’t?”

“No.”

“Then what meaning were you looking for?”

“The meaning of what those actions mean,” he replied cryptically, before saying, “Perseus...although I do not regret you being born, and am very proud for what you did in the two weeks leading up to today...I still regret the fact that, by being your father, I have brought you a hero’s fate, and a hero’s fate is never happy, child. It is never anything but tragic.”

A tidal wave of emotions swept through me at his words. I mean, here was my dad, *my own father*, telling me in a roundabout sort of way that he regretted being *my dad*. Oh, yeah, sure, his reasoning made sense and all that, but still, *it hurt*. It made me think that, once again, while he seemed kind and all of that, he wasn’t as interested in his mortal kids as I’d hoped he be, as I wanted him to be.

My eyes stung at the thought.

Demeter noticed my tears – but, then again, how could she not? Wasn’t she one of the many goddesses of motherhood, on top of being the goddess of agriculture, harvest, and fertility, along with several other things that I was forgetting? “Don’t take your father’s words too harshly, Perseus,” she said soothingly. Next to her, Poseidon nodded in agreement. “We are simply worried for you, that’s all. Because we’ve both seen snippets of your fate.”

“M – my fate?” I asked, confused. “What, did you talk to Lady Ananke or something?”

She laughed again and shook her head. “No,” she replied. “But our eldest son, Apollo, has shared with us the few things that his Oracle has shared with him. And it has made us...*concerned*, to put it lightly. You face several decisions in the near future, Perseus, that will not be easy. Several decisions that, if I was not going to offer to you what I am about to offer, you would get in grave trouble for.”

“I – decisions – offer?” I asked stupidly while I stared up at her with wide eyes.

But Demeter didn’t immediately answer my question. Instead, she said, “To answer your previous question, Perseus, you, your mother, and I *have* met before. I do not usually make it a...*priority* to meet the mortal lovers of my husband, or even their children, but I knew when Poseidon told me of your mother that she was *special* – and that you would be, too. So, ever since your birth, I have been watching both of you with a careful eye, which is why I sent Katie to you when I realized it wouldn’t be much longer until you realized your...*godly heritage*. It is also why I’m going to offer you what I am about to offer you, because if there is one thing that you have proven to me, Perseus, it is how brave, kind, and selfless you are, which are all traits that I admire.”

Her non-direct answers, no matter how complimentary they were, were really starting to annoy me. Still, I did my best to be as polite as possible as I asked, “And what is that you are going to offer me?”

“My patronage,” she replied.

Despite myself, I couldn’t help but frown. *Patronage*? That wasn’t an English word, was it? ‘Cause it sure as hell didn’t sound like one.

At the presumably confused expression on my face, Demeter let out another laugh. “You don’t know what patronage is, do you, Perseus?” she asked. When I shook my head, signifying that *no, I did not*, she added, “In our world, Perseus, patronage is when a god who is not the parent of a demigod decides to extend their protections over them, meaning that the demigod will not get in as much, ah...*trouble* as they would otherwise for the things that they do, as long as their patron god is in approval of it. In exchange, the demigod becomes the god’s champion, meaning that they can act as that god’s voice to other mortals, and may also wind up doing them favors or quests from time to time.”

Unable to help myself, I stared up at her with wide eyes. She – she wanted *me* to her voice to other mortals, other demigods? And for me to do things for her “from time to time”, in exchange for her protection? Protection that she said I would need in the near future, for the decisions that I was about to make?

Just how *bad* were these decisions?

“Of course, child, you don’t need to decide on this now,” she hurriedly added.

“R – right,” I said dazedly.

“This is a huge decision for anyone to undertake,” she continued. “Because it is *life-changing*. Completely and utterly. Hence why it is something that none of us have really done since the ancient times. But, no matter what you decide, Perseus, I do expect an answer by...” she trailed off, and looked over at Poseidon thoughtfully. Neither of them said anything, but I couldn’t help but think that they were having some sort of epic conversation, a conversation that words weren’t necessary for. “...July 4th. Yes. I expect an answer by July 4th. Is that enough time for you to make your decision?”

“I – uh – yeah, sure,” I said after a few moments, once again not really sure what to say. “I can do it by then.”

She smiled. “Good. Just ask for me when you have, child, and I will come to make things – ah – *official*, if your decision is to accept my offer.”

“But, whatever you decide, Perseus,” Poseidon added as he leaned forward, his eyes alight with a fiery kind of pride. “Know that you are mine, and that we are both proud of you. You are a true son of the Sea God.”

And just like that, my conversation with them was over.

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Fifteen minutes later, I was back on the streets of Manhattan, my mind swirling as I thought about everything that had happened, both that day and in the weeks before.

I had just been offered patronage by a god, something which, according to them, hadn’t happened for thousands of years, because said god – *goddess* – wanted to make sure that I wouldn’t get into any trouble for the “several decisions” that I was about to make.

But what were those decisions?

But even as I thought about it, I already knew the answer.

I had to decide what I was going to do about Luke, because *Luke had been working for Kronos*. My dreams about the “Crooked One” had made that obvious, considering the fact that Luke had been in one of them and had seemingly been on pretty cordial terms with the bastardized, the torture he suffered from notwithstanding.

And if Luke was working for Kronos – well, it definitely wasn’t an *if*, but I was just playing with the hypothetical here, because my mind was still spinning far too much to think about it otherwise – then that meant he had probably been the one to steal Zeus’s and Hades’s symbols of power, seeing as how Ares couldn’t have done that due to him being a god. And, because he had done that, Luke was the lightning thief, the stealer of the helm of darkness, and *the traitor of Olympus*.

And I had to decide whether I was going to turn him in or not.

Now, more than ever, I wanted to see to my mom. I wanted to talk to her, to ask her for advice, to listen to what she’d think she’d do in this situation. But, despite the fact that I knew she was home at our apartment, despite the fact how close she now was, I didn’t call for a taxi to take me to her. Because, for one thing, I didn’t want to disappoint her by telling her that I was pretty sure I had fallen in love with the traitor of Olympus – who was two or three years older than me and a *guy*, which meant that Gabe would be pretty fucking pissed, seeing as how he was just as much homophobic as he was abusive – while she was gone. And I also didn’t want to see her because I knew that, speaking of Gabe, if I went back to our apartment now, after everything I’d been through and everything I’d done, I wouldn’t hesitate in killing Gabe. And I didn’t want my mom to see me become a murderer – at least, not if I could help it, because I knew she would kill him first in a heartbeat to prevent that. She was my mom, after all.

Still, though, I tried to think of what my mom would say if I did tell her about all of this, what she would do. I knew that my mom would probably tell me that it’d be only right for me to take Demeter’s offer of patronage, and that it’d be only right for me to turn Luke in, because he needed to face justice for what he did – for stealing two symbols of power and nearly causing World War III in the process, and for aiding and abetting Kronos in his quest for revenge and the return of his power.

But, that being said, I also knew that my mom would also tell me to follow my heart, because even if I was only half in love with Luke as much as I thought that I was – because love was certainly what my feelings for him *felt* like – that still meant that I was *in love with him*. And that meant that I...that I...

...Oh, *fuck it*.

At the end of the day, I knew that I wasn’t going to turn Luke in. I couldn’t. Because even if he did do all of the things that I knew he did, I was too far gone to just throw him to the wolves and leave him there to die – even if that was in the metaphorical sense, although I had my serious doubts. I just couldn’t do it, especially when, according to my memory, Luke had



until August to convince me to join Kronos...which meant I had the same amount of time to convince him to rejoin the gods...or, at the very least, stop working for Kronos. I had until August to come up with a plan to do just that and execute it...which certainly wasn't going to be easy to do, considering the manipulation I was going up against. But, that being said, I knew I could do it. I *had* to, for Luke, for me, and for the kids of Cabin Eleven and Annabeth, even if my motivation to do it for the latter group was pretty fucking low. However, before I *could* do it, I also knew that there was just one thing that I was going to have to do first.

I was going to have to accept Demeter's offer.

## Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: There's A First Time For Everything

# There's A First Time For Everything

## Chapter Notes

...And now, here is the chapter that you have all been waiting for! Well, at least one of them anyways ha ha. The other big chapter for the TLT arc is Chapter 26/27...I haven't decided if I want to have another chapter before it yet lol. We'll see.

Next chapter will be posted on Friday. So, that being said, until then,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

**When I got back to Camp Half-Blood around two and a half hours after I had returned Zeus's master lightning bolt to him and had a conversation with Poseidon and Demeter, I was immediately greeted by...well, pretty much *everyone*.** All of the campers – Katie, Silena, Nico, and Bianca included – had gathered at the top of the hill as soon as they realized that I had returned, with Chiron, Mr. D, and even a few wood nymphs trailing after them. Most of them seemed excited that I had returned – although if that was because they were happy that I had actually come back *alive* or happy because I had successfully averted World War III, I didn't really know.

Unfortunately, because of all of the hustle and bustle at my return, I didn't instantly get to talk to Luke like I wanted to. No, instead, me, Silena, and Katie were pretty much instantly swarmed by campers who treated us as if we'd won some reality-TV contest, as they thrust laurel wreaths on our heads and constantly asked us about how everything during our quest went down. Nico and Bianca pretty much got the same treatment, due to us finding them on our quest and all that, except there were no laurel wreaths for them and no big feasts prepared in their honor like one was for ours.

After the feast, the Apollo cabin led a procession down to the bonfire, most of them singing about quests and epic heroes and everything else along those lines. Everyone got into even more of a festive mood because of it, especially because Katie, Silena, and I got to actually burn the burial shrouds our cabins had made for us in our absence, instead of...you know...them burning the shrouds *for us*.

...Or, at least, Silena got to burn the burial shroud her half-siblings had made in her honor, which was a shroud that was just as kaleidoscopic as her eyes, with the various symbols of her mom embroidered into it. It was really beautiful and obviously well-made, which made me more than a little sad to see it go. Likewise, Katie's shroud – which had been made by the Athena campers, much to my surprise – was also really beautiful, as it was a shimmering, deep golden-green with a giant-ass cornucopia on it in order to honor her mother. I was more than a little impressed with it – and more than impressed by Annabeth's ability to seemingly

put her hatred towards me about the quest aside when it came to Katie – and so, like with Silena’s, I couldn’t help but look at it with wide, admiring eyes.

As for mine...well, I hadn’t really known what to expect when I had been told that the kids from Cabin Eleven had volunteered to do my shroud for me, but it definitely wasn’t the result that I got – because oh my gods, was it *beautiful*. The shroud was a light, ocean blue that was the same color as the oceanid’s scarf that I still had, with a brilliant sea green trident embroidered in the middle. Around it, a school of equally sea green fish and dolphins swam – yes, they were *moving*, like the paintings from *Harry Potter* – and gentle waves seemingly lapped over them, as if the shroud really was a piece of the sea.

As soon as I had seen the shroud and taken in all of its splendor, I had instantly looked up and towards the Cabin Eleven kids, my eyes watering with disbelief. Alabaster winked at me in response, while next to him, Chris gave a grin and Ethan a small smile. But then, Ethan turned his head slightly, making it lean in the direction of Luke, who was standing just behind him. *Luke*, who was looking at me with a grin of his own, along with a light blush on his cheeks that I could just barely make out in the darkness.

In that moment, as soon as our eyes locked and the realization he had been behind the whole design of my shroud hit me, my heart sped up to what had to be a million miles per minute and I almost swooned, right then and there.

...The key word here being “*almost*”, because before I could swoon, a torch was thrust into my hands by an excited son of Apollo, who hurriedly encouraged for me to burn my shroud. I almost decked him in response – both for interrupting my mind melt and for suggesting that I *burn* such a beautiful thing – but then my common sense won out and I did as I was told.

After the three of us all finished burning our burial shrouds, though, I *was* able to slip away from all of the celebrations while the Apollo cabin led the sing-along and passed out s’mores. No one except for Katie and Silena saw me go, and both of them gave me a quick smile as I left before they started talking loudly about the quest as a distraction for my disappearance. Idly, I made a note that I would have to thank them for it later as I slipped into a loose cluster of trees that was only about eighty or so feet away from the bonfire.

I didn’t need to wait long before I heard the soft crunch of twigs and branches from right behind me. Like, maybe only a minute or two. Smiling, I turned around, and locked eyes with Luke once again, just able to make out his brilliant blue eyes in the dark night. “Hey,” I said softly.

“Hey,” he replied with what I hoped was a grin of his own.

At first, neither of us said anything, because, well...what *was* there to say? I mean, sure, we liked each other, but we hadn’t really addressed that yet, due to me going on my quest and all. And even if we had, I now knew that he was the person that had stolen Hades and Zeus’ symbols of power, and I also kinda-knew about Alan and about...

“So,” Luke said awkwardly, causing me to blink in surprise and stop thinking about the very world-shattering mysteries that I was just about to figure out. “About that talk we agreed to have as soon as you got back, along with that kiss...”

“...Yeah?” I asked with a grin.

“I – ” Luke began, but then he shook his head. “Look, I’m not exactly...*good* when it comes to this sort of stuff, but I...I *really* like you, Percy. I know we’ve only know each other for a month or so, but you’re...you’re just *amazing*. You’re smart, you’re kind, you’re caring...just everything I’m not, really.” When I opened my mouth to protest that train of thought, he shook his head and said, “No, let me finish, ‘cause I’ve been giving this a *lot* of thought. You’re brave, and pretty fucking selfless, considering how you rescued Nico and Bianca from that Lotus Hotel and all that. And you’re pretty good at sneaking around and fitting in with us Cabin Eleven kids, even if you’re not a child of Hermes or any of the minor deities. Oh, and before I forget: you’re beautiful, too. Like, *really* beautiful. I don’t think you even realize it, either, which absolutely *blows my mind* and...and...” He paused, before he scratched the back of his head nervously. “Sorry, I’m rambling now, aren’t I?”

“Yeah,” I agreed with a slight laugh, even though I could feel myself blushing so bad that I was pretty sure I was about to pass out from all of the concentrated blood in my head. “But...that’s okay. Especially if you’re going to keep complimenting me as much as you are now.”

Luke laughed in response, before he calmed down and said with a more serious tone, “Look, all of this is my way of saying that, like I said, I *really* like you, Percy, and I want to...want to date you, I guess?” He paused, but when he must have realized how that sounded, he added, “I mean, I *do* want to date you. But, that being said, if we date, things between us could get...complicated.”

“C – complicated?” I asked, not sure of what he meant by that besides the strong possibility that he was going to reveal to me that he was working for Kronos already, before I even had a chance to sway him back over to the gods’ side.

My heart quickened its pace by what felt like a hundred times at the thought.

“I – ” Luke said, “I’m just...I have a lot of metaphorical baggage, okay? A lot of stuff that I want to talk to you about, but I’m not ready to. Not yet. And I don’t want you to feel like you have to keep on waiting for me to – to open up before that. Plus,” he added, “I’m what – two, three years older than you?”

“My fifteenth birthday’s in August,” I interjected quickly, before he could say anything else.

“Two-and-a-half years then,” he corrected himself. “Which is...not a lot in the eyes of our – *the gods*, but it’s still a – a lot, to – to some campers here. And I don’t...I don’t want you to have to deal with the possible backlash from it if we...if we started to date.”

I frowned. I could see where Luke was coming from, I guess, because just earlier today I had been thinking about what my mom and Smelly Gabe would say if they found out that I was dating a guy that was older than me like Luke was, but...my mom’s opinion was one thing, everyone else’s was another. Because while I cared about my mom and her input, at the end of the day, I couldn’t really give a fuck about everyone else’s – especially when Demeter, my *stepmom* of all people, seemingly approved of the idea of a relationship between me and Luke.

Still, though, even if I didn't really care about what others would say about us, it was nice that Luke did...well, more like it was nice that he was willing to *open up* about such a thing, because this was a side to him that I had maybe really only seen once, that night after my first dinner at camp. And I had a feeling that this side of him – along with all of the nervousness that he was showing, which, *oh my gods, was so fucking cute* – was a side of himself that he didn't show often, so the fact that he was showing it to me *meant* something.

And that “something” was pretty fucking *huge*.

So, with all of those thoughts in mind, I leaned forward, and was silently thrilled that Luke did the same as well. “Look,” I said softly. “I don't – I don't really care about what others will think of us. I mean, I care about what my mom thinks, but when – not *if* – she finds out, I know she'll be understanding. That's just who my mom is. And as for your ‘baggage’...I can wait. In fact, I'm fine with waiting. Besides, I think you've opened up to me more tonight than you probably have in a long time...am I right about that?”

Nervously, he nodded in response.

I smiled. “So, that's that, then,” I said. “We're both on the same page. Now, are you going to kiss me or not?”

Wordlessly, he leaned forward all the way and kissed me – and oh my gods, was it the kiss of a *lifetime*. I mean, I had never been one to believe in true love's first kiss and all that, but as his lips moved with mine, something *magnetic* happened between us. It was like a tidal wave crashed over me and submerged me beneath love's waves, like an electric shock jolted through my lips and all the way through the rest of my body, and like my very center of gravity had *shifted*, all in one. It was like nothing I had ever experienced before, but it felt so *right*, so *true*, that I couldn't help but reciprocate the intricate movements that Luke was performing with his own lips as best as I could manage.

...Of course, though, no matter how much I wanted that very moment, that first kiss of mine to last for forever, for an eternity, eventually both of us had to come up for air...which we did a few minutes later with breathless gasps. My face was red again, but this time it was from an exhilarating lack of oxygen instead of embarrassment or humbleness or anything like that.

“...Wow,” I said after a few moments, once I had managed to get a sturdy grip on my breathing. “That was...”

“Amazing?” Luke finished for me. When I nodded, he replied, “Yeah, it was.”

For a moment, neither of us spoke. But then, with what I could see was a wry grin, Luke said, “Want to do it again?”

I gave him a grin of my own. “Oh fuck, *yes*.”

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Later that night – so late in the night, in fact, that I was pretty sure that the clock had already slipped into the early hours of the next day – I sat on the driftwood floor of Cabin Three,

staring up at the waning crescent of the moon that I could just barely see through one of the cabin windows. *Artemis must be happy now that Dad and our uncles aren't going to war now*, I thought idly, in a desperate attempt to calm my nerves in order to prepare for what was about to happen.

After all, there's a first time for everything. A first time for your first kiss – which I had just received hours earlier – and a first time for your first boyfriend – which I now had. A first time for riding a bike, a first time for fighting a monster, and a first time for going on a quest. There's also a first time for sex – but don't worry, I was nowhere *near* prepared for that first time yet. I wasn't even *fifteen* yet, after all.

Still...seeing as how there's a first time for everything, I figure there's also a first time for pledging your allegiance to a goddess in order to become her champion and everything that comes with it. Which, if I'm being perfectly honest, is rightfully much more of a mouthful than all of the other things that I had just listed...which was probably why I was as nervous as I was. After all, while a first kiss as *amazing* the one that I had just had was memorable, it was also fleeting. But this...

...This was *permanent*.

Shakily, I took in a deep breath. I *knew* that I had to do this. For Luke, for our relationship, and for the good of everyone, really. So, with that thought in mind, I ran a trembling hand through my hair as I whispered, "Demeter? Milady? I...uhm...I've made my decision already. And I...well, I accept your offer."

At first, nothing happened.

But then, a sudden gust of wind blew through the cabin, even though the door and all of the windows were closed. It smelled like flowers, like autumn, and like my mom's chocolate-chip cookies. But, most of all, it smelled like *home*. But not in the hearth kind-of-way, like I imagined it would if the wind had been caused by Hestia. No. Instead, it smelled like home in the mothering kind-of-way, and for a second, I could imagine myself sitting in a kitchen in a house that was all the way out in the country, with the windows open and a nice breeze billowing it's way through the house...does that make sense?

In the back of my mind, a voice that was distinctly *not* mine said, "*Close your eyes, Perseus.*"

I did as I was told.

A few moments later, the owner of the voice said from a spot just in front of me, "You can open your eyes now, Perseus."

Once again, I did as I was told, and saw that Demeter was standing just in front of me like I had thought she was. Unlike earlier that day, though, she was normal human-sized – like, she was maybe only a few inches taller than my mom. Also unlike earlier that day, she was wearing a completely different outfit, in the form of a dark green chiton with a golden girdle and equally-gold sandals. She was also wearing a golden armlet on her right arm and a

golden anklet on her left ankle, and her hair was kinda done-up like Hera's was, except there was a distinctive gold netting keeping it in place.

All in all, she looked like the picture-perfect woman from Ancient Greece, like the goddess that I knew she was. And despite the fact that I was one-hundred-percent *gay*, I couldn't help but tremble at the thought, due to how awed I was by her presence.

At first, Demeter didn't say anything. In fact, all she did was tilt her head wordlessly, as if she was bemused at the fact that I had called upon her so soon, considering that she had just given me the offer to become her champion today. Still, though, after a few moments, a small smile appeared on her face, and she said, "So, you have decided to become my champion?"

Wordlessly, I nodded.

Demeter's smile widened. "Very well," she said. "Then let us begin."

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...And that, my dear readers, is how I became Luke's boyfriend and Demeter's champion, all in one night.

Little did I know that both of those things would irrevocably change my life forever.

...Ah, well. I suppose that's life for you, right?

## Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: I Make Good On My Promises Pt. 1 (don't worry, this is the last two-parter chapter that you guys will be getting for a while ;) )

# I Make Good On My Promises Pt. 1

## Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Not much to talk about today lol, just wanted to pop in and say that I laughed a lot while writing this chapter. Like, a lot a lot ha ha!

Next chapter will be posted on Monday, like always. So, until then,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### **Now, I know what you're probably thinking.**

You're probably thinking something along the lines of, "Really, Percy? You just left the last chapter at that? But I wanted to see you *actually* become Demeter's champion! I wanted to read about how that actually works! But instead, you ended it with some silly little thing about how your life is going to change forever, which I already know!"

And yeah, I *totally* get that why you feel that way, if that is how you are feeling. But, the thing is...I kind-of-really-*can't* talk about it. Like, it's forbidden for me to, because in order to become Demeter's champion, I had to swear an oath on the River Styx (per Zeus's "request") that I wouldn't talk about the ritual that I had to go through...which completely and utterly *sucks* for the purposes of this story, but seeing as how I'll literally die and be forced to spend my time with Styx for all eternity if I tell you about it, I hope you'll forgive me for that.

Besides, there's plenty of other things for me to talk about that are *much* more interesting than that – like my relationship with Luke, for instance! Ever since we had gotten together, everything in my life had been *great*. Because while Luke was (understandably) nowhere *near* the point that he would be fully willing to open up to me – and thus, confess about his allegiance to Kronos, and divulge about what had happened between him and Alan and Thalia, because I had figured out the day I had gotten back from camp that he had *most definitely* been one of the two demigods that had been traveling with the daughter of Zeus when she died – he had opened up some. And, not to brag or anything, but even with the little opening up that he had done, I could already tell that he was perhaps the kindest, smartest, and funniest guy that I had ever met, and just the thought of it had me swooning all over him again.

...But, of course, that being said, things between us weren't *perfect*, because Luke didn't know that I knew he had sworn his allegiance to Kronos, or that I had basically sworn my own allegiance to Demeter. He also didn't know that I knew the reason why he had become so insistent on our relationship being "secret" for now (it was something he hadn't budged on, even after I had told him multiple times I was perfectly okay with becoming the gossip of



the camp for the rest of the summer) was because of his allegiance to Kronos, and the promise that he had made to the Titan King to lure me over to his side by sometime during August.

But, that was fine with me, because I had a plan formulating in my mind about how to convince Luke to do the vice versa by the same deadline that Kronos had given him. And that plan was to gain Luke's trust in any way that I could (i.e. by listening to his problems, talking with him about pretty much everything that I could, and bolstering his confidence, because I had quickly realized in the very first few days of us dating that he was *nowhere near* as confident as he made himself out to be), to use that trust – and gods, does that make me sound *awful*, but it's the only phrase that accurately described what I was doing – to show him that the gods weren't nearly as bad as Kronos, and to finally confront him at the end of August and tell him that I knew what he had done while also ensuring that he knew he wouldn't get in any trouble if he came clean then, because of me being a champion of Demeter and all that.

...And yes, I admit that this plan was highly manipulative of me, and that when I came up with it, it made me feel all sorts of *dirty* inside. But, I knew Luke. I *loved* Luke. And I was not going to let him die – because, as Demeter had told me after the champion ritual, that had a *very* real chance of happening – if I could help it.

However, even if my plan was manipulative, it also seemed to be *working*. It had only been a week and a half or so since Silena, Katie, and I had come back from our quest, but Luke was gaining trust in me. He was talking to me and listening to me, and the only two times that I dropped subtle hints that the gods were good and Kronos wasn't, a *thoughtful expression* actually appeared on his face, as if he hadn't quite thought about them that way before.

And, like I said before, that made me happy, because it meant that I was keeping the promise that I had made to myself that I would do my best to save him.

But that wasn't the only promise that I was going to keep.

Because, you see, the Fourth of July was just around the corner at camp, and I had learned that it was kind of a big deal for all of the campers. Apparently, there was an even bigger feast than usual to celebrate the event, the Hephaestus kids made their own fireworks for it as well, and...well, it was also really common for some of the older campers to hook up, too. And while I wasn't all that interested in hooking up with anybody outside of Luke, I knew that there was a certain son of Hecate and a certain daughter of Aphrodite who desperately wanted to hook up with each other, but didn't because of a lack of communication.

...Which brings me to the “present” in this story.

I was in the arena again, my shirt covered in sweat as I gripped Riptide tightly in my hands, waiting for Luke to make the first move in our third sword fight of the day. Luke was staring back at me, a slight smile on his face as he held his own sword in his right hand. He was a little cocky from the fact that he had won the first two matches, but I was determined that this time, *I* was going to be the victor, because I really wanted at least one win against him for the day.

Luke certainly didn't make it easy, though. As soon as he saw me instinctively blink, he struck forward, his smile turning into a full-blown grin as I let out a yelp and dodged his blade. There was no mercy for me just because I had dodged his blade, though, because as soon as he finished his thrust, he turned and thrust at me again, causing me to have to narrowly dodge him once more, unless I wanted to surrender or get the shirt that I was currently wearing ruined.

"C'mon," Luke said. "Make your move!"

I did as I was told, but I angled my body so that I would have even more of an advantage with my short height than I did before. Luke grunted in surprise as I side-stepped him and hit him squarely in the left arm with Riptide, and again when I did the same thing to his back as well.

"Surprise move," he said. "Nice, but a little unfinished."

"You think?" I asked rhetorically as I avoided his thrust again.

Luke smirked. "Oh, yes, definitely."

Then, before I could even register what he had done, he had thrust again – except this time, he had performed the same disarming maneuver that he had taught me during our first sword training lesson together, causing Riptide to fall out of my hands and fall helplessly to the ground.

Luke pointed his sword at my chest. "Surrender?" he asked coyly.

"Oh, yes, definitely," I sighed in response. Guess it was three for three for him today.

Luke frowned at that and lowered his sword before he stepped closer and asked, "Hey, what's wrong?"

I shrugged. "Just wanted to get a win in today, that's all," I said.

Luke smiled mischievously. "Really?" he asked as he stepped even closer. "Even though I've already told you, multiple times, that you're doing great?"

He was all up in my personal space now. Nervously, I gulped. "Y-yeah," I said. "I – I just wanted to have a personal win for today, I guess."

Luke hummed thoughtfully as he tilted his head down, towards me. I tilted my head up, desperately wanting to get that kiss that he was teasing me with. However, before I could, a *very* familiar voice shouted out, "Oh my gods, that was so cool!"

With a grimace, I backed away from Luke, before turning around and looking at the entrance to the arena where Nico, Ethan, and Alabaster were standing. Ever since Nico and Bianca had been claimed two weeks ago, the son of Nemesis and the son of Hecate had basically taken the son of Hades under their wings...which was both good for Nico – because besides Lou Ellen, Cecil Rogers, and a son of Apollo named Will Solace, pretty much every other kid his

age at Camp had shunned him, and I felt really bad about it because of my own experiences – and bad for me.

Why, you may ask? Because, coincidentally, both Ethan and Alabaster (along with Silena, Katie, and Chris) knew about me and Luke being together, and they just *loved* cockblocking me to no end.

“Hi, Nico,” Luke said humorously as he carefully stepped away from me, although I didn’t really know why. The son of Hades was *absolutely oblivious* to gay romance, it seemed, although I didn’t know if that was because of his age or because he was straight out of the 1930’s.

...And frankly, I didn’t really care. Or, at least, I wouldn’t until that obliviousness stopped, anyways.

“Hi, Luke!” Nico exclaimed, with a wide grin. Then, he turned to me. “Hi, Percy!”

“Err...hey, Nico,” I replied, while I tried to give Ethan and Alabaster the best “I’ll-kill-you-later” stare that I possibly could. They both only grinned in response. “What’s up?”

“Oh, nothing much,” Nico said. “I was just wondering when I could start my sword training, too! I know that Bianca said she didn’t really want you to teach me yet, Luke, but Ethan and Alabaster said that it’s practically the first real lesson that everybody gets here, and I don’t want to fall behind!”

“Oh, really now? They told you that?” Luke asked as he gave the son of Nemesis and the son of Hecate a *very* unamused look.

Their grins faltered.

Nico nodded enthusiastically, to the point where I was a little bit concerned that his head was just going to suddenly pop off.

“Well,” Luke said as he ran a hand through his hair. “I don’t want to get between you and your sister...” He trailed off, watching how Nico immediately drooped. “...But, that being said, I guess I can give you a few pointers, if you like.”

Immediately, Nico perked back up. “Really?” he asked.

“Really,” Luke confirmed with a smile.

Knowing that my time was almost up with him anyways – I was technically supposed to be going to the lake to canoe race with the naiads – I turned to look at him with a grin and said, “Guess I’ll leave the two of you to it then.”

Then, as non-discretely as I could, I put two fingers on my neck. It was a simple gesture that Luke and I had figured out how to do a few days ago, in order to display our affection so no one else except for Silena, Katie, Ethan, Alabaster, and Chris caught on to our relationship, since he wanted to keep it so secretive and all that. However, since it was still so new, Luke

only looked blankly at me for a moment, before he blinked and his cheeks flushed ever so slightly from embarrassment. Quickly, he made the same gesture back.

I smiled in return, because while it may not have been a kiss (which I preferred) or an “I love you” (we were *way* too early in the stages of our relationship to say that, I knew, even though I desperately wanted to say it to him), it was still something between us that displayed affection. Something special.

“See you later, Nico,” I told the son of Hades as I walked past him, all the while I not-so-subtly grabbed Ethan and Alabaster by the wrists.

“Hey!” they both protested.

Just as he was oblivious to the closeness between me and Luke, though, Nico was also oblivious to their disapproval at my leading the two other boys away. “See you later, Percy!” he said excitedly in response.

I waited until we were on the path leading down to the lake before I hit both Ethan and Alabaster in the arms.

“Hey!” Ethan protested. “What was that for?”

“Oh, you *know* what that was for,” I replied with a scowl. “I mean, *seriously*? Again? It was funny the first time, and *maybe* the second or third time, but it isn’t funny anymore. You know that Luke,” here, I dropped my voice down to a whisper, “doesn’t want anyone to know about our relationship, so there’s only so many times a day we can get together. Sword training’s one of them. And I thought that that would be the one time of day that’s *off limits*.”

Ethan, at least, had the decency to look ashamed. Alabaster, on the other hand...well, he just didn’t look like he regretted what he and Ethan had done *at all*. And that made me angry. *Really* angry.

However, before the tug from behind my navel started up, I remembered a certain conversation that Silena and I had had about Alabaster, and a certain promise that I had made to her. What was it that I had said to her?

*“...Tell you what,” I had said as I stretched. “Assuming we survive this quest, I’ll help you out with Alabaster like you helped me out with Luke, as thanks for both coming on this quest with me and helping me realize that Luke has feelings for me, too.”*

Despite how angry I was feeling, I couldn’t help but grin viciously as I remembered the exact words I had told Silena.

“Uh...Percy?” Ethan asked me nervously, causing me to blink and look at him. “You alright?”

I blinked again, trying to make myself look as innocent as possible. “Oh, I’m *just* fine now,” I said. “Especially because I know just how to extract my payback on one of you...”

I purposely trailed off for the dramatic effect that it would have, and I couldn’t help but grin again when both Ethan and Alabaster paled.

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“But I don’t like Silena like that!” Alabaster protested vehemently a few minutes later, after I had successfully made Ethan all but run for his life.

“Oh, really?” I asked as I gave him my best disbelieving look. “Then why do you always blush when she calls you Ally? And why are you blushing now?”

“I’m *not* blushing!” Alabaster retorted. “I’m just...it’s hot out here, okay? Of course my face is going to be red, ‘cause I’m hot!”

“Mmhmm, sure,” I said in response.

For several long, tenuous moments, Alabaster glared at me while I still stared back at him disbelievingly, because I *knew* that he liked Silena romantically and I wasn’t about to let him convince me of otherwise. Finally, though, when those several long moments were up, the son of Hecate let out a sigh and asked, “How did you even figure out I like her like that?”

I snorted in response. “Please, Al, you’re not that subtle,” I said. “Besides, it’s not like that really matters...at least, not when I’m going to get you two together, whether either of you like it or not.”

Alabaster’s eyes widened. “What? You are? No, you can’t do that!”

“And why not?” I asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Because Silena doesn’t like me like that,” he replied.

If he didn’t sound as serious as he did in that moment, I would’ve thought *for sure* that he was joking. In fact, even though he sounded as serious as he did, I almost straight-up asked him if he was. Almost. Because instead of asking him that, I groaned, ran a hand through my hair, and said, “Oh my gods, I can’t believe how dense you two are! It’s like Silena was a pot calling the kettle black when she yelled at me and Luke for not realizing we liked each other sooner! Seriously, how can she not see that you like *her*, and how can you not see that she likes *you*?”

Alabaster blinked. “Silena doesn’t like me,” he said.

I snorted again. “Really? Then why did she ask you out at the beginning of the summer?”

He shrugged. “I thought it was a dare.”

Okay, I couldn’t help but think as I gave him another disbelieving look, *that explained* a lot. “Then why does she call you *Ally*? No one else does, do they?”

Alabaster shifted uncomfortably. “Well...no,” he said. “But I always just thought that that was her way of teasing me.”

“And why would she tease you?” I asked, and I very ashamedly admit that my voice may or may not have rose a few octaves as I spoke.

When he didn't immediately answer me, I sighed and ran a hand through my hair again. "Look, I know it may seem kind of hard to believe," I said, "but Silena really does like you, and I know that you like her. And since you can't stop cockblocking me, I'm gonna get you two together so that I can repay the favor."

...That, and like I had said before, I had made a promise to Silena that I was going to get the two of them together. But Alabaster didn't need to know that.

Not yet, anyways.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: I Make Good On My Promises Pt. 2

I Make Good On My Promises Pt. 2

Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Sorry for the extremely late update today – I honestly haven't felt well since Friday, so I've been marching through this chapter a few hundred words at a time (so if it feels rushed/lackluster in comparison to the others, I'm sorry about that!) over the past few days...which is weird for me, not gonna lie. Usually I don't get such small breaks in between my downward spirals, but it's whatever.

Next chapter will be posted on Friday, unless I wind up sleeping/resting more than I write, since I'm a lil behind in my writing. If that is the case, though, I'll update on Monday and repay the lost chapter back to you guys with a three-chapter update week in the near future, so don't worry about that. I'm not that cruel. ;P

So, all that being said, until the next chapter,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

As it turned out, getting Alabaster and Silena together wasn't as easy as I thought it was going to be.

Part of this was because, despite their parents being married and all that, the Hermes and Aphrodite kids *always* had conflicting schedules...or, at least, that was what it seemed like, anyways. Because when the Hermes kids were busy sword-training with Luke in the arena, the Aphrodite kids were busy archery-training in the archery fields with Chiron. And when the Hermes kids were busy climbing the rock wall, the Aphrodite kids were busy canoe-racing with the naiads.

But, that being said, I could've dealt with conflicting schedules rather easily, if that was the only reason why I was having trouble getting them together. After all, Luke and I had conflicting schedules except for his one-on-one sword training instruction with me, and I was still able to work around that.

What I *couldn't* deal with, though, was Alabaster's *stubbornness*. Seriously. Because for a son of Hecate, the goddess of crossroads and choices and all that jazz, Alabaster was *really* fucking stubborn. Each time I tried to get him and Silena alone despite their schedules so that they could confess their feelings for one another, he always came up with an excuse about why he couldn't talk to her at that time – and his excuses were *always* lame. Likewise, each time I tried to convince him to do something nice for Silena, like getting flowers from Katie (who was more than happy to help me in my endeavors to get our two friends together), he *always* had a lame excuse for that, too.

And it was frustrating, his stubbornness. No, *more* than frustrating. Especially when, by the time that Fourth of July celebrations were about to begin in a few short hours, I *still* hadn't been able to get the two of them together.

"Oh, Katie, I don't know what to do!" I groaned as I looked at my reflection in the body-length mirror that Silena had loaned me for the day.

Both of us were standing in my cabin, rummaging through a pile of clothes that had come with the mirror, in order for me to "decide" on an outfit for my "secret date" with Luke later tonight. The date wasn't really anything special – just a small dessert picnic, I guess, in a spot that Luke assured me was secluded from the beach but still in an area where we could see the fireworks that the Hephaestus kids had made for the occasion. Thus, I didn't really see the point in dressing up for the "date", but when I had told Silena that she had promptly given me a horrified look before she gave me a five-minute lecture and doubled the amount of clothes that she was loaning me.

"What do you mean?" Katie asked as she looked at the outfit that I was currently wearing, which consisted of a dark blue dress shirt and black dress pants. "No, that outfit is *way* too formal. I don't care what Silena says. You need something more casual."

"I just can't believe how stubborn Alabaster is," I replied as I shrugged off the clothes and put on the new ones that she then promptly handed to me. "I just...he likes Silena, and he *knows* that Silena likes him, so I don't understand why he's refusing to ask her out. Like, not even Luke and I were that bad. Is this outfit any better?"

Katie shook her head. "No, not really...try this one on. As for Alabaster, though...I agree with you. He really does need to get his head out of his ass...or have it taken out of his ass for him."

I frowned, seeing her evil grin in the reflection of the body-length mirror, before I turned to look at her. "What do you mean?" I asked.

Katie's grin widened. "What I mean is, why have you not considered making Alabaster...oh, I don't know...*jealous*? I mean, if nothing else works, I'm sure that making him jealous will. Oh, and *oh my gods*, is that outfit *great*, it's just missing something in particular..."

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"You want me to do *what*?" Charles Beckendorf, the head of Cabin 9, aka the Hephaestus Cabin, asked blankly.

"Pretend to ask Silena to go with you to the fireworks tonight," Katie replied, while I hastily nodded next to her, "so that Alabaster will get jealous and ask her out instead."

"But I don't even like Silena like that!" he protested.

Katie rolled her eyes. "We know, Beck," she said. "You aren't exactly subtle in showing how much you like Drew –" here, the son of Hephaestus spluttered even more "– but this isn't about Drew. This is about Silena, her half-sister, and giving Silena the proper date that she



deserves for tonight. After all, hasn't Silena been helping you with trying to woo Drew or something like that?"

Beckendorf spluttered again.

Personally, I was just as surprised as he was. I mean, while I knew that he didn't like Silena like that, I hadn't known that Beckendorf had liked *anyone* like that – most of all *Drew*. I tried to picture how that relationship would work, but all that I could picture was Drew constantly speaking in that bored tone of hers, even when they were on dates or when Beckendorf gave her flowers or something like that.

I tried my best not to snicker at that.

Apparently, Beckendorf must have gotten over his spluttering while I was busy entertaining myself the mental imagery of him and Drew dating, because suddenly he was saying, "...Fine. Alright. I'll do it. But you owe me, Katie."

Katie smiled sweetly at him in response. "Of course," she said. "How could I not?"

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Two hours later, just when everybody was about to go down to the beach to watch the fireworks, Katie and I carefully hid ourselves in the brush just behind Cabin Ten, allowing us to have a good view of all of the insanity that was about to ensue.

After the two of us had convinced Beckendorf to fake-ask-out Silena, we had also roped Ethan into our plans. At any moment now, the son of Nemesis in question was going to walk with Alabaster just in front of Cabin Ten, where Beckendorf was going to pretend to ask Silena out. Hopefully, this would make Alabaster jealous enough to butt-in and ask Silena out instead, because otherwise, I didn't know what other tricks I could from out of my sleeve in an attempt to get the two of them together.

"Oh, gods, I hope this will work," I couldn't help but mutter under my breath, as thoughts about what would happen if it *didn't* kept on swirling through my mind.

Next to me, Katie rolled her eyes. "It will, Percy," she said. "I have no doubt about it. And if, for some reason, it doesn't, I swear to gods I will use my vines to tie Alabaster and Silena up until they confess their feelings for one another..."

"Alabaster and Silena like each other?"

Clamping a hand over my mouth so I didn't shriek and ruin our plans right then and there, I quickly turned around and gave Luke the best glare that I could manage.

Luke gave me a humorous grin in response.

What a bastard, I couldn't help but think.

"Really, Luke?" I asked once I had calmed down enough to take my hand away from my mouth. "Did you have to go and scare me like that?"

“No, not really,” he admitted. “But, when I went to go pick you up from your cabin, you weren’t there, so I decided to see where you were. I didn’t think you’d be here, though...speaking of which, *why* are you here?”

“We’re trying to get Alabaster and Silena together,” Katie said before I could say anything myself. Annoyed, I turned to glare at her, but she ignored me and added, “Because Percy made a promise to Silena while we were on our quest to get her and Al together, but Alabaster has proven himself to be more...*stubborn* than Percy was expecting.”

“That’s one way to put it,” I muttered under my breath.

“Sounds fun,” Luke said as he crouched down next to us. “Mind if I stay and watch?”

“No,” I replied quickly.

Katie rolled her eyes. “Only if you guys don’t get disgusting and make out in these bushes,” she said. “Seriously. Don’t. The bushes don’t deserve that.”

Luke snickered at that, but I glared at Katie not-so-subtly. I mean, I knew that she was only joking, but a part of me also wanted to get some payback at her like I was going to get at Alabaster once he and Silena got together...of course, the only problem to that, though, was that, like Ethan, I didn’t really know who Katie liked in that way at camp...provided that she liked *anyone* like that.

“Oh, here he comes!” Katie whispered. “No, here *they both* come! Luke, get down! You’re still too tall! They’ll see you!”

“I’m not *that* tall,” Luke grumbled, but he nevertheless complied to her wishes and crouched down even further, to the point where he was pretty much all but sitting on the ground.

Now, if I hadn’t been so focused on the forms of both Beckendorf and Ethan and Alabaster walking by Cabin Ten, I would’ve laughed at the hilarious image at that was. As it was, though, I was too absorbed by the way that Beckendorf nervously walked towards Cabin Ten, and by the way that he threw a non-discrete glance our way, as if he knew that we were there, watching him.

...Well, watching Alabaster more like it, but I figure that’s like saying *tomayto-tomahto* in a situation like this.

Apprehensively, Beckendorf knocked on the door of Cabin Ten, as Silena and all of her half-siblings hadn’t come out of the cabin yet. At first, there was no visible reaction from inside the cabin, but there *definitely* was one from Alabaster. Subtly – or, at least, what he probably *presumed* to be subtly, because it was really obvious to Luke, Katie, and I – the son of Hecate turned to look at Cabin Ten as his walking slowed to the point where he was barely even moving. Next to him, Ethan slowed down, too, although not before casting a careful, one-eyed glance towards where we were hiding – probably because he had seen Beckendorf throw a glance our way just a few minutes before.

Suddenly, the door to Cabin Ten opened. Due to the door itself, though, the three of us couldn't see who had answered the door, although we all heard the voice of Silena exclaim, "Charlie! What are you doing here? The fireworks are just about to start!"

Although it was pretty dark outside, I could just make out the flush on Beckendorf's cheeks that appeared when Silena called him "Charlie" – no one except for her called him that. In fact, everybody else usually called him Beckendorf or Beck, like Katie had earlier.

"H – hey, Silena," Beckendorf greeted her nervously. "I was just wondering if you..."

Beckendorf suddenly lowered his voice, making all of us unable to hear what he was saying.

"What's he saying?" I asked Luke, hoping that he would be at least somewhat-skilled in reading lips. I mean, not to be stereotypical or anything, but that's a pretty important skill for a child of Hermes to have...right?

"...I don't know," Luke said after a moment with a grimace. "I'm not as good at lip-reading as the Stolls are, unfortunately. If only they were here..."

He trailed off then, both because he presumably didn't have much else to say, and because the door to Cabin Ten suddenly came to a close, revealing Silena in all of her glory. The daughter of Aphrodite's face was rather flushed, and she was looking at Beckendorf with wide, disbelieving eyes. After a moment, though, I saw her look over towards us just like Beckendorf and Ethan had, and I knew in that moment that Beckendorf had let her in on our plans.

...Which I wasn't going to complain about. I mean, although it had never crossed my mind or Katie's mind to get Beckendorf to tell her, we hadn't been actively trying to keep all of this a secret from her, either. And, now that I thought about it, it was probably going to be easier to make Alabaster butt in as well if Silena knew, especially if she...

"Oh, how *sweet* of you, Charlie!" Silena suddenly exclaimed as she gave him a wide smile, just as the flush instantly vanished from her face. "*Of course* I'd like to watch the fireworks with you!"

Quickly, I turned to look at Alabaster, and promptly grinned when I saw his reaction. The son of Hecate, who had long-since stopped in his place, was looking at Beckendorf and Silena with wide, misty green eyes. A horrible blush was on his face, too, making his face look tomato-red, and his hands were clenched into fists at his side.

For a moment, I kind of felt bad for him. I mean, this plan of ours *was* kind of cruel. But then, I remembered how much hell he had been giving me for the past few days through all of the excuses he had made in order to not confess his feelings for Silena to her, and all of my guilt vanished. *Sorry, Alabaster*, I silently thought. *But you kind of deserved this.*

"...me a moment to get my cabin in to order," Silena continued rather loudly, causing me to blink and turn back to look at her. "And then I'll be ready...okay?"

"Okay," Beckendorf agreed rather easily.

Silena then opened up the door to her cabin and walked back inside. Because of this, none of us could see what she was doing, but we *could* see what Alabaster was doing. The son of Hecate was slowly walking towards Cabin Ten, with an expression that looked to be halfway through casual and scowling, with Ethan slowly trailing behind him. I thought I saw the son of Nemesis in question mouth Alabaster's name, but I wasn't sure, since that wasn't exactly in my field of expertise.

"Hey, Beckendorf!" Alabaster called out.

Beckendorf turned around. "Oh, hey, Alabaster," he greeted the other guy nervously – after all, everyone knew that the children of Hecate weren't fun to be around when they were angry, what with their freaky magic powers and all that. "What are you doing here?"

"Just walking down to the beach," the son of Hecate replied with a shrug. "You?"

"Oh," Beckendorf said as he nervously reached a hand up to scratch the back of his neck. "I was just asking Silena if she would like to watch the fireworks with me...as friends, of course!"

"As friends'," Alabaster repeated with a scrunched up face.

Beckendorf nodded – although, if I'm being perfectly honest, his nodding was probably a bit too enthusiastic to be believable.

Just before Alabaster could say anything else, though, the cabin door opened again, and out came Silena and all of her half-siblings. Drew looked just as bored as she usually did, while Laurel was smiling ever-so-slightly and Mitchell and Lacey looked outright ecstatic. Obviously, she had let them in on the plans.

"Alright, I'm ready," Silena told Beckendorf, before she blinked and turned to look at Alabaster. "Ally, what are you doing here?"

At the mention of his nickname, Alabaster flushed brilliantly. "I – uhm – Silena – " he stuttered out.

"He was just wondering about what I was doing, that's all," Beckendorf supplied rather smoothly, his amber-gold eyes alight with amusement. "I told him that I had asked for you to watch the fireworks with me, as friends."

"Oh," Silena said, before her eyebrows furrowed. "Why, Ally?"

"Okay," Katie whispered from right next to me with a snort. "Now she's just being mean."

Luke snorted. "You got that right."

"*Shut up!*" I hissed at both of them. "We're getting to the best part!"

Alabaster shifted uncomfortably. "I – I just – "

Suddenly, he leaned in close to Silena, and lowered his voice to the point where none of us could hear him.

“Oh, come on!” I couldn’t help but whisper furiously. “You can talk louder than that!”

Luke snickered at my heated words.

A few minutes passed by, in which Alabaster and Silena were talking to each other quietly, but fervently. Neither of them noticed how Beckendorf slowly backed away from them, a small smile on his face, before he threw a glance our way once again. “You owe me!” he mouthed, before he walked up to Ethan. The two of them grinned at each other, obviously finding the whole situation rather hilarious, before they started walking towards the beach, where the fireworks were going to be.

“Note to self,” Katie muttered as we half-watched them leave. “Do something nice for Beck. Like making him some flowers to give to Drew or something like that.”

Silently, I nodded to myself in agreement at her words. I was going to have to do something nice for the son of Hephaestus, too, even if the idea of him and Drew being romantically involved was still too hilarious to seriously comprehend.

I didn’t dwell on that thought too much, though, because a minute or so later two things happened at once. The first thing that happened was that Alabaster and Silena were starting to lean in towards one another, their faces flushed and their eyes wide, which meant that they were going to *kiss*. Finally, after days of trying to get the two of them together (which wasn’t as long as Silena had supposedly spent rooting for me and Luke to get together, but still, it felt like *forever*), they were going to *kiss*. My goal had been reached, my promise to Silena had been fulfilled. And it seemed like I was going to be able to get to see the fruit of my labors.

...The key word here being “seemed”. Because, just as Alabaster and Silena were about to kiss, I felt Luke pull me up from where I was sitting next to Katie. “Hey!” I quietly squawked. “What are you doing? They’re about to kiss!”

“They are,” Luke agreed humorously. “But the fireworks are about to begin at any moment, and I’m not going to let you miss out on seeing them. Bye, Katie.”

Katie momentarily turned to look at him, her green eyes swirling with amusement. “Bye, Luke, bye, Percy,” she said in response.

And, just like that, Luke began to fully lead me away from the scene, even though I was still protesting quietly (but only because I knew that, if I protested any louder, the moment between Alabaster and Silena would be ruined). However, that being said, even as Luke led me away and even as I protested against his doing so, I still craned my neck back to look at Alabaster and Silena, and just caught the moment that the two of them locked lips. And *that* was a very beautiful sight.

Finally, I thought with a sigh of relief. *They’re together. My work is done...and just in time for my date, too!*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: TBD

My Perfect First Date

Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Sorry for the late-ish update again, but I reached my goal of posting today, so I'm happy about that. :)

One thing that I would like to say for this chapter is that I made a minor change to canon outside of what has already been stated. This change concerns the backstory of Annabeth's knife, because I realized that I kind of fucked up when writing about her knife but I liked this change too much (and what it means for the storyline) to change it. So...sorry, but not sorry I guess lol.

Also, yes, the flower mentioned in this chapter is exactly what you think it is. I couldn't help but tease it, as she-who-I-will-not-name is one of the few goddesses I think Riordan did justice to in terms of characterizations (along with Hera, Athena, and Artemis). Everyone else is just kinda...meh, but I've already said that a million times before so I won't go into any rants about it. :P

Next chapter will be uploaded on Monday, as always. So, until then,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Uh...Luke, just *where* exactly are you taking me?” I asked my boyfriend – yes, *my boyfriend*. A part of me still couldn't believe that I could call him that – a few minutes after he had led me away from the spot where we had watched Alabaster and Silena get together.

We were walking down one of the many paths that snaked through camp, but admittedly, it *wasn't* the one that led down to the beach, no. Instead, we were walking down the path that led to *the woods*, of all places, which was...*odd*. Very odd. And I couldn't help but get nervous about it, as a part of me wondered whether or not Kronos had found out that I was now a champion of Demeter and had pushed Luke's August deadline up to *now*.

That part of me was slightly dampened (*dampened*? I don't think that's an actual word), though, by the look that Luke gave me after I had asked my question. There was a slight smile on his lips and his icy blue eyes – like *glaciers*, really, now that I got to thinking about it – were alight with amusement and mischievousness, and I couldn't help but feel like that the time for confrontations wasn't now because of it...because Luke looked so *happy*, so *safe*, instead of angry and bitter like I knew he would be when that time came.

“I told you before that the place is a surprise, Percy,” he said, his amusement as clear in his voice as it was in his eyes.

I scrunched my face up at his words. “Well, what if I don’t like surprises?” I couldn’t help but ask.

Luke stared at me for a moment. “Do you not like surprises?” he asked, his tone suddenly concerned.

Gods, did I love that about him.

“I like them,” I assured him as best as I could, not wanting him to worry about something that he didn’t even have to worry about. “I’m just...*antsy*, that’s all. I mean, don’t we have to go to somewhere near the beach in order to get a good view of the fireworks?”

Luke shook his head. “No, not necessarily,” he said. “I don’t...I don’t really know how to explain it. You’ll see what I mean, though.”

“...Okay,” I replied. “I trust you. Lead the way, mighty steed.”

Luke snorted in response, but didn’t say anything as he continued leading me down the path, all the way to the edge of the forest. When we got there, though, he nervously looked into the forest, where we both knew several monsters could be waiting for us. “You have your sword on you, right?” he asked me.

“Yeah, of course,” I said with a nod.

Luke gave a nod of his own. “Good,” he said. “I mean, I do have this, but it’s not the same as a sword...”

I watched him pull a four-inch celestial bronze dagger – well, more like a knife, really – from out of his pocket. “Oh, that’s cool,” I said, even if I was one-hundred-percent sure that Riptide was over a hundred times cooler than it was.

Luke flashed a grin at me. “You think?” he asked. “I was going to give it to Annabeth for her birthday...she came to camp with me, you see, along with...”

...*Thalia*, I silently finished for him when he trailed off, before I frowned. After all, if Annabeth had arrived at camp five years ago, when *Thalia* died, that meant that she was only seven-years-old, maybe eight, when she had come here? That was...well, that was *so young* for somebody to be forced into being what they called a “year-rounder”, since I was almost ninety-percent sure that that was what she was.

...Which, now that I thought about it, explained a *lot* of her behavior towards me. I mean, both Katie and Silena had said that I was pretty obvious about the fact that I liked Luke in a romantic way, which *definitely* made Annabeth way more jealous than I had thought she had been, *and* I had denied her coming with me on my quest on top of that. So, that being said, I guess it was no wonder that she didn’t like me, even if she had brought a lot of her dislike towards me on herself, especially with how she had all but demanded I bring her on my quest.

With those thoughts in mind, I did my best to give Luke a small smile as I said, “That’s a very thoughtful gift for her, I think.”

Luke’s grin widened at my words. “Really?” he asked.

“Yeah,” I replied tightly. “Really.”

“Well, I’m glad,” he said as he put the knife away. “But don’t think that I’ve forgotten about you, because I haven’t. I remember you told me that your birthday is in August – ”

“It’s on the 18th,” I quickly interjected.

“ – and it’s on the 18th,” he corrected himself with another grin, “and I have every intention of getting you a birthday present, too. So don’t freak out, okay?”

“I won’t,” I promised him, while inside I was all but screaming with eternal joy.

After our quick conversation at the edge of the woods, Luke led the way into them. Both of us remained alert as we walked through the forest for around five minutes, looking for any indicator that a monster was going to attack us or something like that, but we didn’t really have to be that concerned because there seemingly wasn’t anything around. In fact, the woods seemed to be *too* quiet to me, more than anything else, especially with it being almost ten o’clock at night and all that.

Finally, after our five minutes or so of walking was up, Luke came to a halt in front of a strange, ivy-covered rock that was maybe two hundred yards or so away from the part of the forest where our capture the flag game was held in. This was the farthest I had ever been inside the woods, which many campers said seemingly went on for forever, but I wasn’t too concerned – not when I had Luke right by my side, anyways, and Riptide just inside my pants’ pocket.

“Are you ready for this?” my boyfriend asked me with a grin that I could just barely see through the darkness.

“Ready for what?” I asked in response, sounding like a total idiot all the while.

Luke’s grin widened. “This,” he said as he reached out and slapped a hand against the ivy-covered rock.

Immediately, the rock began to glow a soft, shimmering blue where his hand touched it, much to my surprise. In fact, I was so surprised that my jaw literally dropped open, especially when I saw his hand go *into the rock* instead of just resting on it like it should’ve.

“Oh my gods,” I breathed. “Oh my gods, oh my gods, *oh my gods*. What is *that*? What’s going on? I – ”

“Relax,” Luke said gently while his grin turned into a gentle smile. “I’m not exactly as well-versed in magic as Alabaster and Lou Ellen are, but this is a...ah...*secret place*, of the sorts. I’m not sure how long it’s been here, but it’s been here for a long time...at least a few decades. I mean, when I found it, the place wasn’t exactly in good condition, but now...”

“...It is?” I finished.

He nodded.

“O – okay then,” I said after a moment, while I shakily ran a hand through my hair. “Okay. Secret places in camp. Why didn’t I realize that these probably existed sooner?”

Luke shrugged. “Because demigods don’t explore this place like they used to,” he said. “Too many kids died in the woods, I guess...or something like that, anyways. But enough about that. Let me show you around this place.”

With that being said, my boyfriend promptly grabbed me by the wrist again and pulled me through the rock – a process which I had to clamp my hand around my mouth for, because even if I had watched the *Harry Potter* movies, watching fake people go through a wall and *actually walking through a rock* are two very different things. Especially when a cold, damp feeling washed over me as Luke and I walked through the rock, as if I was back on the banks of the river Styx all over again.

That feeling, though, was *oh-so-worth-it* when I saw what was waiting for us on the other side of the rock. A small cove with a perfect view of the beach and the barge where the Hephaestus kids were going to light the fireworks from – which seemed kind of impossible, considering that I was relatively certain we were quite a bit of a ways’ away from either of those things, but I wasn’t going to question what was obviously the work of several children of Hecate – greeted us, but it was unlike any cove that I had ever seen (in pictures, of course).

I mean, whereas normal coves are beautiful, but still kind of blend in to their surroundings, this cove did not. In fact, if anything it stood out, because it was *glowing*. Literally. Everything from the pool of water in the cove to the ivy that grew all over the rocks that surrounded the cove and to this strange, silvery flower *glowed*. Only the sand and the rocks seemed to be untouched by the strange, ethereal light that had everything else in its grasp, along with the simple blanket and picnic basket that were laid out on the sand a few feet in front of us.

“...Oh my gods,” I breathed again, too shocked to realize what an utter idiot I sounded like. “This place is...”

“Amazing?” Luke finished for me. When I nodded wordlessly response, he chuckled and said, “Yeah...yeah, it is. Now, do you just want to stand there and take it all in, or do you want to come sit down with me? The fireworks are about to start.”

Numbly, I nodded again before I took the hand that he was offering out to me. Slowly – and with more gentleness than he had had before – Luke led me to the blanket and the picnic basket, before we both sat down. Then, he opened up the picnic basket and pulled out a variety of sweets – two slices of blueberry cheesecake, brownies, *M&M* cookies, etc. He also pulled out a water bottle filled with a blue liquid that I easily recognized as the blue Cherry Coke that I usually requested with the meals that were served at camp, much to my surprise, along with two plastic blue cups.

“What – what’s with all the blue?” I asked him as I shifted nervously in my seat.

Luke gave me a soft smile. “Well...it’s your favorite color, right?”

My eyes widened. “How – how did you – ”

“In all of my years as a camp counselor here, *no one* has consistently asked for a blue Cherry Coke with all of their meals. No one,” he told me with a wink. “Plus, I may or may not have asked Silena about it earlier, when she was picking possible clothes out for you for tonight.”

He then gave a nod towards the outfit that I was currently wearing, causing me to flush ever-so-slightly. I mean, I wasn’t really wearing anything special – just a dark blue v-neck shirt with a pair of black pants and the Oceanid scarf that I had nicked during my side-quest for Ares, which Katie had picked out and was the only “special” thing about my outfit – but still, Luke *obviously* appreciated it. And I appreciated what he was wearing, too, even if it was just one of his camp shirts and a pair of shorts.

...But then again, I wouldn’t really have it any other way, because he looked absolutely *amazing* as-is.

Luke looked like he wanted to say something else, but the sound of something like a missile cut him off. Turning, both of us looked out towards the beach and the barge, just in time to see the first of some of the largest and most impressive fireworks I had ever seen go off. For a second, no firework immediately followed it, but I figured that was so that everyone – especially the children of Hephaestus – could hear the cheering from the beach as our fellow campers prepared for what had to be the *most jaw-dropping performance of fireworks* that I had ever seen.

I mean, *seriously*. I’d always thought, having been raised in New York City for all of my life, that the NYC fireworks were the best fireworks that there could possibly be. But *boy*, was I wrong.

After the pause between the first and second fireworks, the fireworks that followed the second one went off so fast that they looked like frames of animation across the sky instead of individual blasts. Scenes from all of the highlights in American history played out, with George Washington (who was a son of Athena), Thomas Jefferson (also a son of Athena), Abraham Lincoln (yet another son of Athena, as if two presidents being children of Athena weren’t enough), Theodore Roosevelt (a son of Demeter), and FDR (a son of Zeus) all making appearances in their respective time periods. The Revolutionary War segment was something of particular interest as well, because at one point there was a picture of a woman – yes, *a woman* – on the battlefield, all dressed up like was typical at the time, with arms outstretched as she seemingly *controlled* the tendrils of water going after the English soldiers in front of her.

Note to self, I thought again at the sight, *practice water-controlling techniques in the near future*.

But the highlights of American history were only one of three segments in the entire show, it seemed. Because after FDR, vanished from the sky, he was replaced by a *very* familiar fourteen-year-old boy...aka, *me*. I tried not to cringe as I watched the Hephaestus kids’ rendition of my quest, but it was hard not to, as they took *a lot* of liberties with it...like

showing me chopping Medusa's head off without that cool sphere of water I had formed over her head, and showing Hades as this gaunt, Severus Snape-type-of-guy instead of the Moses-from-*Prince of Egypt* guy that he actually was.

On the bright side of the cringe-fest, though, I was able to help myself to some of the desserts that Luke had packed because I wasn't too busy being awe-struck to eat. Plus, I was also able to crack some jokes with Luke about how horrible the Hephaestus kids' recreation of my quest was, which was great, especially when he laughed so hard at one of my jokes that he almost snorted Cherry Coke out of his nose.

After the painful second segment, though, the third segment basically culminated into the grand finale. Several hundred-foot-tall Spartan warriors crackled to life just above the ocean, and proceeded to fight a battle against what looked to be some Athenian soldiers. Each time one of the warriors and soldiers was fatally wounded, they exploded into a million colors, which bedazzled both the sky and my eyes whenever I blinked.

By the end of the show, it was almost eleven and I was pretty tired, since my routine schedule at camp was pretty exhausting. Still, not wanting Luke to feel unappreciated about his efforts for our *wonderful* date, I sleepily turned to look at him and said, "Thank you. Thank you so, so much. Really. I – "

The sudden feeling of Luke's lips on mine prevented me from saying anything else.

After a moment, my boyfriend pulled away, a light smile on his lips. "There's no need to thank me, Percy," he said softly, gently. "Seriously. If anything, I...well, I should be thanking *you*."

I blinked. "For what?" I asked, confused.

"For being *you*," he replied simply. "For being so kind, and patient, and thoughtful, and just...so inexplicably *you*. It really means a lot. It does."

I hummed in response to him saying that, not really sure what else to do or say. But then, an idea struck me, and with a smile of my own, I asked him, "Does this mean I get to thank you for being you as well?"

Luke instantly flushed at my words – *gods*, did he need more of a confidence boost than what I could probably give him. "I – I'm not really sure what there is to thank me for," he answered honestly, but also so quietly that I could barely hear him, especially when my ears were still a little rattled from all of the fireworks.

Still, I heard what he said, and couldn't help but gape at him in disbelief as soon as he had spoken. "Are you kidding me?" I asked him. When he didn't immediately reply, I pushed onward, saying, "I – uh – Luke, you're *amazing*. I know...I know you don't think so, but you are. I mean, look at what you do for the kids in Cabin Eleven. You help out all of them and make them all feel appreciated, even when...even when they don't feel that way themselves, 'cause of their parents, both their godly ones and their mortal ones. And you're nice, *so* nice, and thoughtful, considering all the effort you put into this 'date'. So don't...don't beat up on yourself. You're great, just the way you are, regardless of what anyone else thinks."

Luke looked at me. “Really?” he asked softly.

I nodded. “Yeah, really,” I said. “Now, as much as I want to sit here and keep chatting with you all night, we really should be going. Don’t want the harpies to catch us, right?”

Luke grinned at me in response, before he stood up and offered me a hand. “Right,” he echoed thoughtfully.

I took his hand with a grin of my own, even though all the while I couldn’t help but think, *What am I missing here? What happened to Luke to make him as – as self-conscious as he is? And, yet again, why did he decide to join Kronos?*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: The August Deadline Arrives

The August Deadline Arrives

Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Today's chapter is the one that many of you have all been waiting for! The chapter where we find out whether or not Luke recants Kronos or not! However, that being said, it's not the last chapter of the TLT arc – we still got one more to go (my mistake lol), then there will be a time skip of about two weeks or so...which may or may not also be the chapter where a very important OC will be introduced LOL. I'm very pumped for you guys to meet her, and will gladly take guesses as to who you guys think she is (besides a certain son of Hermes's future love interest, of course!). ;)

Next chapter will be posted on Friday, as current schedule dictates. So, that being said, until then,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

After the Fourth of July and my date with Luke, the rest of July and August passed in something of a whirlwind.

Around a week after the Fourth, a letter from my mom arrived at camp, presenting me with a hard decision I hadn't really realized that I would have to make. In her letter, she told me that Gabe had mysteriously disappeared off of the face of the planet, presenting her with a second chance at life that she hadn't known that she would ever get – especially because she had a funny feeling that, even though she had reported my stepdad as missing to the police, nobody would ever find him.

That was alright with her, though – not only because it seemed that Gabe was gone from her life for good, but also because, just around the time of his disappearance, she had sold her first life-size concrete sculpture, titled *The Poker Player*, to a collector, through an art gallery in Soho. She'd gotten so much money for it that she'd been able to not only put a deposit down for a new apartment and make payment for her first semester's tuition at NYU, but she'd also been able to pay for a year's tuition at a private secondary school called Goode High School...providing that I wanted to go, of course. Apparently, around the same time that she had disposed of "the sculpting tools" that I had left her, she had run into one of the teachers there, who also served as the school's swimming coach. The guy was nice, she said, and *very* interested in my potential to be on his swimming team, provided that I could keep somewhat good grades and not get into too much trouble while at school.

...Which, I'm not gonna lie, sounded *tempting*. I mean, as much as I liked camp, a part of me wanted to do nothing more than return to my mom's, and have the ability to have privacy and

time to practice my freaky water powers so that I could move water just like Katara from *Avatar: The Last Airbender* or that lady from the Hephaestus' kids fireworks did/could.

However, that being said, I knew that, if I was going to be able to convince Luke to turn his back against Kronos, my boyfriend would probably need me more than my mom would, as bad as that sounds. After all, even if he went to Zeus and told the king of the gods about all that he had done and swore to never do anything like it again, there was still a very real chance that Zeus would decide to just simply *smite* him then and there, even with Demeter's interference. And even if he didn't decide to do that, there was still the very long list of things that I would have to help him out with – namely, his complete lack of confidence and self-esteem and his horrible tendency to keep whatever trauma he had previously experienced firmly locked up in a metaphorical bottle.

So...*yeah*. I had a hard decision to make when it came to my mom and Luke, even if I had already decided what I was going to do. And that was hard...*really* hard, especially when I could still hear the Oracle's voice hissing in my ears, telling me, *"You shall go west, and face the god who has turned. You shall find what was stolen, and see it safely returned. You shall be betrayed by one who calls you more than a friend. And you shall fail to save what matters most, in the end."*

I tried not to dwell too much on that prophecy, though. After all, as Chiron had said, prophecies don't always mean what people think that they mean, meaning dwelling on what they could was practically moot and would only cause more grief in the end.

Besides, it wasn't like there were plenty of other things to think about – like the last night of the summer session, for instance, which came all too quickly in my opinion, and was also the night before my birthday. On that night, all of the campers had one last meal together, which was pretty fun. All of the campers who were (knowingly) going away for the year sacrificed a larger portion than usual for the gods, since burning offerings for them in their own homes ranged from difficult to do to outright impossible. Silena just about cried when she offered hers up, as apparently she had just realized we ("we" being her, Katie, Alabaster, and I) were going to be separated for nine months and it just "wasn't fair at all!"

But the feast wasn't anything special in comparison to the bonfire that occurred afterwards, because apparently it was a tradition for the senior camp-counselors to give out end-of-summer beads and leather necklaces for the campers who didn't have any necklaces to put their beads on, like me. This year's design was a sea green bead with a shiny black trident in the center on one side and a black, ancient Greek-style helmet on the other.

Many campers, myself included, looked at Luke and the other senior camp-counselors (Annabeth, Katie, Silena, Beckendorf, and Lee Fletcher, the six campers who had been here longer than anyone else) questioningly about it. But all that Luke said in response was, "The choice was unanimous. This bead commemorates not only the first son of the Sea God at this camp in a hundred years, and the quest that he undertook to stop the impending war, but also the first children of the God the Underworld to come to this camp *ever*. Be proud of yourselves, Percy, Silena, Katie, Nico, and Bianca!"

At his words, the entire camp got to their feet and cheered, even Annabeth, who still seemed to hate me with a passionate vengeance. Nico and Bianca, I think, flushed the most at the

applause, due to how new they were and how most of the camp had pretty much ostracized them for most of the summer, but Silena, Katie, and I had our fair share of blushing as well.

I'm not sure I had ever felt as happy or sad as I did that night. I mean, I had finally found a family, a small group of friends and even a *boyfriend* who cared about me and thought that I was a good person, and cheered me on when I did something right. But, at the same time, Silena would be going away in the morning, along with most of the other campers, like Ethan (who was going back to his father's place in San Francisco, apparently) and Alabaster (who apparently traveled the world with his archaeologist father during the school year) and Chris (who was going back to his mom's place in Texas). In fact, out of our friend group, only Luke, Katie, and I were staying for the rest of the year – but I still hadn't told anyone of my decision about that yet.

...Or, at least, I hadn't told anyone until the morning after the bonfire, when I found a letter on my bedside table – a letter that I could tell had been written by Dionysus, because it went like this:

Dear Peter Johnson,

If you intend to stay at Camp Half-Blood year-round, you must inform the Big House by noon today. If you do not announce your intentions, we will assume you have vacated your cabin or died a horrible death. Cleaning harpies will begin their work at sundown. They will be authorized to eat any unregistered campers. All personal articles left behind will be incinerated in the lava pit.

Hoping you are well,

Mr. D (Dionysus)

Camp Director; Olympian Council #12

After I had read Mr. D's letter, I couldn't help but frown as I folded it up and put it in one of my shorts' pockets. It seemed like now was the time for me to tell Luke, not only because it was August and Kronos had told him he had until now to convince me to join him on the Titan King's side, but also because I wanted him to be the first one to know that I was going to stay at camp for the rest of the year, not Mr. D or Chiron or anyone else like that.

With that thought in mind, I decided to head down to the one place where I knew Luke would be, especially now that, with the exception of him, the Stolls, the di Angelos, and a few more kids, almost everyone in his cabin was gone for the summer: the sword-training arena.

As I walked through the campgrounds, I couldn't help but notice how *deserted* everything was, now that roughly 80% of the campers were gone or would soon-be-going for the summer. Silena had been one of the first campers to go, and I had seen her off that morning, just before I walked back to my cabin and discovered Mr. D's letter on my bedside table. I had also met her father, Jean Beauregard, who was a French guy as tall as Luke – which was saying *a lot* – with wavy black hair, dark green eyes, and olive skin. He actually kinda looked like my dad, even, but I didn't say anything about that as Silena had prattled on about me while she introduced me to him.

After a few minutes' walk, I got to the sword-training arena, where Luke was, just like I thought he would be. His gym bag was plopped at the edge of the stage, and he was working solo, whaling on battle dummies with a sword that I had never seen before, much to my surprise. It was half-bronze, half-steel in color, and that was when I realized that the steel color had to be *actual* steel, because the sword was actually slicing the dummies' heads right off, and successfully stabbed through their straw-stuffed guts.

As he moved, I couldn't help but notice that my boyfriend's orange shirt was dripping with sweat – *hot* – and that his expression was intense. Like, *seriously* intense, as if he was actually fighting for his life or something like that...which was also kinda hot, but also a tad concerning more than anything else.

I spent the next few minutes after my arrival just watching him fight, fascinated. He really was an incredible fighter – the best swordsman in three hundred years, even – and I couldn't help but feel proud at the fact that he was both my sword trainer and my boyfriend, because that meant he was *mine* and no one else's.

Finally, though, after those few minutes' were up, Luke saw me and stopped fighting mid-swing. "Percy!" he greeted me with a grin.

"Hey," I breathed with a grin of my own, before I stopped and took a proper look at his sword. "New toy?"

Luke blinked. "Oh, this?" he asked as he swiveled the sword in his hands. "This is Backbiter. One side is celestial bronze. The other is tempered steel. Works on mortals and immortals both."

I swallowed at the way he said "mortals" – it was a harsh reminder of his servitude to Kronos, which I was hoping beyond hope that I could break with the hard conversation that was soon going to happen between us.

"I didn't know they could make weapons like that," I offered after a moment of thinking, all the while I tried to make myself sound as nonchalant as possible.

"Most people probably can't," Luke agreed. "It's one of a kind."

He gave me a light smile, before he slid the sword into his scabbard. "You know, it's good that you got here now, 'cause I was just going to come and find you. I got something to talk to you about...something important."

"Me too," I blurted out in response, before I flushed something awful. "I – I mean, I have some important stuff to talk to you about, too. If that's okay."

Luke's smile faltered ever-so-slightly for a moment, before it returned back to its bright intensity. "Great," he said. "Do you want to go to the cove to talk about it? Or –"

"The cove's fine," I interjected. We had gone there a few times since the Fourth of July for more "mock dates" – as I called them – and stuff like that, and I knew that it was just the perfect, private place for us to have our life-altering conversation in.

With that being said, the two of us walked down to the woods, and then from the woods to the cove. During our walk through the woods, no monster attacked us – probably because it was too hot, although a part of me couldn't help but be worried that there may be some more nefarious reason at play.

Once the two of us got to the cove, we sat down on two large rocks, and opened up some Cokes that Luke had stashed into his bag, in typical son-of-Hermes-fashion. Neither of us spoke at first, too entranced by the beauty of the cove – even if it didn't glow during the day like it did at night – but eventually, after several minutes of silence, the desire to speak became too much to bear, and I cleared my throat.

“So,” I said, once I had Luke's attention. “I just...I was wanting you to know that Mr. D was wondering about whether or not I was going to stay for the rest of the year...and I intend to say yes, I'm going to stay...for you. For us.”

Luke blinked again. “Really?” he asked, disbelief coloring his voice all the while.

I nodded. “Yes, really...at least, if you want me to, anyways. Do you want me to?”

“Of course I want you to, Percy,” Luke said, before a dark look passed over his face. “It's just...it's not that simple.”

I frowned. “Why not?”

Luke's dark look turned into a weary and angry one then, as if he was carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders. “I've lived here at Camp Half-Blood year-round since I was twelve,” he told me, “as you know. But, what you don't know – what I haven't told you, due to my ‘metaphorical baggage’, is that I was one of the demigods that came to camp with...with Thalia Grace, the daughter of Zeus. I...I watched her die in front of me, along with Annabeth, who was also with us, and there was *nothing I could do about it*. Nothing. Only Zeus had the power to do something about it, and he turned her into a pine tree, instead of allowing her to live or at least die *peacefully*.”

Suddenly, Luke crumpled up his Coke can and threw it into the cove's water, which really shocked me. After all, one of the first things you learn at camp is *to not litter for any reason*, unless you want the nymphs and naiads to get even with you by filling your sheets with centipedes, water snails, and mud.

“Ever since Thalia,” he continued after a moment to collect himself. “Ever since her, I've trained, and trained, and trained, both to honor her memory and to make sure that what happened to her would never happen to me. I never got to be a normal teenager, like you and Silena, out there in the real world. I just didn't. And the one opportunity I got to was on my quest, which I fucked up...*badly*.”

“Whatever it was,” I interjected then, desperate to prevent him from spiraling even more than he already was. “It wasn't your fault.”

Luke laughed bitterly, before he let out a short sob. “But it *was*, Percy,” he said softly. “It was. You weren't there, you don't understand. I had a choice, like you, about who I wanted to

bring on my quest...and I was so cocky, so wanting to please my dad, like you – ” *well*, that was about as far from the truth as you could possibly get, but I wasn’t about to interrupt him and tell him that “ – that I only brought one person with me, instead of two like is tradition. And that person was...well, he was *special* to me, special like *you*. And because of my mistake by just bringing along him, I doomed the two of us. I doomed myself to getting my scar, and I doomed him to a death that no one deserves, a death *in my arms*, and there was nothing that I could do about it, just like with Thalia.

“But you know who could’ve done something about?” Luke asked me, causing me to blink in surprise.

“Err...”

“*Aphrodite* could’ve done something about it,” he said. “Or my dad, or *any* of the Olympians, for that matter. They all could’ve done something to spare Thalia, to spare Al – to spare *him*. But they didn’t – and not because they are bound by the Ancient Laws or anything like that, but because we’re their *pawns*. They don’t think of us anything more than that.”

“That’s not true!” I protested.

“Isn’t it, though?” Luke snorted in response. “Your dad had a choice when the accusations of him having you steal the master lightning bolt and the helm of darkness came out, a choice to not involve *you* in the fight. But he did. He made you go on that quest for him, and for what? A pat on the head and some words of encouragement when you got back? He’s *using* you, Percy. All of the gods are using you, using us – it’s their *way*, the way of Western Civilization, and it’s killing the world. The only way to stop it is to burn it to the ground, burn it *all* to the ground, and start over with something more honest.”

“You mean something like Kronos’s rule?” I couldn’t help but ask.

Luke’s eyes widened. “You know?” he asked.

“Yeah, I know,” I replied. “I’ve known since I went to the Underworld, when I talked with the Lady Styx – ” thunder boomed at the mention of her name, even though it was a bright and sunny day outside “ – herself. She told me all about Kronos’s plans, and about the Great Prophecy, too – you know, the one that’s the *real* reason why the Big Three swore to not have any more mortal children. And I...well, I figured it out from there. So yeah, I know that Kronos is trying to take over the world, and I know that you helped him, but you don’t have to keep helping him, Luke. You don’t. You’re better than that.”

Luke shook his head. “No,” he said, “I’m better than bowing down to the gods, like everyone else here does. I’ve seen them for their lies, and that’s exactly why I’m leaving this place while I still can – and I want you to come with me, Percy. Please. Don’t be the gods’ pawn, the pawn that they want you to be. Come with me, and the two of us – along with a few others – can work together to bring a new age into the world, a golden age where demigods like you and me don’t have to be pawns, and where we’re safe from all sorts of monsters.”

In an alternate universe, one where I was perhaps more bitter and hadn’t pledged my loyalty to Demeter, I might’ve considered his offer. However, as it was, I could only stare at him

disbelievingly in response, could only plead and beg for him to reconsider his loyalty to the Titan King.

“Please, Luke,” I begged. “Don’t do this. The gods may not be good rulers, but they’re still our *parents*. And they can still change, even though they may not want to. We just have to convince them to change in other ways which don’t involve changing one tyrant out for another.”

Luke snorted. “Kronos won’t be a tyrant,” he said.

“But he *will*,” I pressed on. “Don’t you see? Kronos is *using* you just like how you think the gods have used us – it’s in his nature. He’s called ‘the Crooked One’ for a reason, after all, and it’s not because of his scythe or a crooked nose or anything like that. It’s because he’s corrupt, and more corrupt than any of the deities that came before or after him. It’s just as I’ve told you, just as I’ve been telling you all summer. Just as the myths tell us.”

“Who do you think created those myths, Percy?” Luke retorted angrily. “The gods – our *parents* – did, because they feared what would happen if we found out how life really was back in the original Golden Age, if we found out how good it was for mortals and demi-titans alike. They weren’t hunted down like we were, like we still are. They lived in *peace* and in *prosperity*. All you have to do is ask any of the olde gods – Hecate, Nike, Nemesis – to realize that.”

Luke suddenly stood up then, and leaned into me, to the point where our noses were nearly touching. Shakily, he cupped my face with his hand. “Please, Percy,” he said softly. “Come with me. I – well, *I love you* and I don’t want to lose you. I don’t want for us to be enemies, like we most definitely will be if you don’t join me, join Kronos. And we can even bring your mom with us, if that’s what you would like – I know how much she means to you, and I’d love to meet her myself. I can already see so much of her in you, you have no idea.”

My eyes began to water. Luke *loved* me. He loved me, and yet he was about to all but sell his soul away to the devil, and my attempts to stop him – both present and former – weren’t working. *None of it* was working. And I felt like such a failure in that moment – more like a failure than I had ever felt, actually, even with all of the verbal and physical abuse that Gabe had done to me over the years.

“Please, Percy,” Luke pleaded with me, his glacier-eyes just as watery as my own.

“I – I can’t!” I sobbed, before I tore away from his grasp. “You don’t – you don’t understand, Luke! I’ve known that you’ve been working for Kronos – I’ve known all this time, and because of it, I’ve done things to protect you! Things that no one else has done!”

“Like what?” Luke asked, still pleading.

“I became Demeter’s champion!” I cried.

The effect was instantaneous. Immediately, Luke’s eyes widened and he stumbled back, as if I had burned him or slapped him in the face. I watched as all of the color drained from

seemingly every aspect of his body, and as he wordlessly mouthed the words I had already spoken: *I became Demeter's champion.*

"I love you too, Luke," I sniffled after a moment. "I love you with every single fiber of my being – do you know that? I don't think I've ever told you, but I do. And because of it, I've done everything that I can to protect you, to *save* you. Would Kronos do that for you? Huh? Would he?"

Luke didn't answer me – at least, not immediately. Instead, he stood up from where he had fallen, and dusted off his shorts, as if we were having the most casual conversation in the world. Then, he said, "You're...you're too far gone. I should've realized this. Really, I should have. Maybe if I did, I could have saved you before you pledged your allegiance to Deme – before you pledged your allegiance to *them*."

"L – Luke?" I asked, my voice shaky and weak. "Luke, what are you doing?"

He looked at me then, with a hard expression and cool, icy blue eyes. "I love you, Percy," he said. "I love you so much, that I have to let you go. I have to –"

Suddenly, Luke's lips were on mine – but this kiss wasn't anything like our previous kisses had been before. This kiss was hot and *searing*, to the point where it burned me to the very depths of my soul, burned me to places inside myself I had never been before, burned me to –

– *My side*, I thought with abject horror as Luke pulled away from our kiss. *My side – it hurts. It hurts beyond belief! Luke, he –*

– Luke had *stabbed* me, right on my left side.

"Luke!" I cried out.

"I'm sorry, Percy," Luke told me with an expression that looked more grieving, more *longing* than any expression I had ever seen on his face before. "But I can't let the gods corrupt you anymore. I can't. But don't worry. When all is said and done, I'll come get you from the Underworld, and we'll live in a new Golden Age together – *forever*."

Luke pulled his new half-celestial bronze, half-steel sword from out of its scabbard. Then, he slashed the air in front of him into an arc with it and disappeared into a ripple of darkness, meaning he was gone – just like that. He was *gone*.

"Luke!" I cried out again, even though I knew he couldn't hear me, that he was gone.

Blindly – because my vision was going foggy, way too foggy to be what I thought was possible – I reached out for where he had just been, arms outstretched. But I was so weak from the poison that had to be quickly spreading through my body that all I managed to succeed in doing was to collapse in the sand.

But that was okay with me. I was so heartbroken, I didn't want to move, didn't want to breathe, didn't want to *feel*.

The last thing that I saw was two naiads suddenly appearing out of the glowing water from the cove, frightened expressions on their faces as they quickly grabbed me by the arms and legs, both of them whispering sweet-nothings to me as they told me that everything would be alright, that they would get me to Chiron in no time.

I opened my mouth to tell them that the first thing that they said wasn't true, that nothing was alright and that it wouldn't be alright ever again. But, before I could, my world suddenly turned black, and I knew no more...

...Which was perfectly fine with me.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: I Talk Things Over With Chiron

Ending Notes: Am I evil? Yes. Did I have Go Your Own Way by Fleetwood Mac stuck in my head the entire time I wrote this chapter? Also yes. Will your next chapter be uploaded on Friday, as previously stated? Also also yes.

Feel free to rant about one (or all) of those things. I look forward to the onslaught. ;)

I Talk Things Over With Chiron

Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Hope you all are well. Once again, there's not much for me to say about this chapter today – in fact, all I really have to say about it is that I hope you all enjoy it and that the next chapter will be posted on Monday, as always. So, until then,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

I woke up with a drinking straw in my mouth. I was sipping on something that tasted like liquid chocolate-chip cookies – like *my mom's* chocolate-chip cookies. Nectar.

I opened my eyes.

I was propped up in bed in the sickroom of the Big House, my torso bandaged up like I had almost been sliced in half or something like that. Argus stood guard in the corner. Katie sat next to me, holding my nectar glass and dabbing my forehead with a damp washcloth, all the while she sobbed big, fat, ugly tears, which was probably the most uncharacteristic thing that I had ever seen her do.

“Oh, Percy,” Katie sobbed when she noticed that I was awake. “I – I’m so sorry. Lu – you were turning green and grey when we found you. If it wasn’t for Chiron’s healing...”

“Now, now,” Chiron said. “Percy’s constitution deserves some of the credit.”

He was sitting near the foot of my bed in human form, which was why I hadn’t noticed him until now. His lower half was magically compacted into the wheelchair once again, his upper half dressed in a coat and tie. He smiled, but his face looked weary and pale, like he had been up all night grading Latin papers back at Yancy Academy once again.

“How are you feeling?” he asked me.

I opened my mouth to answer him, but no sound came out – mostly because I didn’t *want* to tell Chiron how I was feeling. I didn’t want to tell him that my heart felt like it had been torn in half (just like my side) at the fact that I hadn’t been able to save Luke from Kronos, meaning that it was all but certain that he was going to *die* once the gods found him. And I didn’t want to tell him because I knew that, as soon as I did, the gods would go after Luke with a vengeance, and his blood – *my boyfriend’s blood* – would be on my hands.

After a few minutes of silence, though, I realized that Chiron was not going to press onwards without me answering his question. So, with all of the lying abilities that I could muster, I told him, “I feel like my insides have been frozen, then microwaved.”

Chiron nodded thoughtfully. “Apt, considering that the dagger that Luke used to stab you had been coated in pit scorpion venom, meaning that you were almost at Hades’s door by the time that the naiads got you to us. But, enough about that. Please, Percy, if you can, please tell me exactly what happened to you. Any and all information that you can remember could be crucial.”

Shakily, I nodded, before I told him and Katie the best story that I could come up with on the spot between sips of nectar. I told them that I had stopped by the sword-training arena to talk with Luke, in order to get some advice about whether or not I should stay at camp for the rest of the year or go back to my mom’s. I told them that Luke had agreed to talk with me about it, but that he wanted to have the conversation in the woods, where we could just hang out and have a few Cokes without anyone else hearing us. I told them that Luke then gave me a pseudo-monologue about how I shouldn’t stay at camp, because I needed to have experience in the “real world”, but that I also couldn’t stay at my mom’s, either. I told them that he then revealed to me that he had been working for Kronos all along, and that he had been the one to steal Zeus’s master lightning bolt and Hades’s helm of darkness. I told them that he then gave me the option to either join Kronos like him, or to die, and that I had chosen death because I had secretly become Demeter’s champion not long after my quest.

I told them all of these things, none of which were really true, partially because I knew that I couldn’t protect Luke anymore, and also because a part of me *didn’t* want to protect him anymore. Not after he had stabbed me and almost killed me, even if he had all but said he had believed he was doing it for my own good.

After I finished telling my story, the room was quiet for a long time.

“I can’t believe that Luke would do that,” Katie eventually said, all the while tears continued to pour down her face. “I...well, I know that he wasn’t the same after his quest, but to do that to us, to do that to *you*...”

Her voice faltered.

“This must be reported to Olympus,” Chiron murmured after she had spoken. “I will go at once. There is simply no time to waste.”

“But what about Luke?” I asked desperately. “He’s still out there. We *have* to find him. And what about the prophecy?”

Chiron shook his head. “No, Percy, we cannot go after Luke,” he said gently. “It’s too dangerous. The gods – ”

“The gods won’t even talk about Kronos,” I interjected. “Zeus declared the matter closed!”

“Percy, I know that this is hard. But you must not rush out for vengeance. You aren’t ready.”

I didn’t like it – especially because I wanted to scream that I didn’t want to go after Luke out of vengeance, even if I was pissed off at him for almost killing me, but out of *love* – but I also knew that Chiron was right. After all, my side hurt almost as bad as my heart did, and I knew

that even with nectar and ambrosia, that meant that I wasn't going to be sword fighting or even running anytime soon.

"As for the prophecy," Chiron continued, oblivious to the inner monologue that was going on inside of me, "am I correct in assuming that you viewed Luke as your mentor at this camp, that you trusted him more than you would if he was simply your friend?"

I blinked. He thought I was talking about *that* prophecy? I – well, not to insult Chiron or anything, but I had already figured out that prophecy – had figured out what it meant subconsciously when I had realized that Luke wasn't going to switch sides after all. I mean, he *was* the only person I had ever considered to be more than a friend, romantic interest or not, and I *had* failed to save him in the end, as much as that hurt for me to acknowledge.

No, the prophecy that I was worried about was the Great Prophecy, the prophecy that the Lady Styx had told me in the Underworld two months ago, the prophecy that said: "*A halfblood of the eldest gods shall reach eighteen against all odds, and see the world in endless sleep, hero's soul, cursed blade shall reap. A final choice shall end his days, Olympus to preserve or raze.*"

That was the prophecy that I wanted to talk to him about, more than anything else. However, at the same time, I knew that Chiron didn't know I knew about the prophecy, and I also knew that it would be dangerous if he did. Plus, I had a feeling that...

"You've been ordered to not talk to me about Kronos, haven't you?" I couldn't help but ask.

Chiron glanced upwards nervously. "Remember, Percy, names have power," he said softly.

"So that's a 'yes', then."

"If you choose to look at it that way, yes," he replied with an incline of his head.

"We just can't sit back and do nothing, though!" I protested. "No matter what Zeus says –" here, there was a sickening clap of thunder from above, and both Chiron and Katie looked at me worriedly, although neither of them said anything "– Kronos is out there, and he's only getting stronger!"

"We will not sit back," Chiron promised me. "None of us will, Percy. Too much is at stake to do so. But, at the same time, you must be careful. Kronos wants you to come unraveled. He wants you to be mad at the gods, because he desperately wants you on his side."

"Even though I'm Demeter's champion?" I interjected.

Chiron gave me a grim smile. "Yes, even though you are her champion," he said. "Which, I must say, is surprising to me, especially considering that Demeter has not claimed you as her champion officially yet, but that is neither here nor there. Do not give Kronos what he wants, Percy. Train patiently. Your time will come."

"Assuming I live that long," I muttered under my breath.

Chiron looked at me strangely then, as if he suddenly knew that I knew about the Great Prophecy, but said nothing other than: “You’ll have to trust me, Percy. The matter of Kronos will be dealt with in due time. But, for now, you must decide your path for the coming year. I cannot tell you the right choice in this matter...” he trailed off, giving me the feeling that he had a very definite opinion about what he wanted me to do, and was using all of his willpower not to tell me it. “But you must decide whether to stay at Camp Half-Blood year-round, or return to the mortal world for ninth grade and become a summer camper. Think on that. When I get back from Olympus, you must tell me your decision.”

I wanted to protest. I wanted to ask him more questions, even if he couldn’t tell me all that much and I wasn’t all that willing to provide truthful answers to his own questions. But Chiron’s expression told me there could be no more discussion, that he had said as much as he could.

“I’ll be back as soon as I can,” Chiron promised me. “Argus will watch over you.”

“And I will, too,” Katie said quietly.

Chiron smiled at her. “Yes, Katie will too.”

With that being said, Chiron rolled himself out of the room. I heard the wheels of his chair clunk carefully down the steps, two at a time.

As soon as the sound of his wheelchair hitting the stairs stopped, Katie turned to look at me again, with the most sorrowful expression I had ever seen on her face. “Percy...” she began softly, her voice weak from crying.

“No,” I replied stiffly. “Don’t.”

“But Percy...”

“*Please*,” I pleaded with her. “Don’t. Just...just help me up. I want to go outside.”

Katie shook her head. “Percy, that isn’t a good idea.”

“I don’t care,” I said as I slid my legs out of the bed.

Katie caught me before I could crumple to the floor. A wave of nausea rolled over me.”

“I told you...” she hissed.

“I’m fine,” I insisted, which was probably the biggest lie that I had told all summer – excluding all of the lies I had told Luke, of course, but I didn’t want to think of him right now, or of the fact that he was gone, off to destroy the Western world, and there was nothing that I could do about it.

Thinking just simply hurt too much.

Shakily, I managed a step forward, then another and another, all the while I heavily leaned on Katie. Argus followed us outside, but he respectfully kept his distance, even though all of his

eyes looked as watery as my own felt.

By the time that we reached the porch, my face was beaded with sweat and my stomach had twisted itself into knots. But I had managed to make it all of the way to the railing, which was as much of a victory as it was a lucky support for me to lean on while I had a look around camp.

It was dusk, I realized sadly. Twilight. The time of day when darkness descended like Death's cloak upon the earth. The camp looked completely deserted, the cabins dark and the volleyball pit silent. No canoes cut the surface of the lake. Beyond the woods, the beach, and the strawberry fields, the Long Island Sound glittered in the last light of the sun.

"What are you going to do?" Katie asked me.

"I don't know," I answered truthfully.

I then proceeded to tell her that I got the feeling that Chiron wanted me to stay year-round, just like her and the di Angelos, so that I could put in more individual training time with him. But, that being said...I wasn't sure that that was what I wanted. Demeter had implied to me that, if I stayed, I wouldn't get much training with my powers done as Katie got with hers, and I wanted to harness those as much as I could, so that I didn't pass out every single time that I used them like I had during our quest. Plus, I also missed my mom, and even if I didn't feel comfortable with telling her about *that* (*that* meaning my relationship with Luke, which I didn't refer to specifically out loud for fear that Argus was listening in so that he could report back to Hera or Mr. D), I wanted her support, still wanted her to tell me that everything was going to be alright, even when it really wasn't going to be.

However, that being said, I didn't want to leave Katie when it had originally been my plan to stay behind with her and Luke – even if I hadn't told her or anyone else about that plan. And I especially didn't want to leave her now, when some of the only people that she would have for company were Annabeth, Clarisse, Lee Fletcher, and the Stolls.

When I told her this, though, Katie only laughed and shook her head. "I'll be fine, Percy," she said. "Really. This isn't the first year I'll be spending at camp year-round, and it won't be the last one, what with my father not around anymore and all that."

"I'm sorry," I said automatically at the mention of her dad, even though I had already known that her father had died five years ago.

"Don't be," Katie replied. "It's not your fault. But, what *will* be your fault is you having a miserable time here because you chose to stay here with me, even though you want to be with your mom. So...go be with your mom. Go to school. Practice your powers. And, most of all, have *fun*...although not *too much* fun, considering our demigod luck and all. And when you and Silena get back next summer, the three of us will hunt down Luke, together. We'll ask for a quest, but if we don't get approval, we'll sneak off and do it anyway, so that we can either kill Luke or drag his sorry-ass back here, whichever you prefer. Agreed?"

I managed a smile, even though the very thought of killing Luke caused me more pain than the heartbreak I was already experiencing. "Agreed," I said.

Katie held out her hand. I shook it.

“I got to go,” she said a moment later, her face apologetic. “Have to talk with the Stolls about which one of them wants to be the...well, which one of them wants to be the new counselor of Cabin Eleven. But...I’ll see you later, right? Before your mom comes to pick you up?”

“Yeah,” I agreed. “Before my mom comes to pick me up.”

With that, I watched her walk down the steps of the Big House and off towards the cabins, looking brave, determined, and vulnerable all at once, all simultaneously. Vaguely, I wondered what the Stolls were doing right now, now that they were pretty much the only ones in Cabin Eleven. I wondered what they thought about Luke, what they thought about his betrayal and his allegiance to Kronos.

Knowing them, their thoughts on those matters couldn’t be good, even with how happy and mischievous they usually were.

I didn’t dwell on them for long, though. No. Instead, after a few moments, I began to dwell on how truly *alone* I felt. For the first time during my entire time at camp, I felt just like I had before I had found out I was a demigod: lonely, friendless, and ashamed of myself, ashamed of my worth. And thinking that, I couldn’t help but look out at the Long Island Sound with watery eyes, my heart shattering to a million pieces inside my chest, even as it beat, pure and strong.

“I’ll be back next summer,” I said – although who I was talking to when I said that, I didn’t know. “I will. I’ll survive until then. And when I come back, I’ll find Luke and I’ll bring him home, somehow, someway.”

As soon as I finished speaking, a gentle breeze blew by me. And although I would later deduce it as nothing more than a trick of the wind, in that moment I was almost certain I heard a voice say, “*See that you do, Perseus Jackson.*”

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: The Dog Days Are Over

The Dog Days Are Over

Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Just finished up this chapter this morning, so I hope you don't mind the slightly late-ish update. It wasn't an easy chapter to write, unfortunately, as I had to make it set the stage for the next, oh, ~10 chapters (which will cover the school year between TLT and SOM) without seeming obnoxious. I'm fairly happy with the results, though, so I hope that you like this chapter as well!

The next chapter of this story will be posted on Friday, I'm pretty sure. So, until then, I hope that you all stay safe (especially those of you who are/were in the path of Hurricane Hanna!) and have fun, even if that fun is limited to writing and binge-watching Teen Wolf like me at the moment LOL.

Sincerely,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

You know the saying “the dog days are over”?

If you're reading this in 2009 – which, as a gentle reminder, is the year that I'm writing this, *not* 2006 – or 2010, then I'm sure that you do, since the song *Dog Days Are Over* by Florence & the Machine has been playing on pretty much every single radio station in NYC nonstop for about a year now. And even if you're not reading this in 2009 or 2010, I'm sure that you've probably heard or read the saying several times throughout your life, and that you've either been told its meaning or have figured it out through some other means.

However, if in the unlikely event you *weren't* familiar with the saying “the dog days are over” up until now (or if you were familiar with it but just didn't know its meaning, since the Florence & the Machine song isn't exactly clear on it), then allow me to explain its meaning to you, courtesy of a boring history lesson that Annabeth once provided to me:

See, the saying “the dog days are over” is actually a saying that originates out of the ancient Roman term *dies caniculares* – which roughly translates to “dog star days”. In ancient Rome, these days were a period of days that lasted from July 11th to August 3rd, and were, more often than not, the hottest days of the year. And the Romans believed that the reason why these days were so hot was because the Dog Star, Sirius, rose and set with the sun during these days, hence the name *dies caniculares*, “the Dog Star days”.

Now, since the days of ancient Rome and the term's translation into English, the saying “the dog days” has kind-of taken on some new meanings. For instance, “the dog days” can refer to pretty much the entirety of summer now, and not just some specific dates during the months

of July and August. The saying can also refer to a period of stagnation or...well, *laziness* as well, since people have a tendency to not do anything but sit around during hot and humid weather. Thus, when somebody says “the dog days are over”, they can be referring *both* to the end of summer or to the end of a period of stagnation and laziness.

However, that being said, as I’m sure you’ve figured out already, the second definition is *not* the reason why I am calling this chapter “The Dog Days Are Over” – because my summer was anything *but* stagnant or lazy. No, the reason why I am calling this chapter “The Dog Days Are Over” is because not only was my summer over like the first definition of the saying states, but because *everything* I had associated with that summer was over, as well.

Seriously. All of the happiness that I had experienced during my summer at camp (and even the part of my summer that was spent on my quest) was *gone*, just like every sense of *belonging* and *liveliness* that I had felt during that time as well. It was as if the Dementors from the *Harry Potter* series were real, but instead of sucking out my soul, they had sucked out my ability to be *happy*, leaving a dull, stabbing feeling of heartbreak in my chest and a sense of being *drained* both in the rest of my body and in my mind.

Of course, part of me knew that a large part of the reason why I felt this way was not because of Luke’s betrayal – no, it was because of the pit scorpion venom that had laced the dagger that *he had stabbed me with*. See, pit scorpion venom – especially *magical* pit scorpion venom, which was what he had used – is one of the most venomous substances in the world, meaning that it has a very low survival rate if ambrosia, nectar, or even water-healing abilities aren’t used to stop its effects in time. And even when they are used, recovery from the venom can take a *while*, because the body has to adjust from the venom being counteracted so suddenly, which often means that victims often deal with both exhaustion and depression from anywhere between weeks to *months* after being healed.

...But just because my recovery was the largest reason why I felt so miserable did not mean it was the only reason why I felt so bad. I mean, I had just had my freaking heart *shattered into a million pieces*, after all, so of course I was going to feel pretty fucking terrible! Still, though, that being said, I was not prepared for how *awful* I was going to feel from having my heart broken and my side stabbed a dagger laced with pit scorpion venom, and I wasn’t prepared for how long it was going to last, either.

On the bright side of things, though, at least my mom was very understanding through all of this. She didn’t care that I wound up having to sleep through most of the two weeks that followed my returning home but predated my starting school at Goode High School, nor did she care that I went through regular periods where I was either ravenously hungry or not hungry at all. She also didn’t care when I had Silena come over for two days in order to help me deal with my heartbreak via watching cheesy rom-com movies and eating buckets and buckets of microwavable popcorn.

But then again, this is *my mom* that we’re talking about here. The only thing that she ever cared about, it seemed, was my well-being, and if I had to deal with my injuries and the sudden betrayal from my friend Luke (...yeah, I hadn’t told her about my relationship with Luke, yet. Sue me) by sleeping all the time, eating too much and too little, and spending an

ungodly amount of time with Silena, then she was all for it – just as long as I was ready to go to school by September 1st, the first day of school at Goode High, of course.

Which I was. I mean, don't get me wrong, I didn't *want* to go, not really, but I was ready to. And even if I wasn't, if I wanted to get a position on Goode High's swim team (which I did), I would've had to go to school on September 1st anyways, since that was the one and only day for try-outs for the swim team.

...Of course, even if my mom was happy that I was ready to go to school on the first day of it, though, that didn't stop her from fretting the morning of September 1st as I spooned a bowl of oatmeal – *gross* – into my mouth.

"Percy, dear," my mother said gently. "Are you sure you have everything?"

"Yes."

"You have your school supplies?"

"Yes."

"Your swim trunks?"

"Yes."

"Your *bull*?"

Here, I rolled my eyes as I pulled the bulky, stupid thing out of my shirt. "Yes, Mom, I have it," I said. "Of course I do. Why wouldn't I?"

My mom wrung her hands nervously. "I'm sorry," she said. "I'm just nervous, Percy, that's all."

"Why?" I couldn't help but ask as I frowned and pushed away my half-eaten bowl of oatmeal.

My mom sighed. "...I'm just worried about what will happen if your *bull* breaks, Percy," she said. "I know, I know...you told me that Katie's *bull* breaking was a freak accident, but I still...I still worry. I mean, what happens if it breaks while you are at school? What happens if your coach makes you take it off – not that I think he will – " she muttered this part under her breath " – but still. Will monsters instantly come to attack you? Will you have to go back to camp?"

At this, I couldn't help but internally wince, because...well...I hadn't exactly been *truthful* when I had told my mom about what had happened to Katie's *bull* during our quest. I mean, *yeah*, Katie's *bull* had been broken, but in the two weeks following Luke's betrayal, I hadn't been able to help but wonder how much of a "freak accident" her *bull* breaking was...and whether or not the shoes that Luke had given me, which had blown up on the bus at the beginning of our quest, had been charmed to cause us further troubles on top of that.

Just like my relationship with Luke, though, I didn't – still didn't? – tell my mom about any of my thoughts on what had happened to Katie's *bull*. Instead, all I said in response was, "If it breaks while I'm at school – which won't happen, Mom, but in the wildly unlikely event that it does, I'm pretty sure that I'll have at least a long enough time to get home or get to Silena's before monsters come after me. And I know that Silena has been IM'ing Alabaster nonstop, so he can probably make me another one and send it to me before things get too bad...so don't freak out, okay? I'll be fine. *We'll* be fine. I fully believe it."

My mom stared at me for a few moments, her eyes narrowed and eyebrows creased in worry, but then she sighed and walked over to hug me. "You're right," she said. "I know you are. I just...how did you grow up so fast, *elskan mín*?"

"I don't know, Mom," I replied, while internally I cringed at how...*strained* I sounded, because I knew why I had grown up so fast, and I knew that I couldn't talk to my mom about it – not yet, anyways. "I guess I just did."

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Hours after my morning conversation with my mom, I stood nervously in swim gym of Goode High School, waiting along with around thirty other kids for the swimming coach to walk in and begin try-outs.

I hadn't really experienced any problems related to me still recovering from the pit scorpion venom throughout the day, but then again the first day of school is often the least-exhausting one. Plus, even if it wasn't, all of my classes were relatively close together, and both students and teachers alike had given me a wide berth today. Apparently, almost all of the students came from Kilpatrick Junior High School, which was Goode High School's "filter school" or something like that, so most of them already had well-established cliques that weren't taking new members – especially not new members like me, the student who kept on getting concerned looks from the teachers, even though none of them were allowed to talk about my school record with the other students, no matter how much they obviously wanted to.

But, that being said, both of those things were alright with me. I'd survived the first seven years of my academic career with no real friends or teachers that liked me, after all, so I could survive yet another year of the same thing.

Suddenly, the doors to the swim gym flew open with a loud *BANG!*, causing all of the students – including me – to jump in surprise and turn to look at the two people that had just walked into the room. The first of the two people was obviously the swim coach, if the fact that he was wearing a blue jacket that said *GOODE HIGH SCHOOL SWIM TEAM* was any indicator. The guy looked to be in his mid-to-late thirties, with wavy black hair, light blue eyes, and tanned skin, along with a kind expression that kind of reminded me of Chiron, back when he had been posing as Mr. Brunner the Latin teacher.

The second of the two people was much younger than the swimming coach – in fact, she was much younger than *all* of us, as she barely looked thirteen, much less fourteen or fifteen like me and at least half of the other kids wanting to try out for the swim team were. But, that being said, she actually looked a lot like the swimming coach – she was almost a *spitting image* of him, even, outside of her loosely-curled black hair and bluish-green eyes – so I



figured that she was probably his daughter or something like that, so I wasn't too concerned about her being there.

"Sorry I'm late," the swimming coach announced as he walked into the swim gym. "I had to make sure that my daughter, Callie here, got on the correct bus to get here. Rest assured this won't happen again unless the circumstance calls for it."

He paused then, as if waiting for somebody to vocally acknowledge that statement. However, when no one did, the swimming coach sighed and leaned in close to his daughter to whisper something to her. Callie nodded in agreement at whatever he said, before she walked off towards the bleachers, where I figured she was probably going to be sitting for the entire session of try-outs.

"Now then," the swimming coach said after he spent a moment eyeing his daughter warily. "Time for some introductions. As most of you probably know already, my name is Mr. Blofis. I am the swimming coach of our school's swim team, as well as a sophomore English teacher and the head of our school's Drama Club. Does this mean that I'm fairly busy. Yes, yes it does. But, that being said, I have made it a point of getting to know all of the people who try out for my swim team over the years, and that's not going to change now. So, when I call your name, I would like to you to tell me what grade you are, what middle school you came from, and two fun facts about yourself, if at all possible. Got it?"

Once again, he paused, waiting for somebody to answer him. But, when no one did, he merely sighed again and rolled his eyes before he looked at the clipboard in his hands and said, "Tyler Attlebee."

"Here, Coach," a kid with wavy brown hair, hazel-green eyes, and a smattering of freckles across his face said. He actually kind of reminded me of Alabaster, but not in a nice way, because he looked *meaner* than Alabaster...if that makes sense. Like he was actually secretly Draco Malfoy from *Harry Potter* disguised as Alabaster or something like that. "I'm a ninth grader from Kilpatrick. Two fun facts about myself are that I went to Italy this summer with my family and I am also trying out for the baseball team later this year."

"Interesting," Mr. Blofis said with a nod. "Very interesting. Now, Liam Beckender?"

Just like that, he went down the list of students, who all told him various "fun facts" about themselves on top of their grades and former middle schools. I didn't really see the point in him asking about what middle school we had come from, considering that, once again, almost all of these kids came from Kilpatrick Junior High. In fact, it almost made me think that Mr. Blofis – which sounded *a lot* like *blowfish*, much to my amusement – was trying to shame me for coming here from Yancy or something like that, but I quickly discarded the idea due to the fact that the teachers weren't supposed to bring up my school record *and* due to the fact that this guy had apparently pulled a lot of strings to get me here in the first place.

"Jackson, Perseus," Mr. Blofis suddenly said, pulling me out of my train of thought.

"Oh," I said stupidly in response, causing a few kids to not-so-subtly snicker. "Umm...I'm a ninth grader from...from Yancy Academy. Two fun facts about myself, I guess, are that I'd *really* prefer to go by Percy and that...well...umm...I'm fluent in ancient Greek?"

I winced internally at that last part, because *gods*, did it make me sound like a *nerd*. But, honestly, what kind of other fun fact could I give? Everybody would look at me like I was loony if I said that I was secretly a son of Poseidon, and I didn't want *anyone* here to know about my school record or the fact that I was gay. So saying that I knew ancient Greek, while nerdy, was really the best option that I had to say...

...Right?

"You know ancient Greek?" Mr. Blofis asked me with a strange look in his eyes. His curiosity was obviously piqued. "As in Attic Greek?"

Nervously, I nodded, even if I wasn't exactly sure of what "Attic Greek" was.

"Fascinating..." the swimming coach mused. "I took a few Attic Greek courses when I was in college...it's been a few years, though, since I've actually read it or spoken it. I doubt I could even do either of those things anymore...anyways, next on the list is Indiana Jones, I believe?"

"Here, Coach," a girl with dark blonde hair said dryly, all the while snickers broke out at her name.

I didn't pay attention to the people that snickered at her name, though, just like I didn't pay attention to anything else that Indiana said, even if I felt sorry for her because of her name. No, instead I found myself looking at Tyler Attlebee, who was currently *glaring* at me, as if I had just told him that he was the most hated person on Earth or something like that. Why he was looking at me like that, I didn't really know – I mean, *yeah* Mr. Blofis had been impressed at me knowing Ancient Greek, but he had also been impressed at Attlebee's fun facts, hadn't he? So it wasn't like I had usurped Attlebee at being the most interesting, really, and even if I did, that was kind of a lame pissing contest to have so early in the year.

...But, of course, at every other school I had been to in the past, other kids had never really needed a good excuse to hate me – they just *did*. And just because I had gotten a new host of friends and other people that liked me over the summer didn't mean that I was going to be likable to others now, especially when they would probably run away screaming if I even tried to talk to them about me being a demigod and all that that entailed.

*Once again, I thought wryly, the dog days are over. I just wish they hadn't taken away my ability to make more friends or even seem likable to other kids here along with them.*

"Alright," Mr. Blofis said after he had gone through everyone's names and had heard our lame fun facts. "Now that everyone has said their introductions, I think it's time that we move on to how today's try-outs are going to work. As most of you know, there are 30 positions on both our school's varsity swimming team and our junior varsity swimming team, meaning that there are 60 positions total. However, only 10 of the varsity team's positions and 15 of the junior varsity team's positions are open, which means that six of you will not be getting a position on the team this year. So, while you may feel like getting a position on the team may be easy considering how many open positions there are, it is still in your best interests to try your hardest. Got it?"

“Got it, sir,” Tyler Attlebee said with a bright grin. He was the only one to speak.

Mr. Blofis gave him an appreciative look. “Right,” he said. “We’re going to go down the list in alphabetical order again, so Attlebee, show us what you got.”

## Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: The Swim Team For Rookies

Edit: Turns out I wasn’t as satisfied with this chapter as I thought, so I may or may not have added another 100 or so words :P

# The Swim Team Protection Program

## Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! I'm sorry that this update is so late – new meds, vacation, and writer's block just don't mix LOL. However, that being said, I feel better now, and so here we are!

One thing I want to mention about this chapter before you read is that this chapter did not go in the way that I was expecting – like, Paul utterly derailed the entire second half of this chapter (hence why the name has changed)...which is strange, because usually only Percy does that! But, that being said, I couldn't resist the urge to show off some Papa Bear Paul, since he and Sally unfortunately won't be getting together in this story...

Also, shout out to cristallina on AO3 for single-handedly discovering some massive spoilers in one of her comments. Unfortunately, because of the spoilers, I can't approve it, but I just wanted to say that she is 110% right without having to wait for her to comment. XD

Next chapter will be up on next Monday, as I'm getting ready for the mayhem that will come with school. So, until then,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

**As it turned out, Tyler Attlebee had a *lot* to show Mr. Blofis and all of the other kids trying out for the swim team, including myself, when it came to his swimming abilities.**

Seriously, he was *really* good, which was something that had honestly surprised me. I mean, after all, most kids who are as egoistic as this asshole seemingly was weren't really all that great when it came to the sport that they prided themselves on, with Draco Malfoy from *Harry Potter* being perhaps the prime example of this when it came his skills in Quidditch. However, that being said, Attlebee actually possessed a grace, an *elegance* when it came to swimming that, while I knew I could replicate due to my son of Poseidon status and all that, I doubted that any of the other students could...

...And, judging by the looks on all of the other kids' faces once Attlebee finished his performance, they all agreed with me on that.

Unfortunately, though, the expressions' on all of the other kids' faces served a two-fold purpose, as not only did they show how nervous all of them were, but they also seemed to serve as the fuel that Attlebee needed to become even *more* of an asshole. Because as Attlebee got out of the water and walked towards the bleachers – where Mr. Blofis instructed him and everyone else to go to after they finished trying out – not only did he *smirk* at me, as

if he was trying to rub how much better than me he thought he was in my face, but he also snootily asked Mr. Blofis, “So, how was that, coach?”

Thankfully, though, Mr. Blofis didn’t seem all that willing to indulge the asshole – *hmm, I think I’m starting to like that name for him. Attlebee, Asshole. What’s the difference?* – in his egoistic behavior. Or, at least, that was my take from the way that he blandly said, “That was fine, Attlebee. Next up is Liam Beckender. Beckender, how about you show us what you’ve got?”

As Liam Beckender shakily got into the water, obviously much more nervous about his own impending performance than he had been before, I watched Asshole moodily walk over to the bleachers out of the corner of my eye, his mood seemingly significantly dampened at being brushed off by the coach so easily.

Vaguely, I thought about walking over to him and telling him that Callie Blofis – I presumed that was her last name, anyways – was silently laughing at his behavior, showing that she was probably just as amused with Asshole’s behavior as I was, but I ultimately discarded it. After all, it wouldn’t do for me to seemingly attack a kid who was most certainly going to get on the team unprovoked – especially when I hadn’t even tried out for my own place on the team yet.

With those thoughts in mind, I went back to focusing on the try-outs. Most of the kids that went in between Asshole and I, Beckender included, weren’t really all that bad. In fact, a few of them were even pretty good, to the point where I figured that those two or three kids in particular were all but guaranteed a spot on the team. However, that being said, there were also a few kids who were pretty darn *awful*, with the kid before me, a guy named Isaiah Hyland or something like that, perhaps taking the cake.

Seriously. That kid was just *horrible*, and I couldn’t help but wonder how he had thought that he was good enough to try out in the first place – which was a thought that I immediately felt bad for, regardless of Hyland’s awful performance.

Just like with Asshole, though, I didn’t dwell on Hyland’s performance for long, because just as he was getting out of the water, Mr. Blofis said, “Right. Thank you for that, Hyland. Next up is Jackson – so show us what you’ve got, Jackson.”

“Sure thing, Coach,” I said as I walked towards the water, just before I cautiously slipped into it.

A few kids snickered at my doing that, obviously thinking something along the lines of, “*oh, you can already tell that this kid isn’t any good, just by how slowly he got into the pool*”, but I didn’t pay them any mind. After all, I doubted that *any* of these kids were still dealing with long-term effects from a poisoned stab wound, and even if they were, they wouldn’t be able to heal, wouldn’t be able to be *rejuvenated* by the calm, cool water like I was, nor would they be able to suddenly become calm because of the water’s calming influence.

Now, as I’m sure you’ve already deduced by now, I don’t really like to brag about my own abilities, but since my swimming abilities are directly tied to my godly heritage, as previously stated, I don’t really feel that bad in saying that my try-out performance was *excellent* – and

probably even better than Asshole's, at that. But, that being said, I didn't really think about him during my performance, no. Instead, I thought about the water, and how I was born of it, born to be a *part* of it, and how water was the one thing that nobody could take away from me.

*Not even Luke.*

At the end of my performance, I tentatively got out of the water, because even though the water had rejuvenated me while I was in it, there was only so much the water could do for my injuries relating to my poisoned stab wound when I got *out* of it. However, that being said, everyone except for Mr. Blofis seemingly couldn't believe that I was doing *anything* tentatively after showing off my natural swimming skills, if the way that they were all staring at me in shock was anything to go by. Even Asshole seemed impressed at my performance, although when he saw that my eyes had wandered over to look at him, his face morphed into a vicious sneer.

"A fine performance, Jackson," Mr. Blofis said blandly, briefly looking at me before he turned back to his keyboard, no interest or amazement tainting his voice. That was fine with me, though – I didn't need everybody fawning over me like Asshole seemingly did. "Next on the list is Jones. Come on, Jones, show us what you've got."

The girl after me, Indiana Jones – *yes*, I was still feeling sorry for her when it came to her name. Gods know Perseus was bad enough, but *Indiana Jones*? What kind of parent named their kids that? – nodded shakily at his words, her face pale.

Looking at her then, I felt a twinge of sympathy that was separate from the sympathy that I felt towards her because of her name. I mean, *yeah*, I wanted to be on the swimming team – *needed* to be on it, even – but I had an advantage over her and everyone else because of my demigodly (which isn't a word, but *fuck* it, I'm using it anyways) nature, Asshole included. And it wasn't right for her or anyone else to compare themselves to me because of it.

So, that being said, as I slowly walked over to the bleachers, I turned to look at Indiana, and gave her a small smile. Indiana's nervous face turned into one of confusion in response to that, but I didn't let that bother me as I mouthed to her, "You can do it! I believe in you."

Indiana blinked at my words, and for a second I thought she was going to glare at me or something like that, as a myriad of emotions flashed in her eyes. However, after a few moments, both her eyes *and* her face settled into a *hopeful* expression, and with a small smile of her own, she mouthed, "Thank you."

*Well, that's one good deed for the day, at least*, I thought to myself as I sat down on one of the bleachers and began to watch Indiana's performance – which was actually pretty good from what I could already tell, and probably guaranteed her a spot on the team as well. However, when I saw that Mr. Blofis was looking at *me* instead of at *her* with an expression of what looked to be consternation on his face, I couldn't help but silently add, *But, of course, no good deed goes unpunished.*

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“Alright,” Mr. Blofis said at the end of try-outs, after he had assembled us all back into the almost-linear mess of kids that we had been before. “Before I end the try-outs, I just want to say that I thank you all for coming today. It takes a lot of guts to try out for a position on any sports team, regardless about whether or not you actually get on the team like you were hoping to do.” He paused then, just for a moment, to take a look at all of us, before he added, “I also hope that you all learned something today, by trying out for my team. What you learned is up to you, but, as a teacher, it is my firm belief that no experience is truly an experience unless you *learn* something from it.

“Now, that being said,” he continued onwards, “Tomorrow morning, the results of who did and didn’t get on the team will be posted on the bulletin board right next to the gym’s doors. But, regardless on whether or not you think your name will be on the ‘did’ or ‘didn’t’ lists tomorrow, you all should still pack your swimsuits anyways, because tomorrow afternoon will also mark the first practice of the season. Got it?”

“Got it, sir,” several of the kids, including myself, said in response.

Mr. Blofis nodded. “You’re all dismissed,” he said, before he turned to look at me. “Except for you, Jackson. A word, if you will?”

...*Well*, fuck, I thought nervously as I both nodded in response *and* watched the other kids leave for the locker rooms. I didn’t miss how *triumphant* Attlebee looked at the coach’s words, or how Indiana Jones looked at me with a face full of concern. *Guess I’m getting kicked off of the team now...before I even had a place on it, that is.*

When all of the other kids had left the swim gym, Mr. Blofis turned back to me. There was a...dare I say it...*strange light* in his eyes as he looked at me, a strange light that I couldn’t even begin to decipher in terms of what it meant – and even if I could, in the next moment it was gone, as Mr. Blofis’s eyes suddenly widened as he looked at the bleachers that were standing behind me. “Callie,” he said softly. “Would you please give us a moment as well?”

What? I thought as I blinked in surprise. *Did Mr. Blofis seriously just forget his daughter was here?*

I heard – rather than saw – Callie snort in response, making me think that she was thinking a similar train of thought that I was. “Really, Dad?” she asked, annoyance creeping in to her voice.

“It’ll just be a moment, Callie,” Mr. Blofis replied. “Just...wait outside for me, okay?”

This time, I was able to see Callie snort again as she rolled her eyes, before she walked out of the main doors of the swim gym instead of those designated for the locker rooms. Once again, both Mr. Blofis and I watched her go, the swimming coach only turning back to look at me once the doors closed firmly behind her.

“So,” Mr. Blofis said casually after a few moments, “how long have you known that you’re a demigod?”

I froze in place, my eyes widening and my face paling – *yep*, I could feel the blood leaving my face *entirely* – as I looked up at the swimming coach. I mean, I just simply *couldn't* believe what he had just said, or how *casual* he had been when he had said it. “So, *how long have you been a demigod?*” *Because just casually dropping that isn't utterly horrendous at all!*

After a few moments, though, I realized what a mistake I was making, and nervously coughed. “Uh, sorry, sir,” I said, all the while hating myself for how *unbelievable* I sounded. “I don't know what you're talking about.”

Mr. Blofis snorted – which was a very uncharacteristic trait of him, at least from what I had already knew about him, from what I had already seen him do and say. “You're going to have to try better than that, Jackson,” he said. “I know your mother has the Sight like me, and that most mortals who do ultimately become parents of demigods. And, if that's not enough, I *also* happen to know what your school record looks like and what a *bull* is, so I repeat: how long have you known that you're a demigod?”

“Uhh...” I replied nervously, before I hurriedly added at Mr. Blofis's souring look, “just – just since this past May, sir.”

Mr. Blofis nodded. “Thought so,” he said. “And your parent?”

“I – uh – Poseidon, sir.”

The swimming coach nodded again, before he sighed and ran a hand through his hair. “Once again, just as I thought,” he said. “I – look, Jackson, I'm going to be honest with you here. I like you.”

I blinked. “What?”

“You're a good swimmer, with or without your...abilities,” Mr. Blofis said. “And you also aren't the first...demigod I've helped out in this way. Gods know what would've happened to some of them if I hadn't. But...you're *dangerous*, Jackson. You know that?”

I frowned. “Wha – what do you mean?” I couldn't help but ask. I mean, *yeah*, I knew that I was dangerous, would always be dangerous outside of camp without my *bull*, but I had a feeling that that wasn't what Mr. Blofis was talking about...

...And sure enough, I was right. Because in the next moment, Mr. Blofis narrowed his eyes at me and said, “You know that the leader of the Titan King's movement is looking for you, right?”

This time, I'm pretty sure my blood froze along with the rest of my body.

After all, there was really only one – *one* – candidate for “leader of Kronos's movement”, and that was Luke. *Luke*.

But why was Luke looking for me?

Of course, even as I thought that question, I silently came up with the answer. Luke was looking for me because somehow, some way he had figured out that I had survived him stabbing me with his poisoned blade. And he was looking for me because...because...

...Gods, I couldn't even *think* it. At least, not when the idea had just occurred to me, anyways.

Fortunately, though, I didn't have to. Because suddenly, Mr. Blofis was saying, "Jackson? Jackson? Are you alright?"

I blinked. "Uh...yeah," I said after a moment, all the while hating how my voice sounded, because it was *obvious* that I was lying – even Mr. Blofis seemingly thought as much. "I – uh – look, Mr. Blofis, I...honestly, I didn't know that – that Lu – that *he* was looking for me. If I did, I wouldn't have...wait, how did *you* find out?"

Mr. Blofis gave me a wry smile. "I have my ways," he said dryly, before he added, "There's no need to apologize to me, Jackson. *Really*, there isn't. It isn't your fault, after all." I opened my mouth to disagree with him then – even if doing so was a *very* stupid idea – but the swimming coach pressed onwards, ignoring my desire for outburst. "I just wanted to make sure that you know that I'm willing to protect you, but only so far, because you aren't the only demigod that I need to ensure the safety of..."

He trailed off then, and turned to look at the swim gym doors. It suddenly hit me then, just as I was wondering about how a *mortal*, of all people, could protect *me*, who he was talking about: *Callie*. His daughter, Callie Blofis, was a *demigod*. No wonder he was so concerned about me being on the swim team, and no wonder he seemingly knew about the gods so easily and somehow had a way to protect me.

Because he probably had a god on his side, just like I did.

Nervously, I swallowed at the implications of what that meant. Hard. Then, tentatively, I asked, "Does this mean that I'm on the team then, sir?"

The swimming coach gave me another smile, but this one was warmer, more inviting. "If you're willing to accept what I just said, Jackson, then yes," he said. "You're a good swimmer, regardless of you being a son of the sea god, and you show great teamwork, if how you encouraged Jones is any indicator...of course, though, this is assuming that you *still* want to be on the team. I understand if you don't, though, or if you want some time to think about it."

"O – of course I do!" I immediately protested. After all, how could I *not*? Like I previously said, I *needed* this, needed something that Luke couldn't take away from me (even if seemed like he might be able to), and I needed something that would make it so that I could *stop* thinking about him, even if only for a little while. When I realized, though, that my voice cracked when I had been saying "of", I hurriedly added as I felt my face flush, "I – I mean I do. I still want to be on the team."

Mr. Blofis nodded. "Good," he said shortly. "I expect you to be here for practice, then, and *on time*. Okay?"

“O – okay.”

He nodded again. “Dismissed, Jackson,” he said.

As I walked towards the door to the boy’s locker room, I could feel my mind almost *buzzing* from all of the shit that I had just found out. Mr. Blofis was not just a swimming coach or an English teacher, but a clear-sighted mortal and the father of a demigod (whose parentage I realized I didn’t know...not yet, at least). I had a position on his team, both because I wanted to be on it and apparently because it was for my own protection...whatever that meant. And, perhaps the most mind-blowing thing of all, Luke *was looking for me*. He knew that I was alive and he was looking for me...

...*And it is probably because he is looking to kill me again*, I forced myself to think, even if I didn’t want to, because it made the heartbreak that I was still experiencing that much worse.

...On the bright side of things, though, at least Asshole no longer seemed like as big of a problem as I had previously thought of him as, even if I knew that he was going to be grinding my nervous for the entire school year.

So, at least there was that.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: My First Champion Quest Pt. 1 (I know I said it would be a while until the next double-chapter, but I can’t help myself :P)

My First Champion Quest Pt. 1

Chapter Notes

Gonna try to keep this A/N short, but I am so sorry for the delay! College life has been...hectic, to put it bluntly. My health issues have also been giving me problems and, just when I was getting ready to write, family issues started up as well – which was not fun, let me tell you. Thankfully, though, break has begun, and with it, a new season of writing!

Also, according to the word count on AO3, this chapter should take us just over 100k for this story. I'm very excited about this! :) Let's hope for another 100k, eh?

Sincerely,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Despite what Mr. Blofis – sorry, *Coach* Blofis, ‘cause I really should be calling him that now at this point in time – said about Luke knowing that I was alive and that he was looking for me and all that, it actually wasn’t until November that I saw him again.

Now, as I’m sure you probably imagine, this was both a blessing and a curse for me. I mean, it was a blessing because, as much as I loved Luke and desperately wanted to see him again, I also...*didn't*, at least where the latter was concerned. Luke *had* tried to kill me, after all, and while I could forgive him for that – and for the side effects of his poison of use, which were *still* bothering me at this point – that didn’t necessarily mean that I wanted to see him again so soon. In fact, I hadn’t wanted to see him until the next summer at the very *least*, as while Katie’s idea of kicking his ass had become more and more appealing, I also needed to be in a good enough condition to *do* it.

Still, not seeing Luke was also a curse. It was a curse because, since he had tried to kill me, I had absolutely no idea *what* he would do when he saw me again. Of course, obviously I hoped that he wouldn’t try to kill me again, but I had no way of knowing if murder still wasn’t on the cards for him. Moreover, since he had all the time in the world to do whatever he wanted to, I also had *no idea* when he was going to show back up in my life. And that was a very stressful thing to know when combined with his homicidal nature.

...Which was also why, in the two months leading up to our reunion, I suffered. My sleep suffered, my eating habits suffered, hell, even *my grades* suffered. It was only Coach Blofis’s

pleading to the principal of Goode High School that prevented me from getting kicked off the team from all of the above, but even then, he made *sure* to warn me that if I didn't clean up my grades before the end of the semester, then he was going to have to kick me off the team.

...*Prodigal son of Poseidon or not.*

And the reason why I'm telling you this is not to make you feel sorry for me or anything like that, but rather to give you a frame of reference for what's about to happen. See, since I had been feeling so miserable, both because of Luke and because of my grades, on the first Friday in November, when I had been walking home from swim practice and school, I hadn't immediately noticed that someone was sitting on the steps that led up to my mom's apartment building.

...Not until I was right on top of them, anyways.

"Agh!" I screamed as I nearly tripped over the person in question. Instinctively, I both stumbled back and tried to reach for the pen-slash-sword in my pocket. However, this wound up not being a very good idea, because not even a moment later, I fell directly onto the ground, ass first.

"Oof!" I groaned.

"Well, hello to you too, Perseus," the person sitting on the steps said, their tone laced with amusement.

Surprised, I looked up, before asking, "*Demeter*? Uh – I mean – milady?"

Sure enough there, sitting in front of me, was her. My patron goddess was wearing an emerald green dress coat, complete with emerald earrings, emerald boots, and emerald netting in her done-up hair. The abundance of green surprised me, but not as much as the fact that she was actually *sitting* before me, looking as if she was a casual pedestrian instead of the powerful goddess that she was.

"Yes, indeed," Demeter replied, a soft smile on her lips. "I am terribly sorry to...drop in on you like this, as the mortals say, but I'm afraid that I have some...*business* for you."

"Business?" I asked with a frown as I got to my feet. "Like...a quest?"

"Precisely," she said with a nod. At first, I thought she was going to tell me then and there what the quest that she wanted me to do was, but just before she could, a strange...*light*, I guess – I don't know what else to call it – lit up her eyes.

"Do you mind if I come in to explain it to you?" she asked.

At her words, something in my stomach *sank* – why, I didn't know. Still, with the best smile that I could possibly muster, I said, "No, not at all, milady. Please, follow after me."

~~~

A few minutes later, the two of us were sitting at the small table in my mom's kitchen. I was holding a cup of hot chocolate that Demeter had summoned in my hands, my lips pursed as I waited for her to begin. Strangely enough, though, my lady did *not* seem willing to speak at all until, at long last, she finally said, "Have you been watching the news recently, Perseus?"

I blinked. I hadn't been sure what she was going to throw at me, but it certainly *wasn't* that.

"Uh...no, milady, I haven't," I admitted, before I frowned. "Why?"

Demeter sighed. "Well, you see," she began. "A few weeks ago, there was a murder."

Despite knowing how important it was to listen to what she was saying, I couldn't help but deadpan, "There's always a murder in New York City, milady."

Demeter smiled. "Yes, yes, I know," she said, but then her smile faltered. "This one, though...this one is...*special*. You see, Perseus, the person that had been murdered was a young woman from Georgia. She was only twenty-four. And yet, according to the mortals, she was horribly and viciously torn apart...by dogs."

"Hellhounds?" I guessed with a grimace.

My patron nodded. "Yes. Now, obviously, this happening to any mortal, *any* at all, would be troublesome for us. Monsters *aren't* supposed to attack mortals, and any evidence to otherwise is investigated immediately. But this woman, Nerissa Hunter, *wasn't* an ordinary mortal. She...well, I'll let you see for yourself."

Demeter snapped her fingers.

Suddenly, two pictures appeared on the table in front of me. Curiously, I leaned forward to look at them.

The first picture, the picture on the left, was of a woman – *Nerissa*, my mind supplied – and a boy, standing in front of the ocean. Nerissa looked to be around twenty-two or so, with long, light brown hair, shimmering hazel eyes, and a smile that was absolutely *radiant*. The boy, who was obviously her son and looked to be maybe four, was holding a dried sand dollar in his hands, and he looked a lot like her, with a few exceptions. One, his light brown hair was messy, *unusually* messy, in a way that couldn't just be attempted – it was *natural*. Two, whereas Nerissa's eyes were a complete hazel, the boy's were flecked with green...a very *familiar* green.

Suddenly, the sinking feeling in my stomach, which had somewhat lessened, returned, and it returned with *more* than full force.

Nervously, I turned to look at the second picture. This picture was only of the boy, but he looked older, maybe around five or six. He was standing in front of an aquarium, a wide smile on his face, and – *shit*, I recognized that smile.

I recognized that smile because it was *mine*.

Horrificed, I looked up at Demeter.

“You can’t be serious,” I accused her.

Demeter sighed again. “It’s true,” she said. “He is – ”

“But I thought that there was a pact!” I protested. “A pact, saying that *none* of them could have kids! And you’re – you’re telling me that Zeus not only broke it once, that my *father* not only broke it once, but that he also managed to break it *twice*?”

Demeter stayed silent.

Her silence wasn’t comforting, though. If anything, it made it *worse*, because suddenly, as I sat there, staring at her, a new thought occurred to me.

“Neither of them broke it just once, did they?” I asked. “How...how many times did they break it, then?”

Demeter gave me a mournful look.

“How many times, milady?” I pleaded.

“...Zeus broke the oath twice,” she said finally. “Twice with the same woman, Beryl Grace. But you needn’t be concerned about that, because...well, both Thalia and her younger brother died. Her brother died before she did, in fact. As for your father...” Demeter trailed off.

When she spoke again, it was only in a whisper, “Including yourself, your father broke the oath four times.”

I gaped at her. “*Four* times? I – *what*? How does one just – just break an oath that they made on the River Styx *four times*? Even if they are a god?”

“Not easily,” Demeter answered.

I scowled.

“Perseus,” my patron said softly. “You must understand, I did not want to have to tell you this so soon. Ideally, this would have waited until...the beginning of this summer, at the very least. Maybe even longer. But, after Nerissa died, well...the police realized that she hadn’t traveled alone. That she had brought her son with her. And they also realized that her son was...*is* missing. In New York City.”

“And that’s a bad thing,” I said.

“Yes,” Demeter agreed. “But not for the reasons that you think.”

“...What do you mean?”

“Think, Perseus,” my patron urged. “Why would hellhounds go after a mortal, even if she was the mother of a demigod? What could be so important about that demigod? Besides his parentage, that is.”

I thought about it. *Besides his parentage...what could that mean? What's more important than*

—

— Oh.

“Krono — *Luke* found out about his existence, didn't he?” I asked. But before she could confirm my guess, I said, “*Of course* he did. He found out about this kid and he — he killed the kid's mom for it. Or Kronos made him do it. Either way, I — ugh!” I screamed in frustration, before I put my head in my hands. “What do you want me to *do*, Demeter? I can't — I can't just *convince* Luke to come back. That didn't work the first time, and I swear, it's *not* going to work — ”

“Look at me, Perseus.”

I looked up at her, my eyes wide.

“I do not expect you to sway the son of Hermes. Not now, not today,” she said gently. “But there is also no denying that your...*brother* needs your help. And that's what I want you to do. To help him. To *find* him. And to bring him to Camp Half-Blood when the time arrives.”

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“You're shitting me,” Silena said when I told her.

“I wish,” I said miserably.

The two of us were lying on her bed, in the house that her dad owned in Queens. As soon as Demeter had left, I had written my mom a quick note and run out of the house, deciding that I wanted some comfort — specifically, some comfort that only *Silena* could supply.

But Silena, unfortunately, did not have much comfort to give. If anything, she seemed just as shocked as I was. “*Four* times,” she said. “*Four* times, including you, that your dad broke the oath. That means that there's — ”

“Two other kids besides Tyson running out there,” I finished for her, all the while I internally seethed.

Tyson. That was the kid's name. I hadn't particularly wanted to know — hadn't particularly wanted to know *anything* about him, really — but when I had accepted Demeter's quest — she was my *patron*, what else could I do? — she had told me his name. “*To help you find him*, ” she had said.

“*Help you find him*, ” my ass.

“What am I going to do, Silena?” I sighed as I stared at her ceiling. There admittedly wasn't much for me to stare at, though. Her father was *rich*, and the smooth ceiling above us rather than the rough ones that I was used to only proved that. “I mean, *yeah*, obviously I'm going to find this kid, but am I just...does she honestly expect me to accept this or something?”

“...Well, what do you mean by ‘this’?” Silena asked. “Do you mean the fact that he’s your half-brother, or just him specifically?”

“...Both?” I said after a few moments, but...it didn’t sound *right*. “Neither? I don’t know!”

“Well, Tyson didn’t ask to be born,” Silena pointed out. “And before you say anything, *yeah*, I know you didn’t ask to be born either. None of us did. But it wouldn’t really be fair of you to take it out on him. The person you should be mad at is your dad.”

“And I am!” I cried.

“And that’s fine,” Silena soothed. “But I have a feeling he’s not the person that you’re angry with the most.”

Frowning, I turned to look at her. “What do you mean?”

Silena gave me a gentle smile – a *sad* smile. “Percy,” she said softly. “You’re mad at *Luke*. You’re mad at him more than you are at anyone else. And you’ve been mad at him for a while.”

I flushed. “No, I haven’t!”

But the lie was as clear as day, and Silena made sure to say so. “Yes, you have, Percy,” she said, her voice soft. “And it’s understandable. He *did* try to kill you, after all. And he broke your heart – something which *I* still haven’t forgiven him for. But Percy, you can’t *stay* mad at him forever. First of all, you love him. It’s not good to be angry at people you love, at least not for a long time. Second of all, you’re bound to see him again *someday*, and even if that day is probably going to be much sooner rather than later, it’s still going to happen, and if you’re mad at him then, it’s unlikely he’s going to come back in the future.”

I could tell that she wasn’t done speaking yet, but I *had* to ask her when I heard her say that, “Wait...you still think he could come back?”

Silena laughed. “Of course, Percy. He’s angry at the gods. And while I don’t know everything, I *do* know enough. I know there’s still hope for him. Not just ‘cause of you – it’s just who he is. Now, what was I going to say?” She frowned, before she grinned. “Oh yes, that’s right! And third of all, you also *don’t know* if Luke actually...if he actually killed Tyson’s mom, now do you? You only assumed so.”

Angrily, I chewed on the inside of my cheek. I didn’t want to admit what I knew was true.

“...Percy?”

“...You’re right, you’re right,” I groaned, before I playfully kicked one of her legs for good measure. “Gods, why do you always have to be this way?”

Silena grinned. “Well, I’m a daughter of Aphrodite, Percy,” she declared. “It’s my job.”

After that, the two of us just lied there, not saying anything because there wasn’t really anything *to say*, if you know what I mean. Eventually, though I couldn’t take it any longer.

“You know,” I said as casually as I could. “Demeter *did* say that I could bring one other person with me on my quest. Just one another.”

“Oh, did she now?”

“Yeah. Wanna come with?”

“Of course,” Silena said with another grin. “What would you *ever* do without me?”

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: My First Champion Quest Pt. 2 (P.S.: I have decided that this will be the 2nd of 3 parts. Fitting the mini-storyline here into two parts just felt...choppy lol!)

Edit: Left in the word count. My bad :)

My First Champion Quest Pt. 2

Chapter Notes

...So, hey guys! I'm really sorry it's been...err...nine months since I last updated! Also sorry about how incredibly short this chapter is – I've written it and rewritten it several times and I still don't really like it, but it'll have to do for now.

Also, if you haven't noticed yet, this story now has its own cover page (link is here, for AO3 readers: <https://imgur.com/a/A9Nz04l>) and two side stories, Percy Smiles and Nearly Witches. And I highly suggest you look at those two stories, particularly the first one, because spoilers: they're in Luke and Silena's POV!

Next chapter should be published sometime soon. Maybe Monday, but I have to move back to college that day, so I don't know. We'll see.

Until next time,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

A few days later, Silena and I found ourselves walking through Central Park for what felt like the *umpteenth* time as we desperately tried – and *failed* – to find Tyson.

And if I sound more upset about the entire thing than I probably should've been...well, I gotta admit that I was. I mean, while I knew that Tyson was basically my baby brother and that he hadn't asked to be born, I still couldn't help but *dislike* the idea of meeting him. Hell, I still couldn't help but dislike the fact that I had to even find him, even though Demeter had at least been kind enough to tell me before she sent me off on my quest that he was somewhere specifically in Central Park, which was 1.317 squared miles, instead of just somewhere in NYC, which was a *lot* bigger than that.

Part of this, I knew, was simply because I felt betrayed by my dad, that he would break his oath four times and then not even tell me the first time we met, leading me to assume that it had been just me all along. But a larger part of it stemmed from the fact that, for us demigods, half-siblings came with a lot of responsibility. And it was a responsibility that I didn't want, considering the fact that I also had a prophecy and a traitorous (ex?-)boyfriend looming over my head.

...It also didn't help that Silena was being a little bit of a pain in the ass about the entire thing, either.

Case in point:

“Oh, I wonder what the other two will look like,” she said excitedly as we walked along, her kaleidoscope eyes bright and her hands clutched around the thermos of hot chocolate she had insisted on bringing with us. Why, though, I had no idea. “I mean, Tyson doesn’t look very much like you, besides the eyes, hair, and smile. And will they both be boys, or will at least one of them be a girl?”

I resisted the urge to roll my eyes. “I don’t know, Silly,” I said, which was true. It was also true that I didn’t really care. But, just to humor her, I added, “I thought Poseidon didn’t have mortal daughters, though.”

“No, that’s just Hermes,” she replied. “Poseidon does have mortal daughters, they’re just really rare. I think the last one was Penelope Hurley – she was the demigod controlling the water during the Fourth of July fireworks – and before that...I don’t know. The only other one I know about is Herophile, but I’m sure there were others in-between them.”

Ah, yes. Herophile. The oracle of Erythaea. Not exactly the best daughter of Poseidon to base my expectations off of, all things considered.

“You know,” Silena continued. “You should also give some thought about how you’re going to run your cabin, once they all get claimed.”

“...And why is that?”

Silena gave me a smile. “Because every counselor runs their cabin differently, Percy,” she explained. “Haven’t you noticed? Clarisse runs her cabin like they’re a military unit, and because they’re all children of Ares, it works. Annabeth runs her cabin like more of a democracy, which works, because even though she’s the one that’s been there the longest, several of her siblings are older than her. And Charlie and I both run our cabins as older siblings. It’s easier, I think, especially because, well...”

I swallowed thickly. “Luke did too,” I finished for her.

Weakly, she nodded.

I tried not to think about it, even though I couldn’t help it. Because although Luke had never been like that with me, not really, he had been like that with everyone else in Cabin 11. And what’s more, he had been *good* at it. He had been mature enough to keep the Stolls in their place when it really mattered, even though they were both the same age as him. He had been strict enough to make sure his orders were followed when they really needed to be, as well as observant enough to make sure when the others in the cabin weren’t eating enough or weren’t feeling good, for whatever reason.

But he had also been kind enough to be their older brother, too. Their best friend. On more than one occasion last summer, I had watched him talk things over with the kids in his cabin, when they were really stressed. He had even talked things over with kids from other cabins, too, regardless of how long they had stayed in his cabin – or if they had stayed there at all.

The thought just made his betrayal all the more worse.

I shook my head to clear it of my thoughts. I didn't need to be thinking about Luke now, or even what kind of camp counselor I was going to be. I needed to be thinking about Tyson.

I was just about to tell Silena that too, but then, as if Ananke herself had heard my thoughts and decided to answer them, I saw a flash of messy light brown hair out of the corner of my eyes.

At first, I almost didn't even believe what I had seen. I mean, Silena and I were in Central Park, to be sure, but not an area that I would've thought Tyson would be in. It wasn't close to any playgrounds or other kid-centered things, anyways. Plus, even if I had seen a kid with messy light brown hair, that didn't mean it was him. There were tons of kids out there with that same feature, after all, or so Silena and I had found out over the past couple of days.

But, as I stopped in my tracks and turned to look at him...*yep*, that was him all right, standing right next to a tree and looking at us – looking at *me* – with wide, hazel-green eyes. He was smaller than I had thought he would be, and a little dirtier, his hair a bit greasier, but that didn't matter.

He was Tyson.

"Percy," Silena said a little bit of a ways ahead of me, as she apparently hadn't realized that I was looking at my baby brother yet. "Percy, what are you – *oh!*"

At the sound of her gasp of excitement, Tyson flinched.

Nervously, I let out a shaky breath. I could do this. I didn't want to be a big brother, but I could do this. Tyson needed me to do this. Because if I didn't...

...*Well*.

Slowly, I crouched down to the ground, so that Tyson was eye-level with me, just like how my mom used to talk to me when I was upset as a kid. "Hey there, Tyson," I said softly, but then my voice cracked, and I coughed awkwardly. "That – that is your name, right? Tyson?"

Tyson just gave me a wary look in response.

"...That's alright," I said. "I probably wouldn't trust me either. But...my name is Percy, and this lovely girl right here is Silena. We're...*friends* of your dad. Do you know who your dad is?"

Tyson blinked.

"Percy," Silena whispered as she crouched down next to me. "Maybe we should – "

"Where's my mom?" Tyson asked.

It was my turn to blink now.

"Your mom?" I asked, frowning. His mom was dead. Didn't he know that?

“My mommy,” Tyson insisted, his lower lip quivering. “If you’re friends of my dad, where is my mommy? She said she was going to go – to get him. She left her right here. She said she would be back.”

...Okay, so obviously, he *didn't* know that his mother was dead.

Great.

Turning to look at Silena, I gave her a questioning glance. I didn't know what to do. Little siblings weren't my forte. But, obviously, she did, because she gave me a reassuring smile back before she looked over at Tyson.

“Tyson, sweetie,” she said. “Your mommy was very smart for telling you to wait here for her, but you need to come with us. Your daddy, he’s been looking for you. It’s why we’ve been looking for you, too. And now that we’ve found you – ”

“No,” Tyson interrupted her, his eyes hardening. “Mommy said to wait for her.”

“Tyson – ” Silena began.

“*No!*” he screamed.

I wasn't expecting what happened next.

With a scowl on his face, Tyson screamed again. He raised his fists. But instead of water coming to his aid like I expected, like it did for me, the ground somehow...trembled. It groaned.

And then, it launched both Silena and I into the air.

Silena let out a scream as we both flew into a bush. She screamed again when the brambles of it raked over both of arms and legs, scratching deep gouges into our skin, but I did a pretty good job at ignoring her. I also did a pretty good job at ignoring the thought of how I should've brought Katie with me instead as I brought myself to my feet, too, but it wasn't really all that hard to do.

Because, somehow, despite Poseidon being the god of earthquakes, despite him literally being called the *Earthshaker*, it had never occurred to me before that one of his kids could inherit his powers like that. I mean, talking to horses? Sure. Causing storms? Not a surprise. But this?

(I wonder if I could do that, too? I wonder if my other siblings could do it? I wonder if –)

“Shit!” I cursed. “Silena, he’s getting away!”

Sure enough, the little shit was running away for his dear life, just not down the path like any normal person would when they were trying to run away from some strangers and get some help. No, instead he was running through the trees and into the denser collection of woods behind them, which was where I realized he had probably been hiding out in from people for

the past few weeks. Although, how he had survived that long without dying from dehydration, starvation, or exposure was anyone's guess.

Once again, I was beginning to wish I had brought Katie along with me instead of Silena.

"Percy," Silena gasped as she struggled to her feet, the brambles still clinging to her clothes...and face. "How did he –"

"He must've inherited different powers from me," I said quickly. "Or gotten better at other ones, I don't – I don't know. Just – come on!"

I ran as fast as I could after Tyson, vaguely aware of the fact that Silena was following after me as best as she could. It wouldn't have mattered if she wasn't, though; I would have left her in the dust.

Still, we tore through the woods, following after the brilliant mop of messy brown hair that was just on the edge of our line of sight. Both of us nearly tripped over overgrown roots at least once or twice, but thankfully neither of us fell down, not even when one of us was half-shouting his name when we got caught. I probably should've thanked Tyche or some other goddess for that.

At some point, I realized that I was going to have to stop. Because even after all of the crazy shit I had done over the summer and being a member of the Goode High School swim team, my lungs felt like they were going to burst. My heart felt like it was going to beat out of my chest. And both my adrenaline and my will to keep running were steadily dropping by the second, even though I knew that stopping would most likely mean I would have to find Tyson another day.

But before I could actually go through with what my body was telling me to do, it all came to a pretty abrupt end, as Tyson came to a stop in a small clearing. I didn't really know why, even though I figured it was probably because he was just as worn out as I was, but I also didn't really care.

All that mattered was that he was coming back to my house, or camp, or wherever else Demeter wanted him, and he was coming back *with me*.

"Tyson," I breathed in relief as I ran up to him, with Silena trailing just behind me. Well, more like panted, really. It doesn't matter. Semantics. "Tyson, really, Silena and I aren't going to hurt you. You don't need to be afraid of us. Your dad –"

My voice stopped in its tracks.

Because instead of him looking all tired and worn out like I had thought he would be, like he probably should've been, Tyson looked...he looked like a deer in the headlights. He looked *scared*. And not just of me and Silena, either. No, because standing on the other side of the clearing was a tall, seventeen, almost eighteen-year-old sandy blonde with a familiar-looking scar on his face. Standing on the other side of the clearing was my (presumably ex-)boyfriend, the son of Hermes, the traitor of Olympus, and I'm sure to other demigods in the present or near-distant future, a monster in human disguise.

Standing on the other side of the clearing was *Luke*.

My First Champion Quest Pt. 3

Chapter Notes

Hey, guys! Here is the conclusion of the champion quest chapters! It's another shorter chapter, but I just prefer it that way for this set of chapters for formatting reasons. The next couple of chapters should be a bit longer, especially because we're getting into the Sea of Monsters around chapter 35/36, which is several chapters closer than what I had originally planned.

Also, for some reason, this chapter gave me some serious Bella's Lullaby vibes from the Twilight movies. Don't ask me why lol, because I don't know.

Next chapter will hopefully be posted next Monday. My room at college does not have AC, though, so I may need some time to adjust. Until then,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

To be honest, I'm not sure how I would have reacted if the situation was different.

If I had met Luke in Central Park, or anywhere really, without Tyson between us and Silena behind us, I might have whispered or gasped his name in shock. I also might have fallen into his arms, like I was a damsel in distress and the song *If I Can't Have You* by Yvonne Elliman was playing in the background. Or, alternatively, if that's too sappy for you, I might have launched myself forwards at him and, after completely pelting him in the dead leaves in the ground, shouted, "Luke Castellan, you asshole!"

As it was, though, I had bigger things to worry about.

"Tyson!" I shouted as I roughly grabbed him by the arm and pulled him closer to me.

Tyson looked like he wanted to scream at the action, but I didn't care. My side was on fire and the – the *bastard* that had caused it to hurt like that was now staring at me with wide eyes, as if he hadn't expected me to be there.

Next to me, Silena gasped, before she pulled out her dagger. "L – Luke," she said. "St – step back."

...Well, it was nice to know that, even if she currently had a much better opinion of him than I did, she was also prepared for the worst.

But, Luke did not take a step back. Instead, he took a step forward and breathed, "*Percy*."

My grip on Tyson's arm tightened.

"Oh my gods, Percy," Luke babbled. "You're – you're – "

He started to rush forward, but I took as many steps backward as I could without causing both me and Tyson to fall to the ground. Then, after Silena stumbled after me, I shoved Tyson into her arms before I took Riptide out of my pocket and uncapped it, so that I had a sword to defend myself with this time.

"Go away, Luke," I snarled.

Luke raised his hands as if in surrender. "I'm not going to hurt you, Percy," he said. "I don't even have any weapons on me. I promise."

"Yeah, like I'm going to believe that," I snorted.

Luke gave me a sad smile. "I swear it on the River Styx."

Immediately, despite the fact that it was only partially cloudy right now, thunder boomed and crackled.

Warily, I lowered my sword ever-so-slightly.

"What do you want, Luke?" I asked.

"Well..." Luke said, before he shrugged nonchalantly, as if we were just talking about stuff at camp and he totally hadn't tried to kill me three months prior. "I was supposed to find Tyson for Krono – "

"You can't have him!" Silena interjected with a glare.

"But, now, I was hoping that I could have a talk with you, Percy," he continued, though his eyes flitted over to Silena nervously. "And you alone."

I didn't even have to think about my answer.

"No," I said. "I'm not talking with you."

"*Please*, Percy," he replied, with pleading icy blue eyes. Eyes that were my favorite color in the world. "You can take Tyson with you, I don't – I don't care. Just, let me have a talk with you. Hell, you don't even have to say anything, just let me talk *to* you. Please."

I was going to say no again. The word was on the tip of my tongue. And if he didn't like it, I was fully prepared to let either my fists or my sword do all the talking for me.

But then:

"I'll take Tyson to one of the playgrounds," Silena suddenly said.

"What?" I spluttered. "Silena – "

“No, remember what we talked about a few days ago, Percy?” she asked me, but it was a rhetorical question. Of course I did. We had talked about Luke, and more importantly, about how I didn’t really know if Luke had killed Tyson’s mom or not and about how I could still possibly get him to come back to our side one day. “Luke promised that he’s not going to hurt you. He swore it on the River Styx. And I believe him. So, you two are going to have your *talk*, and Tyson and I are going to go have some fun at the nearest playground. How does that sound, Tyson?”

Tyson still looked a little too terrified to speak.

“...Fine,” I ground out after a moment. “You and Tyson can go. But *you*,” here, I raised my sword again and pointed it at Luke, “you’re not going anywhere. You’re not even moving from that spot. You hear me?”

“I promise,” Luke said, before he winked. “But I hope you don’t mind if I don’t swear on it, because I won’t.”

I resisted the urge to scratch his eyes out.

Really, I had thought that I wasn’t going to be this bad when I saw him again. I had thought that I could, at the very least, keep my cool. But as Silena and Tyson walked away, I couldn’t help but feel *hurt* all over again. Luke had betrayed the camp, he had betrayed the gods, and he had betrayed *me*. He had said that he loved me, too, but that love didn’t stop him from trying to kill me. That love hadn’t stopped him from wishing that I was dead.

“Well?” I demanded once my best friend and baby half-brother were out of sight. “What is it that you wanted to talk about? Spit it out!”

Luke lowered his hands.

“I’m sorry, Percy,” he said. “I just...I fucked up, okay? I thought – well, I don’t know what I thought. I guess I thought that, despite all the good stuff you had said about the gods this past summer, that I would be able to win you over. And when I realized I couldn’t...”

“You tried to kill me?” I supplied.

“I tried to *save* you. From them,” he corrected, before he sighed. “But also, from me. From what we would become if we had to fight each other on opposing sides.”

I considered that, for a moment. Luke seemed to be telling the truth, and as much as I hated his bullshit reason for trying to kill me, I could also admit that it helped me understand why he did what he did. But, it also didn’t change anything and it didn’t answer all of my questions.

“What about Tyson’s mom?” I asked. “Did you kill her, too?”

Luke shook his head. “No, no I didn’t,” he insisted. “Kronos had found out about Tyson months ago and he wanted me to find him and bring him to him. But, when I actually found Tyson and his mother, all I did was scare her. She took him up here. So Kronos decided that

he needed to get someone else to find them and, well, you know the rest. I swear, I didn't kill her."

"Do you swear it on the River Styx?"

"I swear it on the River Styx," he repeated.

Thunder boomed once again.

I looked away from Luke and down at my sword. He wasn't going to hurt me and I guess he hadn't killed Tyson's mother either – otherwise the Lady Styx would've appeared and dragged him down to the underworld herself – so maybe I could trust him. Just maybe.

"I meant what I said, you know," he murmured, stirring me out of my train of thought and causing me to look up at him again. "About Tyson. Kronos wants him, but he doesn't need him. Not when he has you."

A halfblood of the eldest gods, shall reach eighteen against all odds, I thought wryly. But I couldn't focus on that. "What? Are you feeling regret? You know you could always come back."

Luke's lips quirked. "Not regret, no. Call it...just call it recognizing Tyson's needs. And you know that I couldn't just come back, Percy. Even if I wanted to."

"You could," I protested.

But Luke shook his head again. "No, I couldn't," he said. "Even with your...*patron* watching out for me, I couldn't. You don't know half of what I've done, Percy. Stealing my grandfather's bolt was just the start of it."

For what felt like an eternity, the two of us just stood there, watching each other. It was a tense eternity, not like some of the ones that we had had at camp, but it allowed me to get a proper inventory of him. It allowed me to notice how he still seemed to be eating and training properly, how he didn't have any scruffs or scratches on him like one might expect from his time on the run. It also allowed me to notice the clothes that he was wearing, which consisted of dark-washed skinny jeans and a brown aviator jacket over a black shirt, and how good he looked in them.

"Is it okay if I hug you?" Luke finally asked after a while, his deep voice cutting through the silence like a knife cuts through butter.

Instinctively, my grip on Riptide tightened. "I don't think that would be a good idea," I said.

But then, with those pleading eyes again, he said, "Please, Percy? I – I thought you were dead. Only for a couple of weeks, but still. I thought that I had *killed* you. I just want a reminder that I didn't."

And like an idiot, I caved.

"Fine," I muttered as I capped Riptide.

I didn't put the pen back in my pocket, but that didn't seem to bother him as he slowly stepped forwards. Neither did the fact that, as he slowly and haltingly wrapped his arms around me and even planted a kiss to my forehead, I remained as stiff as the trees around us.

Vaguely, I wondered if that made me a good qualifier for becoming a tree nymph.

"...I missed this," Luke sighed after a moment. "I missed *you*. Gods, Percy, if I had actually killed you..."

Then I would be dead, I wanted to say. I would be in the Underworld and somebody else – Bianca, probably – would be the child of the Great Prophecy.

But I didn't. Instead, against my better judgment, I slowly allowed myself into Luke's warm embrace. It had been *so long* since I had last been in it and felt his fingers slowly running through my hair like they were now that I could hardly help myself. It just felt so good, to the point where he could have tried to kill me again and actually done the trick, and I wouldn't have cared. Not a single bit.

"I don't want us to be enemies, Percy," he whispered in my ear. "That's what they're going to make us be, but I don't want that. If only there was some other way..."

And that, my dear readers, is when something in my mind *clicked*.

"You know, we don't have to be enemies," I said, before I pulled away from him so that I could look him in the eye.

Luke frowned. "What do you mean? We're on opposite sides of a war, Percy. We don't have much of a choice."

"But we do," I insisted. "The gods and the titans, they want to go to war. And they want us to fight. So we will. But it'll just be for them. It'll be a show. Because behind the scenes, when nobody except for those we trust are looking..."

"We'll be together," Luke finished for me, his eyes lighting up in surprise.

"Exactly."

Was I aware that my plan for us was treasonous? Yes. Was I aware that it could probably get me killed, my status as a champion of Demeter be damned? Yes. Was I also aware that, despite how much I loved him, Luke probably wasn't deserving of what I was offering, and most definitely not deserving of me letting him go without another word? Yes.

Did I particularly care? No.

Because *that* was how much I loved him, dear readers. That's how much I still do. I was completely and utterly willing to get myself killed just to be with him, and to get myself doomed to eternal damnation in the Fields of Punishment (or worse). It wasn't all that much different than becoming Demeter's champion, really. And besides, even if it was, I was probably going to die before I turned eighteen, anyways. The gods could cut me some slack.

“Are you sure, though?” Luke asked me, his eyebrows furrowing. “I – don’t get me wrong, but I almost tried to kill you. No sane person would go back to the person that did that.”

“No sane person would let their attempted murderer hug them, either. But, here we are,” I shot back, before I wrapped my arms around his neck. “Now, are you going to kiss me or not?”

...And, well, I think you know the answer to that question.

~~~

“You seriously just let him walk away,” Silena said a few hours later, disbelief coloring her voice.

We were walking back to my mom’s apartment, side-by-side, with Tyson in front of us. Silena’s hands were firmly placed over his ears so he couldn’t hear anything from the conversation that we were having (the little he knew of it, the better), but Tyson didn’t seem to care. He had really warmed up to her in the past couple of hours, all memory about sending both of us flying into a bush forgotten, and I was happy about that – even if we still had to break the news to him about his mom dying and all that.

“Yes,” I replied to Silena’s question as we walked along with a huge, stupid grin on my face.

“Seriously, you finally faced Luke after months of basically cursing his name, you talked with him, you got him to hug you and admit that he was wrong to try and kill you, and instead of trying to convince him to come back to our side, you let him walk away?”

“Yes.”

“Percy, are you *insane*?”

“Luke basically asked me the same question,” I replied jovially. But, when all Silena did was sigh in response, I did as well and looked away, my smile forgotten. “Silena, you didn’t talk with him. You didn’t get to hear how he felt. I’m sure, if he could, Luke would have come back with us today, at least for me. I’m sure of it. But...”

“But what?” she pestered.

“I’m not so sure he can,” I admitted in a whisper as I ran a hand across my face. “He didn’t seem to think so, anyways. I don’t know, though, I didn’t want to press any further.”

I could feel Silena’s glare on me, and when I turned, I saw that her lips were locked into a hard line. She obviously wished that I did.

“Well, on the bright side,” I said as I looked down at Tyson, who looked back up at me and, giggling, gave me a wide smile of his own. “We found Tyson and you somehow tamed him. I don’t know how I’m going to explain him to my mom, though.”

“...Percy, you didn’t tell your mom about him? You didn’t tell your mom about *your quest*?”

“Uh...”

## Chapter End Notes

Edit: Forgot to put the next chapter title lol

Next Chapter Title: Dancing Queen

# Chapter 34

## Chapter Notes

So, this chapter really did not go the way I was expecting it to. It's still fluffy and light-hearted, don't worry about that, but uh...I had to change the chapter title because of it. Also, it's a little late. Sorry about that.

I haven't written the next chapter yet, so I make no promises, but I'm hoping for 2 weeks at the most until I update again.

Until then,

~TGWSI/Selene Borealis

(P.S.: If things look weird it's because I had to remove 19 of the tags. This work is gonna be probs ~400k which is why I justified having so many, but oof guess that doesn't matter now.)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

**“Are you sure you two will be alright watching Tyson?” my mom asked.**

She was standing in the living room of our apartment, her eyes wide as she looked at me and Silena. She had asked the two of us if we could babysit Tyson for the night – a fact that I would have been miffed by under any other circumstances, because I could watch my little brother *myself* – because he had been staying with us ever since my quest, and she just-so-happened to have an evening planned with a friend. Or so she said.

Because judging by the fact that she was wearing one of her nicest shirts and her earrings, it wasn't a friend at all she was seeing. It was a *date*.

“We'll be fine, Ms. Jackson,” Silena said with a smile.

“He is already asleep,” my mom continued, as if she hadn't said anything at all. Her question must have been rhetorical. “So you two should be fine to watch your shows, as long as they're PG-13 and not too loud. And if he does wake up, just read him a bedtime story, he'll go back to sleep no problem.”

“Mom,” I said.

“And if there’s an emergency, you call me first, okay?” she said. “Not if it’s a life-or-death emergency, of course, but you should still call me. My number’s on the fridge, in case you forget it. And – ”

“Mom, we’ll be *fine*,” I said, cutting her off. “You already told us what to do twice before now. I’m sure we’ve got everything covered.”

“Oh, I’m sure you do too, Percy,” my mom replied with a smile. “I’m just reassuring myself.”

I blinked. “Oh.”

“Alright, well, I’ll be back around eleven,” my mom said as she opened the door. “If you get hungry, there’s money on the counter for pizza. Call me if you need anything.”

“Bye, Ms. Jackson. We will.”

“Bye, Mom.”

A few minutes later, after the door had been closed for just long enough that we both could be sure that my mom had left the building, Silena turned to look at me expectantly. “I can’t believe you’re doing this,” she said.

I grinned at her as I got to my feet. “Yeah, I know. Feels exhilarating, doesn’t it?”

“No. No it does *not*,” she snapped. “You’re living a Greek tragedy, Percy.”

“Well, it’s a good thing that I’m a demigod then, isn’t it?” I shot back.

Silena sighed.

“...Alright, *fine*,” I said. “You have a point. But we’ve been over this, Silly. This is my decision.”

“That you roped me into,” she muttered.

I didn’t know what else to say to that.

“Look, I’ll be back around ten,” I said. “Just watch Tyson for me, but it’s like my mom said. I don’t think he’ll wake up.”

Begrudgingly, Silena nodded.

Deciding to take that as the best answer I was going to get that night, I walked out of the front door’s hallway and into the living room, before making my way over to the door that served as the entrance to Tyson and mine’s bedroom. Like I previously said, my half-brother had been living with us ever since I had found him on my quest about a month or so ago, and things had been...

...Well, things had been going *great*. I mean, I had thought that I wasn’t going to like Tyson, that he was going to be annoying and irritating and basically just a reminder of my father’s



infidelity, but that simply wasn't the case. Tyson was a bright and smart kid who didn't let anything, not even the news of his mother's death or the fact that he was a son of Poseidon and my half-brother (thank Alabaster and his *bullas* for that, otherwise I don't know how I would have kept such a big secret from him for seven months), drag him down, and I couldn't be luckier to have him in my life.

But, at the same time, he was also six-years-old. So, as I crept towards the window of the room, I did my best not to wake him up. And when I got to the window, I opened it up slowly, thankful for the fact that I had thought to grease it quite regularly in the past month or so.

"See you in a little bit, Tyson," I whispered, once my mission was complete.

Then, I stepped out onto the fire escape, closed the window behind me, and disappeared off into the night.

It wasn't a long walk to the ice skating rink Rockefeller Center, the destination that I had in mind. The place was packed when I got there, full of people out and about with their lovers and kids – it was only half past seven o'clock, after all – but that was a good thing. It was easier for monsters to get confused if the scent of the demigod that they were looking for was lost in a crowd of mortals, after all, or so I had been told by Chiron at camp.

*Not* that the entities that I was concerned would find me were monsters, though. Far from it.

Once I got myself immersed into the crowd, it didn't take long for me to find the person that I was looking for. He was standing near a set of benches, still wearing that brown aviator jacket he had worn back in November, and his sandy blonde head lowered to look at a book. If I didn't know any better, I'd say he was reading it, but considering how bad our mutual dyslexia was, I figured that was probably impossible.

"Luke!" I breathed once I saw him.

Immediately, my boyfriend closed his book and looked up at me, a grin on his face. "Percy!" he exclaimed. "You made it!"

"Of course I did," I replied as I reached up for a quick kiss. Then, after my mission was accomplished, I added, "Did you bring the skates?"

Luke gestured to the bag that he was wearing around his shoulder as confirmation. With a grin of my own, I eagerly grabbed the bag from him and zipped it open and – ah, *perfect*. Not only were there two pairs of ice skates there, one in my size and one in his, but they were also from the brand that I wanted. A very expensive brand.

"You got them," I said, my grin widening.

Luke shrugged in response, but I could tell that he was secretly pleased. "It wasn't that hard to find them. Not as hard as you seemed to think they would be, anyways," he said.

But his secretly-pleased-expression didn't last for long. With a now-strained smile, Luke leaned down to grab the bag from me, and as he did so, he asked into my ear, "How is Silena taking it?"

I resisted the urge to let out a sigh.

See, as you probably have already guessed, I had been seeing Luke on the sly for a while now, just as I had told him I wanted to back when he had found me chasing Tyson through Central Park. It had been a month now, to be precise, and during that time, Silena had not been...well, she had not been taking it *well*, to say the least, as I'm sure you have also probably already guessed.

It irritated her, I knew, despite her being a child of Aphrodite and all, that I could forgive Luke so seamlessly. It also irritated her that I would continue to see him at the risk of both of our lives (and hers, because despite her disapproval of everything, she had remained steadfastly silent about it to everyone else); that I would do so "recklessly" (I didn't see how only seeing him once a week at different times and locations was reckless, but I had also agreed to disagree about it); and that I would refuse to tell anyone else about it (but honestly, who else needed to know? Maybe Katie, sure, although I was a little terrified of that thought. But, someone like my mom or Demeter? Now, *that* was a laughable idea.)

And I didn't know how to fix it. I mean, yeah, I knew that Silena wanted me to stop seeing Luke, but she had also said that we were *destined* to be together once. And if we were destined to be together, surely, then, we were destined for this, too?

"...She's still disapproving," I finally replied, completely honest. Luke deserved nothing less than that. "Thinks I'm making a mistake. But she's not going to tell anyone, Luke. She's my friend. *Our* friend."

"I don't think I'm friends with anyone these days, except for you," Luke mused. "But then again, you're my boyfriend, so you don't really count."

I rolled my eyes. "*Luke.*"

"Alright, alright, fine," he sighed. "But I don't see how my answer is going to change. Either she'll accept us or she won't. And just as long as she doesn't tell our parents about us, we'll be fine."

This time, I sighed, too. "I know. But, I don't wanna talk about it anymore. So let's do what we came here to do: ice-skate."

Luke grinned. "That's the spirit, Perce."

The two of us put on our ice-skates and got out onto the ice. For me, ice-skating was easy; after all of the times that my mom had taken me here and some other ice-skating rinks as a kid, it was comfortable and exhilarating. Just like riding a bike.

But as for Luke...

“It’s not fair,” I protested as I watched him skate backwards so he could keep his eyes on me, a mischievous grin on his lips as he did so. I was good, but not *that* good. “I thought you said you’d only been ice-skating once or twice.”

Luke grinned. “Actually, I lied. This is my first time,” he said, and when I scoffed, added, “It’s one of the few perks of being my father’s son that I actually enjoy. He’s the god of athletes, so I’m naturally good at almost anything athletically-inclined.”

“Oh,” I said. That actually made a lot of sense. “What else are you good at, then? Besides swordsmanship and stealing things, I mean.”

Luke hummed. “Well, I’m good at acting,” he said. “But most of my half-siblings are. We’re all also good with money –it’s how I was able to afford the shoes –and we have a particular affiliation with luck – comes from my father being Tyche’s favorite of the gods. But as for me, personally,” here, he grinned, “I’m *fast*.”

For a moment, with the way he had put a particular emphasis on it, I thought he was going to give me a demonstration of just how *fast* he was, regardless of the fact that we were both ice-skating and surrounded by mortals. But, he didn’t. Instead, turning around, Luke perfectly matched his skating pace with my own, and clasped our hands together as if it was something that we did all the time. And not, you know, just once a week or so.

I tried not to blush at the thought of just what *else* we could be doing instead if we were able to meet up more often than that.

“So, what about you? Have you been able to figure out what else you can do, besides control water and talk to fish?” Luke asked.

“Fish and horses,” I corrected him. “And no, I haven’t. I thought that maybe I could do the same thing that Tyson does – control the earth or cause earthquakes or whatever – but I can’t. I mean, I think I *can*, but I don’t think it works the same way that controlling water does for me. And I haven’t had any time to figure out how else it could possibly work.”

I paused and looked up at him, only to find him giving me a bemused smile in return.

“Err...that didn’t make any sense, did it?”

“Oh no, it did,” Luke assured me. “Believe me, it did. I just can’t really relate. None of my powers required nearly as much self-discovery as yours seem to.”

We didn’t really talk about anything demigod-related after that. I mean, for one, there wasn’t much that we could talk about without name-dropping one of the gods (Tyche didn’t count as, according to Luke, she had stayed neutral in the last war and was already aiming to do so again) and drawing their attention, which would undoubtedly cause them to discover us (and kill us). And, for two, the conversation was making me uncomfortable, because as I’ve said before, I didn’t like bragging about my powers. Which was what discussing them in this way *really* felt like, at least to me.

Besides, after a while, all I wanted to do was be around *him*. To hold his hand, to smell his scent (which was something along the lines of pine trees and cinnamon, in case you wondering), to kiss his cheek whenever I wanted to, and to listen to Christmas music with him. It wasn't something that I got to do all that often, after all.

"You know," Luke whispered in my ear around an hour or so later, causing me to stir out of my thoughts. "There's been something that I've been meaning to give you."

I blinked. "Wait, what? You're giving me a present?"

Luke grinned. "Something like that," he said.

Excitement bubbled in my chest. I didn't get presents often, as my mom had often struggled to pay the bills on time as it was with Gabe around, and friends...well, I didn't have friends up until I had met Katie. "What is it?" I asked eagerly.

"You'll just have to come with me and find out," he replied with a wink.

The two of us skated back over to where the set of benches were, before we sat down and changed out the ice-skates for our regular shoes. Then, much to my interest, instead of simply staying in the center, Luke had us get up and walk away, towards an alley that was close by. It was a choice that was probably more dangerous than it was worth, but I wasn't all that concerned. The gods *probably* wouldn't hear us anyways, and even if they did – presents. That was enough of an explanation for me.

When we walked into the alley, Luke turned around and checked to make sure that nobody, mortal or monster, was following us. Once he was satisfied, he then proceeded to pull down his bag and grab a small box carefully wrapped in blue gift wrap paper, before he handed it to me.

"Open it," he said, smiling.

With a small smile of my own, I gingerly tore at the wrapping paper, revealing a dark blue gift box underneath. "*Jewelry*, really?" I asked, laughter bubbling from my chest as I looked at the box, before I looked up at him. "You know, I'm not exactly that kind of guy."

Luke rolled his eyes.

"C'mon, just open it," he said.

I did as I was told.

Inside the box, I saw what had to be one of the most beautiful wristwatches I had ever seen in my life, if not *the* most beautiful one outright. It was made of what looked to be celestial bronze, with a dark blue background that depicted a turquoise, glow-in-the-dark sea turtle. Also glow-in-the-dark were the numerals, which were Attic in design instead of Arabic or Roman, except they weren't turquoise but a bright, luminous gold. And, as if all of that wasn't enough, the same could be true for the word *ἔρως*, *eros*, which was placed in the middle of both the sea turtle's shell and the rest of the piece.

“Oh my gods, Luke,” I said. My jaw felt like it was about to hit the floor. “I don’t – I don’t know what to say.”

“Shit, it’s not too much, is it?” Luke asked quickly, his face flushing as he awkwardly scratched the back of his neck. “I mean, I know it looks like a lot, but it’s not *just* jewelry. It’s more than that. And besides, even if it was, I promised you I would get you something for your birthday and then I never did, so – ”

“Luke, I love it,” I interjected before he could say anything else.

He blinked. “Really?”

“Really, I do,” I assured him, giggling. I couldn’t help but laugh at how uncertain he was. It was just too cute, the causes of it notwithstanding. “It’s not too much. If anything, it’s – it’s *perfect*. But what do you mean, it’s not ‘just’ jewelry?”

Luke gave me a tentative smile.

“Here, I’ll show you,” he said.

With his (insanely) large, but gentle hands, Luke reached out and took the watch away from me, before he fastened it around my left wrist. Then, he pressed the pusher and, in a firm voice, said, “ἔρως.”

Before my very eyes, the wristwatch began to expand. First it got as big as a saucer, then as big as a dinner plate, and then even bigger than that. As it did so, the dark blue background as well as the gold Attic numerals and the ἔρως inscription began to fade away, turning the front of it into the natural glowing hue of celestial bronze. The turquoise sea turtle remained, though, even as the band also changed into a dark brown color before, with a shudder, it developed a leather quality and separated into two – one band meant for my wrist, the other meant for a position much higher up my arm than that.

It was a shield, I belatedly realized. Luke had gotten me a shield. And not just that, but *one that was fucking made just for me*.

“I know you probably don’t know how to fight with a shield,” Luke said as he pulled my arm through the bands, pointedly ignoring the way I was looking at him as if he was the reason for life itself. “But, I figure I can teach you. It’s not that hard to learn the difference.”

“Luke – ”

“And besides,” he continued. “At least this way, I know you have a higher chance of being safe.”

“Luke.”

“Yeah, Percy?” he asked.

I grinned. “I fucking love you, you know that?”

And then, without another word, I took off the shield and launched myself at him, before kissing him to Elysium and back.

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(In case you were wondering, my gift to Luke on his birthday four months later, March 21st, was a vintage pocket watch that I used three months' worth of allowance to buy. And I don't regret it. Not at all.)

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Title: In Which Tyler Attlebee Gets Creamed

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